

Christians dabble in Eastern, New Age beliefs: A Pew study

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The vast majority of U.S. residents may be Christian, in self-identification if not in practice, but nearly a quarter of them dabble in a range of Eastern or New Age beliefs, a new study shows.

Asked about their supernatural experiences, significant minorities of Christian respondents said they believe in astrology (23 percent), reincarnation (22 percent), spiritual energy in physical things like trees or crystals (23 percent) and yoga as a spiritual practice (21 percent).

The survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life found that self-identified Christians are about as likely as Americans overall to say they've been in touch with the dead (29 percent), had an experience with a ghost (17 percent) or consulted a psychic (14 percent).

However, both evangelical and mainline Protestants who attend church weekly express much lower levels of belief in reincarnation, yoga, the existence of spiritual energy in physical things and astrology, compared with those who attend religious services less often.

On the more general question of whether they have had a "religious or mystical experience—that is, a moment of religious or spiritual awakening," the Pew study noted that strong majorities of white evangelical Protestants (70 percent) and black Protestants (71 percent) said they have had such spiritual experiences.

This was in contrast to whites belonging to traditional, or mainline, Protestant churches (40 percent) and Roman Catholics (37 percent).

Pew researchers said that compared with other religious traditions, white evangelical Protestants consistently express lower levels of acceptance of both Eastern beliefs (reincarnation, yoga) and New Age beliefs (spiritual energy in physical things and astrology).

For example, roughly one in ten white evangelicals believes in reincarnation, compared with 24 percent among mainline Protestants, 25 percent among both white Catholics and those unaffiliated with any religion, and 29 percent among black Protestants.