

PNAS-published poll finds some Christians find their own political beliefs conflict with Jesus' teachings

January 31 2012, by Bob Yirka

(PhysOrg.com) -- A new online poll conducted by a team of three researchers from Stanford University has found that of those who identified themselves as Christians and who also identified themselves as either politically conservative or liberal, in many cases reported that they believed their own political views were not always the same as what Jesus would espouse were he here today to offer his opinions.

The online study was conducted in the United States and included responses from 1,256 people who agreed to take part in the survey in exchange for a donation to a [charity](#) of their choosing and a chance to win \$100 for themselves. Of those, the researchers focused exclusively on those who said they were Christians, and who self identified themselves as being either politically conservative or liberal. Excluded were those who fell in the middle and those who, oddly enough, thought the Fox News channel was more liberal than the CNN news channel. That brought the sample size down to 474.

In analyzing the results and writing a paper about them, which the research group has published in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#), the team found that overall, many people who responded consider themselves conservative Christians, also believe some of their views are at odds with how Jesus would feel. For example, many had strong [negative feelings](#) about how best to handle immigration issues, but felt Jesus would be much more liberal in how he would

handle things. Also some felt Jesus might be a little more anti-abortion than they are and harsher on same-sex unions. Conversely, many of those who identified themselves as liberal felt that Jesus would likely feel stronger about morality issues than they do and would probably be better about building bridges between those who disagree with them.

The authors write that the purpose of the poll was designed to show that people tend to find it easier to rationalize differences in their beliefs in one area as compared to another when they are part of an identified group. In this case, they say, when people label themselves as conservative or liberal it makes it easier for them to rationalize the gulf between their own beliefs and those they ascribe to the man who symbolizes their religion.

Other results of the poll showed that the majority of respondents of both political leanings believed that Jesus would likely be more likely to help the poor than they are and that the things that mattered most to them would also likely matter the most to Jesus.

More information: How Christians reconcile their personal political views and the teachings of their faith: Projection as a means of dissonance reduction, *PNAS*, Published online before print January 30, 2012, [doi: 10.1073/pnas.1117557109](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1117557109)

Abstract

The present study explores the dramatic projection of one's own views onto those of Jesus among conservative and liberal American Christians. In a large-scale survey, the relevant views that each group attributed to a contemporary Jesus differed almost as much as their own views. Despite such dissonance-reducing projection, however, conservatives acknowledged the relevant discrepancy with regard to “fellowship” issues (e.g., taxation to reduce economic inequality and treatment of immigrants) and liberals acknowledged the relevant discrepancy with

regard to “morality” issues (e.g., abortion and gay marriage). However, conservatives also claimed that a contemporary Jesus would be even more conservative than themselves on the former issues whereas liberals claimed that Jesus would be even more liberal than themselves on the latter issues. Further reducing potential dissonance, liberal and conservative Christians differed markedly in the types of issues they claimed to be more central to their faith. A concluding discussion considers the relationship between individual motivational processes and more social processes that may underlie the present findings, as well as implications for contemporary social and political conflict.

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