

Did Jesus want his followers in positions of power?



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

The PEW Research Center recently made a less-than-shocking discovery. The study reveals that Christians make up 87% of the 119th Congress. This is a decline from over 90% just a decade ago (see "Faith on the Hill" at pewresearch.org). For comparison, 62% of Americans identify as Christian (in the 1960s, about 90% of us claimed to be Christian). Clearly, our "representatives" aren't truly representing a lot of the country, at least religiously. Almost 30% of us are "religiously unaffiliated" (RU). That doesn't mean the "RU" don't believe in God, just that they don't claim one particular faith. Yet, think about it: 461 members of Congress — Senate and House — say they are Christian, out of a total of 532 members. Less than 1% — three members — are RU, about the same as Muslims — four members — and much less than Jewish reps — 32 members — (there is one "Messianic Jewish" representative, which means, another Christian).

What does this tell us? To begin with, when some Christians claim "We're not

free to talk about our faith" or "We're being persecuted," we can smile and point to the fact there are literally thousands of radio, television and internet stations and channels, as well as countless churches, to propagate Christianity. When these people say the government, the culture, the nation is ruled by "secularism," we don't smile any longer. It's time for a serious reality check. Not only are elected Christians in major leadership positions across the country (and gaining in numbers), but the culture continues to be saturated with the symbols and scriptures of one majority religion. And, by the way, those numbers in Congress clearly show that Protestants — at 55% — are dominant (alongside Catholics at 28%). And there are more Baptists than any other Protestant group (though, strangely, there are over 100 members who don't specify what kind of Protestant Christian they are).

I like the term "RU" since it gives the green light to ask a few relevant questions such as: "Are you a believer?" "If so, how does that influence your vote?" This is where my curiosity is awakened. What about those "unspecified" believers in Congress, who say they are Christian but choose not to be labeled? Almost 20% of the Christians in national government don't wish to say what they believe. This may surprise you, but I find that rather encouraging. Here's the way

I see it: we might assume there are many elected leaders who know they were elected to office not because of their faith, but to do the job. In a secular government — not ruled by "secularism" but merely non-sectarian — people of any faith or no faith can serve in leadership. It might be good if we couldn't identify any member of government with any particular belief. Could we guess what a person believes by their decisions, legislative actions, votes? Unfortunately, there are many voters who choose not to trust an elected leader unless they specifically identify with that person's sectarian beliefs.

I also find it disappointing, to say the least, that some elected leaders claim they serve their faith — and constituents who share that faith — above serving the rest of us, or the Constitution itself. There's nothing wrong with a leader stating they have faith and their faith guides their decisions. However, if it appears they have forgotten their duty to uphold our secular Constitution, neglecting their responsibility to make decisions that benefit everyone regardless of faith affiliation, we have a problem. "God put me in office and I follow the teachings of the Bible above any law," is a big red flag. This would be a good time to ask some "RU" questions: Are you saying you will use your elected office to propagate your faith, that you want to

make the rest of the country obey the rules of your chosen religion? Are you telling us you don't believe there should be a separation between religion and government, meaning no one religion can rule in America? If so, maybe you should be a preacher rather than a politician.

I find it encouraging there are slight increases in non-Christian representation such as Hindus and Buddhists. "There will be four Hindus in the House — two more than in the previous session. Three won reelection in 2024... Three Buddhists are set to serve in the new Congress, an increase of one... In addition, there are three members who identify as Unitarian Universalists."

Dominant Christians are going to have to come to terms with the uncomfortable truth: their privileged position of power is fading, and that can be a good thing for everyone, including Christians. After all, this leads to one more curious RU question: Are you sure the message of Jesus is about seeking and securing power?

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