

Yoga is unchristian, says Baptist leader

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Terming the popular and growing practice of yoga "a symptom of our postmodern spiritual confusion"—a confusion that "to our shame . . . reaches into the church"—Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, argued in a September 20 blog that "yoga begins and ends with an understanding of the body that is, to say the very least, at odds with the Christian understanding."

Mohler said he disagrees with those who think that yoga as a form of exercise or meditation can be separated from its roots in Hindu mysticism. "Christians are not called to empty the mind or to see the human body as a means of connecting to and coming to know the divine," Mohler said. "Believers are called to meditate upon the Word of God, . . . not to meditate by means of incomprehensible syllables."

Nicole Soteropoulos, a yoga teacher in Louisville, invited Mohler to attend one of her classes. But she called his viewpoint "ignorant" and "based on fear." Maintaining that yoga is "not based on a religion," she said it's "an exercise, health and wellness system . . . so old that it belongs to humanity."

Dayna Gelinas, a Christian who teaches yoga in Kennesaw, Georgia, said she shares Mohler's concerns about yoga's Eastern origins but thinks its physical practices can be divorced from those origins. Her yoga practice, she said, "is a celebration of what I have through Jesus."

According to the Christians Practicing Yoga website, yoga offers people of all faiths "an embodied spiritual practice that inclines toward deeper prayer. It is embedded in our spiritual DNA to go to God the way God came to us—in and through the body."