



FOOLS FOR CHRIST: WHAT PUBLIC SURVEYS REVEAL ABOUT CHRISTIANS



Christ asked: “Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). We may view this as a request for a public survey. For example, to inquire about what people are saying about Christ generally ... and/or, what is the range of opinion as to who He is? Surveys can be useful. They can reveal the opinions, desires and attitudes of peoples.

By Wilfred Hahn

As Jesus established (likely the very reason that He requested the survey evidence), the general population was quite confused and uninformed. They had no clue as to Christ’s identity. Responding to His question, the disciples replied: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets” (Mark 8:28). There was no public consensus on this question.

We see here that surveys cannot be used to determine any truths ... only malleable opinions. That is also the case in modern times: Polls cannot be trusted to confirm facts or wisdom. They can only reveal the “opinions” of a sample group of people, whether right or wrong.

As the case may be, public surveys are prized in commercial and political spheres today. For example, businesses will want to remain abreast of the latest consumer wants and preferences. Government statisticians may wish to gauge future economic growth prospects by inquiring about “consumer confidence”; and politicians will attempt to run ahead of new and evolving changes in the beliefs of their constituents, to ensure the popularity of their policies.

However, public surveys are not reliable. In recent years, political polls have at times proven to be spectacularly wrong. We recall here the Brexit vote in the UK in 2016, and the recent U.S. presidential election. Pollsters discovered that traditional surveying techniques—

such as the practice of calling residential phone numbers—were prone to be unreliable.

Public Polling History

Polling has a long history. However, it is only relatively recently that public survey techniques have become a scientific field of study. George Gallup is widely considered to have been the modern-day founder of public polling back in the 1930s. The Gallup organization still exists today and is indeed employing scientists.

Another polling pioneer was Albert Sindlinger (who at one point briefly worked for the Gallup company). He is considered to be the father of “consumer confidence” surveys. He formed Sindlinger Company Inc. in 1948, which became an innovative and influential gatherer of “confidence” data.

If this writer may be allowed a bit of personal history, years later—in 1988, when Albert was already well into his 80s—we became friendly acquaintances, visiting each other several times. I recall him recounting his earlier relationship with President Herbert Hoover (31st President of the United States, from 1929 to 1933, during the Great Depression).

President Hoover had complained to him that he was unable to make good polices without understanding the “mind of the consumer.” This inspired Sindlinger to develop innovative surveying techniques of measuring “consumer confidence,” as well as being a master inter-



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preter of the data results. Herbert Hoover was both an instigator and an investor of the Sindlinger company.

With many polling organizations existing today, politicians are constantly—even frenetically—striving to align their policies with the latest public sentiment shifts ... even fads. However, as may be surmised, there is a flaw in this approach. Public opinion is fickle and ungrounded. Opinions and moods can change very quickly. Moreover, public opinion can be perverse and ridiculous. Holding an opinion that agrees with the “majority” provides little safety.

Surveys, therefore, do not provide any anchor to timeless values nor morality. They are built on the sand of “humanism” and capricious human lusts. Effectively, policymakers are “bending their ears” to their constituents.

This is not a Biblically-endorsed approach. This view might be surprising, given the popular “survey” techniques employed today by “growth churches.” Some go so far as to counter the words of Apostle Paul, “[...] do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

Consider the situation of Jeremiah. He had complained that he was having a difficult time prophesying to the Hebrews. However, the Lord Jehovah had no pity and said to Jeremiah: “If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them” (Jeremiah 15:19) ... much less consult surveys.

Jeremiah was expressly not to cater to the wants of the Hebrews, nor their preferred views. He was not to “turn to them.” To the contrary, he was called to unpopularly warn them about their deviant practices and beliefs.

Ezekiel, too, was counseled to maintain an independence from the popular viewpoints of the Israelites. “[...] The people of Israel are not willing to listen to you

because they are not willing to listen to me, for all the Israelites are hardened and obstinate. But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint” (Ezekiel 3:7-9).

Anyone who has fought or countered strong popular opinion in our days will surely wish to have a forehead of flint, as did Ezekiel.

In fact, all the prophets were constrained from pandering to the “itching ears” of the Hebrews. Incredibly, Balaam, though intending to pronounce false prophecies, could only utter the true words of God. Prophets were to speak the immutable words of God.

Surveys About Christians

We mention two recent surveys about Christians that recently caught this writer’s attention. Given our rabidly materialistic world, it is no wonder that Christians are degraded as simpletons and as a people with misplaced heavenly hopes.

Firstly, we refer to a recent presentation of the American Time Use Survey, which is produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). It shows that the audience for religious television programming is mostly comprised of the poorest demographic groups. The most-wealthy, on the other hand, are the least likely to watch religious programming, according to the survey.

Admittedly, it is difficult to arrive at any concrete conclusions based on this particular information. However, the implications (i.e. that Christians are “dummies” and “poor in this world”) are also suggested by the Religious Landscape Study of the Pew Survey of Religion and Public Life. Certain Christian sects are shown to be the poorest and least educated.

Its most recent edition continues to show Christians as a group to be much less prosperous than (the average of) Muslims, Hindus and Jews. Pente-



costals were specifically centered out as being among the least wealthy.

What does this really all mean? James addressed this by stating, “[...] Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5). It is not the first time that Christians have been ridiculed on the basis of being non-materialists. In New Testament times, Christians were called Ebyonites (meaning the poor ones).

Popular Christians

As we learned at the outset, a survey of what people thought about Christ Himself several millennia ago was wrong and confused. It would then be no surprise that modern-day surveys of His true followers would also be unreliable and misinterpreted today.

For one, it is unfortunate that the people of the world like to take popular “culturally relevant” Christians as their preferred examples. These people will tend to be famous and/or controversial leaders ... even apostates.

As the case may be, any surveys about Christians are bound to be flawed. To start with, we have no consensus today on what the word “Christian” actually means. The brand identity of the word “Christian” is highly contested today. What does “Christian” really signify to the world?

After all, this term can now adapt to just about everything. All kinds of movements, causes, religions and apostate viewpoints brazenly masquerade behind the word “Christian.” The fact that the word “Christian” has become so misused is itself a sign of the times.

We wrote the article, “Last-day Prophecy—Hot Comfort, Cold Faith” (August 2006) in response to another question posed by Christ: “[...] when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). We presented a decisive case as to why the word “Christian” is the most falsified and imitated brand name of all time. If it were a consumer brand name, it would represent everything and nothing.

Points to Ponder

As we highlighted earlier, a survey revealed that the world’s perception of Jesus was incorrect. Even though He was distinct, the world was not aware of His “distinctiveness.”

Likewise, Christians should be seen to be “distinct” in this world. Just what does the word “distinct” really mean? We quote from Dictionary.com:

“[...] distinguished as not being the same; not identical; separate; different in nature or quality; dissimilar (sometimes followed by from); clear to the senses or intellect; plain; unmistakable; distinguishing or perceiving clearly.”

In short, it means to be readily distinguishable ... that there can be no doubt as to who you are.

Is that really the case? We live in a time where many declared Christians are not distinct from the general, non-believing populace.

In the case of the Jews, God chose to make them a separate and distinct people. How so?

They were required to have dietary restrictions, and to practice the Sabbath and circumcision (among a host of other laws). That made them distinct to this day ... to be noted as such all around the world. As a consequence, they continue to be beleaguered, hated and persecuted ... and increasingly so.

Though modern-days public surveys may do no justice to the distinctions and identity of a true Christian, the Bible does state what should be the characteristics of a Christian. For example, Ephesians 2:19 says that “[...] you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.” “Strangers” are not likely to score favorably in a worldly survey.

Indeed, the last-days church is weak and poor. Said Jesus, “I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

It is the materialistic church of Laodicea that is actually poor, blind and naked—poor in faith, blind as to the true state of things, and vulnerable to the loss of genuine faith and power. They fell for the error of Balaam, by sacrificing lukewarm faith for the primacy of materialistic warm comfort.

Paul clearly differentiates the true Christian from the “brand-name” Christian today: “We are fools for Christ [...]! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!” (1 Corinthians 4:10).^(MC)