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Research

Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist Research Releases in Faith & Christianity April 13, 2009 new nationwide survey of adults' spiritual beliefs, conducted

Most American Christians Do

Views on Spiritual Beings The Barna survey asked questions about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Satan, and demons. All 1,871 self-described Christians were asked about their perception of God. In total, three-quarters (78%) said he is the "all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the universe who rules the world today." The remaining onequarter chose other descriptions of God – depictions that are not consistent with biblical teaching (e.g., everyone is god, god refers to the realization of

human potential, etc.).

For the other survey items a four-point opinion scale was used to measure people's reactions to statements about each spiritual entity. Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan "is not a living

indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan. Barna

lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. Holding the strongly. Six percent did not have an opinion on this matter. Much like their perceptions of Satan, most Christians do not believe that the

Most self-described Christians contend that their religious faith has significantly impacted their life. Almost six out of ten adults (59%) said their faith had "greatly transformed" their life, while 29% said their faith "has been helpful but has not greatly transformed" their life and 9% stated that their religious faith "has not made much of a difference" in who they are and how they live. Christians were asked if they believed that a person must either side with God or with the devil – that there is no in-between position. A large majority

15% more agreed somewhat with the statement. Just 4% strongly disagreed and 7% somewhat disagreed with the statement. Three percent **NEW FROM BARNA Barna**

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Among self-identified Christians, few held a positive opinion of Wicca.

self-described Christians: four out of ten felt Mormons were Christian (18% strongly agreed, 21% somewhat agreed), three out of ten disagreed (17% strongly, 12% somewhat), and three out of ten were not sure what to think. When asked whether it was important to them to have "active, healthy relationships with people who belong to religious faiths that do not accept the central beliefs of your faith," about two-thirds of the self-professed Christians claimed it was important. Thirty-six percent agreed strongly with the notion, and 29% agreed somewhat, while 11% disagreed strongly and

• About one-third (33%) of the self-defined Christians who agree that the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon all teach the same truths simultaneously contend that the Bible is totally accurate in its principles, even though the three sacred books have very different ideas about truth, salvation, and the nature of God. **How Born Agains Differ**

The study examined how one segment of the Christian population – those

whose beliefs about salvation categorize them as "born again" - differ from

the beliefs of people who describe themselves as Christian but do not base

their view of salvation solely on confession of sin and God's grace received

"notional Christians.") For each of the 13 questions examined in the study,

there were statistically significant differences between these two segments

of the Christian population. Among the most significant gaps in belief were

Born again adults are at least twice as likely as notionals to strongly

agree that the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches; that their

life has been greatly transformed by their faith; that a person can be

under the influence of spiritual forces such as demons; and to hold an

• Born again adults are more than twice as likely as notionals to strongly

Born again adults are more than three times as likely as notionals to

disagree that Satan is just a symbol of evil, and that Jesus sinned while

through Jesus Christ. (The Barna Group has labeled the latter group

describes the Holy Spirit as more than a symbolic reference to God's

with all their heart, mind, strength and soul. The smallest difference between the two segments related to the importance of having active relationships with people who reject the

central tenets of the person's faith. Born again adults were slightly more

likely to strongly agree that such relationships were important to them

generations. Get the latest data inside The Future of Missions. **SEE OUR NEW REPORT**

George Barna, the author of nearly four dozen books analyzing research

concerning America's faith, suggested that Americans are constantly trying

to figure out how to make sense of biblical teachings in light of their daily

"Most Americans, even those who say they are Christian, have doubts

about the intrusion of the supernatural into the natural world. Hollywood has

made evil accessible and tame, making Satan and demons less worrisome

self-reliant, independent people to believe that their lives can be impacted

by unseen forces. At the same time, through sheer force of repetition, many

Americans intellectually accept some ideas – such as the fact that you either

than the Bible suggests they really are. It's hard for achievement-driven,

Americans Are Struggling to Make Sense of Their Faith

produces resources pertaining to cultural change, leadership and spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries. Located in Ventura, California, Barna has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984. If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each new, bimonthly update on the latest research findings from The Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website (www.barna.org). Additional research-based resources, both free and at discounted prices, are also available through that website.

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that the Holy Spirit is not a living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure. A majority of Christians believe that a person can be under the influence of spiritual forces, such as demons or evil spirits. Two out of three Christians agreed that such influence is real (39% agreed strongly, 25% agreed somewhat), while just three out of ten rejected the influence of supernatural forces (18% disagreed strongly, 10% disagreed somewhat). The remaining

Overall, just 5% had a positive opinion while 55% had a negative opinion of Wicca. However, a huge segment (40%) did not know enough about Wicca to have formed an opinion of it, despite it being described to them as "an organized form of witchcraft." Survey respondents were asked whether they believed that Mormons are Christians. Mormons themselves claim to be Christian, but most evangelical leaders say that they are not. There was no clear-cut perspective among the

Thoughts on Other Faiths

leaving a sizeable portion (20%) undecided. **Inconsistencies Noted** The study also identified a number of instances in which people's beliefs seemed inconsistent. Among those were the following: • About half (47%) of the Christians who believed that Satan is merely a symbol of evil nevertheless agreed that a person can be under the influence of spiritual forces such as demons. • About half (49%) of those who agreed that the Holy Spirit is only a symbol but not a living entity also agreed that the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches, even though the Bible clearly

who rejected it (28% disagreed strongly, 12% disagreed somewhat), while

strongly disagree that the Holy Spirit is merely a symbol of God's power or presence; that Mormons are Christians; and that the Bible, Koran and Book of Mormon teach the same truths.

(39% versus 31%).

experiences.

He lived on earth.

unfavorable opinion of Wicca.

the following:

power or presence.

The way people view missions is changing — especially in younger FUTURE

to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Respondents were not asked to describe themselves as "born again." The Barna Group, Ltd. (which includes its research division, The Barna Research Group) is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization that conducts primary research on a wide range of issues and products,

Conservatives Differ on Matters of Faith Based upon an evaluation of more than a dozen religious beliefs of liberals and conservatives, consistent and significant differences are evident. This new study conducted by The Barna Group indicates that those differences are related to substantially different spiritual beliefs, behaviors and alignments.

Survey Shows How Liberals and

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EVERY BARNA REPORT, COURSE, **WORKSHOP AND** SO MUCH MORE. All in one low-cost subscription. Barna Access Plus GET STARTED AT BARNA.COM/ACCESS Although a core teaching of the Christian faith is the divinity and perfection of Jesus Christ, tens of millions of Christians do not accept that teaching. More than one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He opposing view were 9% who disagreed somewhat and 46% who disagreed

presence but is not a living entity." Just one-third of Christians disagreed 8% were undecided on this matter. Influence of Faith

strongly agreed with the notion (61%) while an additional 15% agreed somewhat. Just one out of ten adults disagreed somewhat (10%) and a similar proportion (11%) disagreed strongly. Surprisingly few adults (3%) did not have an opinion on this matter. A large majority of Christians also proclaimed that the most important purpose in their life is to "love God with all their heart, mind, strength and soul," a notion drawn directly from the Bible (Mark 12:29-30). In total, three out of four self-described Christians (74%) strongly affirmed that idea, while said they were not sure.

16% disagreed somewhat. The other 8% did not have an opinion. Views on the Bible A slight majority of Christians (55%) strongly agree that the Bible is accurate in all of the principles it teaches, with another 18% agreeing somewhat. About one out of five either disagree strongly (9%) or somewhat (13%) with this statement, and 5% aren't sure what to believe. There is no similar clarity among self-defined Christians regarding how the Bible compares to other holy books. When faced with the statement that "the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths," the group was evenly split between those who accepted the idea (19% agreed strongly, 22% agreed somewhat) and those

Born again adults are one-third more likely than notionals to possess a definition of God as the omniscient, omnipotent creator and ruler of the world; nearly 60% more likely to believe that you either side with God or Satan because there is no in-between position; and slightly more than 50% more likely to say their chief purpose in life is to love God

side with God or Satan, there's no in-between - that do not get translated into practice." Barna also noted that Christians tend to be open to co-existence with other faiths. "Most people understand that America's religious life is diverse," explained the author of a forthcoming book about the nation's faith segments, The Seven Faith Tribes. "A majority of Christians are generally open to maintaining relationships with people of other faiths, and most are not predisposed to judging people of different faiths, such as Mormons or Wiccans. But that open-mindedness is sometimes due to their limited knowledge about the principles of their own faith and ignorance about other faiths as it is to a purposeful acceptance of other faiths." **About the Research**

This report is based upon telephone interviews conducted by The Barna

"Christian." A total of 1,871 adults were randomly selected from across the

48 continental states, with the first 873 interviews conducted in January and

February, 2008, and the remaining 998 interviews conducted in November

2008. The aggregate sample The range of sampling error associated with a

sample of 1,871 people is between ±1.0 and ±2.2 percentage points at the

95% confidence level. The range of sampling error associated with the sub-

95% confidence level. The range of sampling error associated with the sub-

sample of 873 adults is between ±1.5 and ±3.4 percentage points at the

sample of 998 adults is between ±1.4 and ±3.2 percentage points at the

95% confidence level. Minimal statistical weighting was used to calibrate

"Born again Christians" were defined as people who said they had made a

today and who also indicated they believed that when they die they will go

personal commitment to Jesus Christ that was still important in their life

the aggregate sample to known population percentages in relation to

several key demographic variables.

Group for two surveys among people who described themselves as

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being but is a symbol of evil." An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they "agree somewhat" with that perspective. A minority of Christians

Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is "a symbol of God's power or

by The Barna Group, suggests that Americans who consider themselves to be Christian have a diverse set of beliefs -but many of those beliefs are contradictory or, at least, inconsistent. The survey explored beliefs about spiritual beings, the influence of faith on their life, views of the Bible, and reactions to faiths other than their