

State of the Bible: Printed Bibles more popular than apps

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Printed Bibles remain the most popular choice among Bible readers, the American Bible Society said in its latest installment of the 2022 State of the Bible report.

A \$100 million ad campaign wants to fix Jesus' image

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The “He Gets Us” campaign is a \$100 million effort to redeem Jesus’ brand from the damage done by his followers, especially those who say one thing and then do another.

Protestant pastors say economy is hurting their churches

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A new survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors finds that half are concerned the

economy is hurting their churches.

Culture wars changing how students choose colleges?

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For some Christian families, politics are revamping the college decision process, swaying them away from colleges marked “too liberal” or “too conservative.”

Analysis: Some Christian Democrats abandoning the Social Gospel

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(RNS)—About a decade ago, the conservative commentator and radio show host Glenn Beck told listeners to “look for the words ‘social justice’ or ‘economic justice’ on your church website. If you find it, run as fast as you can.”

In essence, Beck was telling his followers to reject a strain of Christian

theology that dates back at least 100 years in the United States: the Social Gospel.

Popularized by Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist pastor, in the early 20th century, this theology focuses on issues such as poverty, exploitation, disease and hunger as the primary action items for the church.

Instead of focusing on the individual problem of sin, Rauschenbusch and other advocates of the Social Gospel believed Christians should focus on reforming institutions in the United States to make the country more equitable and fairer for all people.

Do American Christians still embrace the core principles of that doctrine? Or do they agree with Beck?

Acceptance of Social Gospel

Certain aspects of the Social Gospel still enjoy widespread approval. For instance, about 80 percent of Christians believe “God instructs us to protect the poor,” and only 15 percent believe “addressing social issues distracts people from achieving salvation.”

Other facets of the Social Gospel provoke more disagreement. While 61 percent of nonwhite evangelicals agree “social justice is at the heart of the Gospel,” that sentiment is only shared by 36 percent of white evangelicals. About 3 in 5 white evangelicals—twice the rate of other Christian groups—agree with the statement “God is more concerned about individual morality than social inequalities.”

Given that white evangelicals are outliers on a number of questions related to the Social Gospel, and white evangelicals’ tendency to vote for Republicans, it seems probable their divergence from nonevangelicals’ views on social justice is more about political partisanship than about

theological tradition. The data confirms that suspicion.

For instance, a Christian who is Republican is twice as likely as a Christian Democrat to believe “building the kingdom of God on earth is only about bringing people to Christ, not changing social structures.”

Two thirds of Democrats who are Christians believe “social justice is at the heart of the Gospel,” while just 36 percent of independents and 35 percent of Republicans of the faith share that belief.

Social Gospel at church

Given that Democrats are more likely to embrace tenets of the Social Gospel, it would be fair to believe they are hearing these beliefs amplified in their churches, while Republicans are hearing more discussion of personal salvation and individual responsibility.

To test that theory, I put together a data model to determine how religion interacts with political partisanship to shape people’s beliefs about the Social Gospel. This model only included respondents who identified with a religious tradition. The religiously unaffiliated “nones” were excluded. I controlled for age, income, education, gender, race and other basic demographic factors.

Clearly, Republican Christians, regardless of church attendance, are more likely to believe individual morality is more important than societal inequalities. Church attendance only accelerates this belief, with more than half of Republicans who are weekly attenders agreeing on personal morality, compared with less than 40 percent of those who never attend.

Not much of a surprise. But for Democrats, the data gets more interesting. The more they attend church, the more likely they are to embrace a message of individual responsibility as opposed to societal sin.

If those on the left side of the political spectrum are attending churches that preach a strong version of the Social Gospel, those messages are not finding their way into the hearts and minds of the average liberal churchgoer. In fact, the data says just the opposite: The more Democrats go to church, the more they hold views on individual responsibility in common with Republicans.

That may come as a surprise to many progressive Christian communities and organizations that focus squarely on Social Gospel concerns like the Poor People's Campaign, but there is no evidence to be found here that religious Democrats are more likely to focus on the problems preachers like Rauschenbusch focused on during the Progressive Era.

Instead, American Christianity is being seen more and more as a vertical relationship with God as opposed to a horizontal relationship with those in the community.

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Religion big predictor in support for Confederate memorials

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When it comes to memorializing the nation's Civil War legacy, Americans are nearly evenly divided over whether to preserve Confederate symbols, memorials and statues, according to a new Public Religion Research Institute survey.

US evangelicals want balanced approach to immigration

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Substantial majorities of evangelicals in the United States say they want an immigration solution that both secures the border and values those already in the country, a new Lifeway Research report shows.

Fuller Theological Seminary names first Black president

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Fuller Theological Seminary, the nation's largest interdenominational seminary, has chosen a Baptist as its new president—David Emmanuel Goatley, the first Black person to hold the office.

Fewer than half of Americans may be Christian by 2070

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If current trends continue, Christians could make up less than half of the population—and perhaps as little as a third—in 50 years.

Gen Z leads in desire to share their faith

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Gen Z—adults 25 and younger—lead all ages in their openness to spiritual conversations, the Bible society said Sept. 8 in releasing its latest chapter

of the 2022 State of the Bible.

New church construction reflects changing needs

October 17, 2022

Churches are getting a new look with architects and ministry leaders focused on the needs of today.

Pandemic pastoring report documents new era in ministry

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Eileen Campbell-Reed of Union Theological Seminary surveyed more than 100 Christian pastors, chaplains, campus ministers and lay leaders from more than 20 denominations between June 2020 and April 2022.