

# Muscular Christianity

By Adam Park, Saint Louis University

Entry tags: Protestantism, Evangelical (charismatic), Abrahamic, Religious Group, Secularism, Christian Traditions

A culturally and religiously diffuse movement characterized by its central concerns and practices around health, fitness, and sports. These concerns have historically taken hold when linked to the project of reinstilling lost manhood, of fixing "overcivilized" and effeminate men through right orientation to divine, gendered purpose. Aligned toward personal "instinct" and God-given knowledge of best health and fitness practices, the movement is predominantly protestant-inspired. As a means of social reform - of sanitizing sport culture from various evil influences, of offering healthy alternatives to unhealthy societal norms around diet, dress, medicine, or daily comportment - Muscular Christianity has resonated in Catholic, Jewish, and more broadly "secular" circles as well.



Date Range: 1762 CE - 2020 CE

Region: Countries with significant Muscular Christian presence.

Region tags: United States, Japan, Germany, England, Lower 48, Alaska, Hawaii, Brazil

Places most impacted by Muscular Christian missions, ideologies, and practices throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and into the present day.

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).
- Source 2: Dane Claussen, ed., *Promise Keepers: Essays on Masculinity and Christianity* (London: McFarland & Company, 2000).
- Source 3: Adam Park, " 'Fighting Spirit': WWI and the YMCA's Allied Boxing Program," *Religion & American Culture*, 29:3 (Fall 2019): 391-430.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ymca>
- Source 1 Description: The Kautz Family YMCA Archives - the largest collection of digitized and archived materials related to the Young Men's Christian Association
- Source 2 URL: <https://springfield.edu/archives/collections>
- Source 2 Description: Springfield College (founded by the YMCA) Special Collections and Archives -

contains several digitized sources relevant to Christian sports missions and health culture from the 19th century to the present day

– Source 3 URL: <https://promisekeepers.org/>

– Source 3 Description: The Promise Keepers 2.0 website - this group has been outspoken in matters of "biblical" manhood since the 1990s

Relevant online primary textual corpora (original languages and/or translations):

– Source 1 URL: [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Tom\\_Brown\\_s\\_School\\_Days/gN0NAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Tom_Brown_s_School_Days/gN0NAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0)

– Source 1 Description: Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days (1857) - a semi-autobiographical tale of rough-and-tumble boyhood experiences in an English boarding school in the 1830s

– Source 2 URL:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Atlantic\\_Monthly/Volume\\_1/Number\\_5/Saints,\\_and\\_Their\\_Bodies](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Atlantic_Monthly/Volume_1/Number_5/Saints,_and_Their_Bodies)

– Source 2 Description: Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Saints and Their Bodies," The Atlantic Monthly (1858) - a critique of the then-contemporary western Christian notions of bodily vitality and strength being opposite spiritual fortitude

– Source 3 URL:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20021107184011/http://www.marshall.fm/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000048.html>

– Source 3 Description: William Wallace II (a.k.a. Mark Driscoll), "Pussified Nation" (2000/1) - an online chatroom for Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA, wherein members and interlopers decry the effeminate influence of American culture and its departure from God's intentions

## General Variables

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### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– Yes

Does the religion have official political support

– No

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Are apostates prosecuted or punished:

– Yes

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– I don't know

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 50

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also “oral scriptures” (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– No

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Is iconography present:

– Yes

↳ Where is iconography present [select all that apply]:

– On persons

– At home

– Some public spaces

↳ Are there distinct features in the religious group's iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic):

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic):

– Yes

Notes: Figures are masculinized

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract symbol):

– Yes

↳ Portrayals of afterlife:

– No

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols):

– Yes

↳ Humans:

– Yes

↳ Other features of iconography:

– Yes

Notes: Common tattooing and religious clothing with crosses, crucifixes, angel wings, bible verses, praying hands, and meaningful phrases.

## Beliefs

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### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer “no” only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– Yes

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– No

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Are grave goods present:

– I don't know

Are formal burials present:

– I don't know

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

- ↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):
  - No
- ↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is a kin relation to elites:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god is unquestionably good:
  - Yes
- ↳ Other feature(s) of supreme high god:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:
  - Yes
    - ↳ The supreme god's knowledge is restricted to particular domain of human affairs:
      - No
    - ↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:
      - No

- ↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god knows your basic character (personal essence):
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god has other knowledge of this world:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can reward:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god can punish:
  - Yes

- ↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god exhibits positive emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god exhibits negative emotion:
  - Yes
- ↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:
  - No
- ↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:
  - No
- ↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature:
  - Yes [specify]: Concern for appropriate, binary, gendered expression for humans.
- ↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:
  - Yes
    - ↳ In waking, everyday life:
      - Yes
    - ↳ In dreams:
      - Yes
    - ↳ In trance possession:
      - No
    - ↳ Through divination practices:
      - No
    - ↳ Only through religious specialists:
      - No



↳ Only through monarch

– No

↳ Other form of communication with living:

– Yes [specify]: Intuition; instinct; human nature; emotion; health; bodily shape and appearance; energy and vitality

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):
  - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):
  - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings can see inside heart/mind (hidden motives):
  - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings knows your basic character (personal essence):
  - Yes
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings know what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):
  - I don't know
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have other knowledge of this world:
  - No
- ↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can reward:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings can punish:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings have indirect causal efficacy in the world:
  - Yes
- ↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:
  - Yes

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– No

↳ These supernatural beings possess/exhibit some other feature:

– No

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model:

– No

↳ Organized hierarchically:

– Yes

↳ Power of beings is domain specific:

– Yes

↳ Other organization for pantheon:

– No

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– Yes

↳ Food:

– Yes

↳ Sacred space(s):

– Yes

↳ Sacred object(s):

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Yes [specify]: Clothing

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of coreligionists:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other religions:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about murder of members of other polities:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about sex:

– Yes

↳ Adultery:

– Yes

↳ Incest:

– Yes

↳ Other sexual practices:

– Yes [specify]: Premarital sex and masturbation

- ↳ Supernatural beings care about lying:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about honouring oaths:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about laziness:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about sorcery:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:
  - Yes
  - Notes: Fighting is condoned through various sports like boxing, wrestling, eastern martial arts, and mixed martial arts.
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about shirking risk:
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about gossiping:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about property crimes:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about proper ritual observance:
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about performance of rituals:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural beings care about conversion of non-religionists:
  - Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about economic fairness:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about personal hygiene:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done by other entities or through other means [specify]

– No

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:  
– No

↳ Done randomly:  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Other [specify]  
– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:  
– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:  
– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of mild sensory displeasure:  
– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure:  
– Yes

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:  
– No

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:  
– No

↳ Other [specify]  
– No

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:  
– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:  
– Yes

- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of political failure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of defeat in battle:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of disaster on journeys.
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of mild sensory displeasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of extreme sensory displeasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:
  - Yes
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of impaired reproduction:
  - Field doesn't know
- ↳ Punishment in this life consists of bad luck visited on descendants:
  - Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
  - No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes



↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– No

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

↳ Done to inhibit selfishness:

– Yes

↳ Done randomly:

– Field doesn't know

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural rewards in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of mild sensory pleasure:

– Yes

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory pleasure:

– Yes

- ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of eternal happiness:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:
  - Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
  - No
- ↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:
  - Yes
- ↳ Supernatural rewards in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of good luck:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of political success or power:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success in battle:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of peace or social stability:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of healthy crops or good weather:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of success on journeys:
  - Yes

- ↳ Reward in this life consists of mild sensory pleasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of extreme sensory pleasure:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced health:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of enhanced reproductive success:
  - Yes
- ↳ Reward in this life consists of fortune visited on descendants:
  - Yes
- ↳ Other [specify]
  - No

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

- Yes

### Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

- Yes

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

- Yes

- ↳ What is the nature of this distinction:
  - Strongly present and highlighted

- ↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:
  - Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts:  
– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are explicitly linked to vague metaphysical entities:  
– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked to impersonal cosmic order (e.g. karma):  
– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being:  
– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked explicitly to commands of anthropomorphic being:  
– Yes

↳ Specifically moral norms are have no special connection to metaphysical:  
– No

↳ Moral norms apply to:  
– All individuals (any time period)

## Practices

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### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require celibacy (full sexual abstinence):  
– No

Does membership in this religious group require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence):  
– Yes

↳ Monogamy (males):  
– Yes

↳ Monogamy (females):

– Yes

↳ Other sexual constraints (males):

– Yes

Notes: Discouraged sex before marriage and masturbation.

↳ Other sexual constraints (females):

– Yes

Notes: Discouraged sex before marriage and masturbation.

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of property/valuable items:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require physical risk taking:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require accepting ethical precepts:

– Yes

Does membership in this religious group require marginalization by out-group members:

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– No

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale “ceremonies” and “festivals.”

– No

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

↳ Tattoos/scarification:

– Yes

↳ Circumcision:

– Yes

|

↳ Food taboos:  
– Yes

↳ Hair:  
– No

↳ Dress:  
– Yes

↳ Ornaments:  
– Yes

↳ Archaic ritual language:  
– No

↳ Other:  
– No

Does the group employ fictive kinship terminology:

– Yes

↳ Fictive kinship terminology universal:  
– Yes

↳ Fictive kinship terminology widespread:  
– Yes

↳ Fictive kinship terminology employed but uncommon:  
– No

## Society and Institutions

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### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: A porous group with ill-defined boundaries, having a widespread and diverse range of sentiments and practices, but bound by their shared concern for implementing godly designs for health and fitness.

## Welfare

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized famine relief:

– No

Is famine relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized poverty relief:

– No

Is poverty relief available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm:

– No

Is institutionalized care for the elderly and infirm available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

## Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

## Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:



– No

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

### **Public Works**

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide water management (irrigation, flood control):

– No

Is water management provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide transportation infrastructure:

– No

Is transportation infrastructure provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

### **Taxation**

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– No

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

### **Enforcement**

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized police force provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to institutionalized punishment enforced by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include execution:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include exile:

– No

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include corporal punishments:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include ostracism:

– Yes

↳ Do the institutionalized punishments include seizure of property:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– No

Are the group's adherents subject to a formal legal code provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

### **Warfare**

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– No

Do the group's adherents participate in an institutionalized military provided by institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

### **Written Language**

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– Yes

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Is a non-religion-specific written language used by the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

### **Calendar**

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– No

Is a formal calendar provided for the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

↳ Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: Foods considered healthy

Is food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

↳ Please characterize the forms/levels of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Other [specify in comments]

Notes: Christian diet books and diet plans are commonplace.

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