

None of the above

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [May 16, 2001](#) issue

When pollsters ask people what their religious identity is, they usually answer with a phrase like “I am of the Catholic tradition,” or “I am a mainline Protestant” or “My people are Jewish.”

If I were asked, I could answer “Christian,” in aspiration. Or, to sharpen the point, “Lutheran.” But pollsters like to sharpen the point even further. “Are you born again?” they ask. “What do you believe? How do you practice? Do you pray and read the Bible? Are you liberal or conservative or moderate?”

But never having been on any pollster’s call list, I’ve never had to think much about what I am. Then, somehow, I found myself hooked into www.Selectsmart.com/RELIGION/results.html. On my screen appeared a “Belief System Selector,” a perfect example of cafeteria line, pick-and-choose, eclectic, postmodern religious life. I was asked to check one of seven choices on “Number and Nature of Deity.” I checked “Only one God, incorporeal spirit.” More or less. “Human Incarnations of God(s)?” Mine: “One Incarnation.” For “Origins of Physical Universe & Life on Earth” one of my choices was Genesis, interpreted two ways. I chose “God is creating and controlling the phenomena.”

“After death” gave me eight choices, none of them matching the Christian creeds’ “resurrection of the body,” so I checked “None of the above.” “Why is there evil?” I checked “Original Sin,” since it was the only choice that suggested universality and depth. “Suffering in the world?” Seven choices, none of them biblical, so I left it blank.

“Path to salvation?” All of them looked New Age, and there was no place for “None of the above.” I couldn’t worm in anything that looked like a variation on the path to salvation with which 1.8 billion Christians identify. Finally I was allowed to agree or disagree on positions on such subjects as abortion, homosexuality, women’s and men’s roles, divorce and remarriage and nonviolence.

Then the Web's keepers of unorthodoxies told me what I was. I was 100 percent "Mainline to Liberal Protestant." So be it. But my answers matched 88 percent of those given by people identified as "Liberal Quaker" and 79 percent as "Unitarian Universalist," 74 percent as "Reform Judaism" and 73 percent as "Neo-Pagan." Happily, my answers matched those of 72 percent of the people who call themselves "Mainline to Conservative Protestant," tied with "Bah'ai." What am I? "Roman Catholic" came in 12th, trailed just a bit by "Sikhism," "New Age" and "Humanist."

My stumper: if my being a conventional orthodox Lutheran, ELCA brand, is "mainline to liberal Protestant," that's fine with me. But I know that next to that brand I am really closer to "Roman Catholic" than to any other description except "Mainline to Conservative Protestant." What indicators threw Dr. Cyber Space off so much?

I have a hunch. Where the quiz gave no options congenial with biblical thought I used too many "none of the aboves" or left too many blank. Some of my best friends are Unitarian Universalists, who would have responded similarly. But they are really undecided while I merely lacked options on a computer quiz.