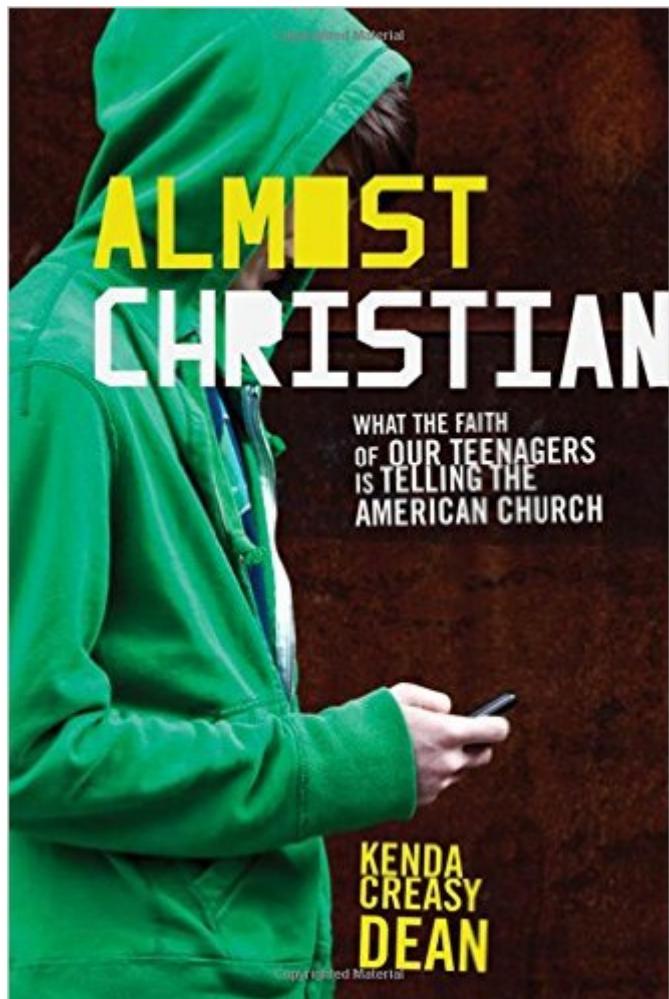


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# Almost Christian: What The Faith Of Our Teenagers Is Telling The American Church



## Synopsis

Based on the National Study of Youth and Religion--the same invaluable data as its predecessor, Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers--Kenda Creasy Dean's compelling new book, *Almost Christian*, investigates why American teenagers are at once so positive about Christianity and at the same time so apathetic about genuine religious practice. In *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton found that American teenagers have embraced a "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"--a hodgepodge of banal, self-serving, feel-good beliefs that bears little resemblance to traditional Christianity. But far from faulting teens, Dean places the blame for this theological watering down squarely on the churches themselves. Instead of proclaiming a God who calls believers to lives of love, service and sacrifice, churches offer instead a bargain religion, easy to use, easy to forget, offering little and demanding less. But what is to be done? In order to produce ardent young Christians, Dean argues, churches must rediscover their sense of mission and model an understanding of being Christian as not something you do for yourself, but something that calls you to share God's love, in word and deed, with others. Dean found that the most committed young Christians shared four important traits: they could tell a personal and powerful story about God; they belonged to a significant faith community; they exhibited a sense of vocation; and they possessed a profound sense of hope. Based on these findings, Dean proposes an approach to Christian education that places the idea of mission at its core and offers a wealth of concrete suggestions for inspiring teens to live more authentically engaged Christian lives. Persuasively and accessibly written, *Almost Christian* is a wake up call no one concerned about the future of Christianity in America can afford to ignore.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*\*\*\*\*This wonderful book is based on the National Study of Youth and Religion conducted from 2002 to 2005. It is a fascinating analysis of teen religious practice, which is a bellwether of the faith of us all. Teenagers are practicing the faith that we are teaching them, not what we say we believe, but what we actually believe as evidenced by our actions. All of this could be dry and boring, but in "Almost Christian" it is not! This is a truly fascinating exploration of what makes faith vibrant, what makes faith "consequential". As such it is important for everyone to read, not just those interested in teens and youth ministry. Much of the book describes real faith--a faith rich in holy desire and missional clarity--and explores ways that we as a church can experience and model this in our lives. Most teenagers today practice an "imposter faith" what the author calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"--"the new mainstream American religious faith" in which God is seen as a butler or a therapist rather than (as the approximately 8% of youth that are "highly devoted" do) as a "divine swimming instructor" who is down in the water with them, leading and instructing them. The book also explores the faith of these "highly devoted" youth and what makes them different from their peers. The scope of this book is limited to Christian ministry and formation and does not include Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or other faiths. There are helpful appendices and an index, and the book is written in a somewhat intellectual style and at the same time a very moving style---very readable and pragmatic--not academic.

Kendra Creasy Dean (Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary) has written a disturbing yet thought-provoking book on the current religious state of America's teenagers. The background research for this book was the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). One of the largest studies ever of the religious views of teenagers, the original research was conducted from 2002 to 2005 and consisted of extensive interviews with 3,300 American teenagers (13 to 17 years old) and face-to-face follow-up interviews with 267 teenagers. The study also continues on with a longitudinal study of 2,500 of these teenagers. The overall summary of the findings (and the basic theme of the book) is "American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith - but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school" (3). The most condemning part for us as the parents and grandparents of this generations is that Dean rightly associates the lukewarm nature of our children's faith as a "barometer of the religious inclinations of the culture that surrounds them, giving

parents, pastors, teachers, campus ministers, youth pastors, and anyone else who works closely with teenagers fifty-yard-line seats from which to watch America's religious future take shape" (9). Dean summarizes the NSYR findings under five general headings. First, most American teenagers have a positive view of religion but otherwise do not give it much thought. So while teenagers are not hostile towards religion, neither do they care much about it. Dean believes that most teenagers equate Christian identity with "niceness" but do not think religion has any influence on one's decisions, choice of friends, or behaviors.

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