

## Walking in the valley of the 'nones'

According to several surveys and polls like the Gallup survey entitled, "2017 Update on Americans and Religion," about 75% of Americans identify as Christians. Only 37% consider themselves 'highly religious' and 33% said they weren't religious at all. Not to drift too far away from my theme, but 48% of those who said they were highly religious approved of Donald Trump.

About 6% said they identified with a religion other than Christianity, Judaism or Islam, while 21% said they don't have a formal religious identity at all. Of the highly religious group (the 37%), church attendance was an important part of their faith. Though the 'moderately religious' group stayed even with previous year's numbers, the 'not religious' grew by a percentage point. The 'most highly religious' worshippers were the Mormons (74%), followed by the Protestants (50%), the Muslims (45%), the Catholics (40%), and the Jews (19%).

### **God isn't a Republican...neither is He a Democrat, but most religious people are one or the other.**

Gallup says that, "The relationship between religiosity and political party identification remained virtually the same in 2017 as in 2016. About half of Republicans are highly religious, compared with about a third of independents and Democrats. Religiosity among the latter two groups is almost identical, including 38% and 39% of independents and Democrats, respectively, who are not religious. President Barack Obama had his highest approval ratings in office among those who were not religious, while George W. Bush, like Trump, had his highest approval ratings among the highly religious."

There is another study that shines the light on the *nones* - those without religious affiliation. A poll done by Pew Research three years ago found that the number of non-religious citizens was growing and that among millennials, 36% of them were *nones*. This was a whopping increase from numbers of ten years earlier when the figure was 16% or about 37 million people. *None* should not be confused with atheists or agnostics, however; they make up about 13% of the population. What is somewhat confusing is that many of the *nones* consider themselves *spiritual*. Spiritual does not easily translate, but one thing it does mean is that while a spiritual person may not be institutionally religious, he or she are probably 'believers' (in a deity).

Like political Independents, this group is growing in America, but the movement away from specific religions may not be all bad IF the individuals have a belief system that tracks with the values espoused in the Ten Commandments and that are reflected in our Constitution. Despite the fact that the *nones* are not visiting America's churches, they are (hopefully) practicing their beliefs outside those religious four walls. THAT would, indeed, be good for America. It's probably too much to expect that the *nones* will help stop the church attendance bleeding, but we can engage with them and make them feel welcome by showing a genuine interest in them and in their spirituality. They must never be allowed to feel like a fifth wheel on God's chariot.

And we must never believe that their independent thought represents a closed door to their hearts, minds or spirits. If the devoutly religious among us want to spread the Word to this group we must adjust our approach to them by shifting from preaching to conversational mode and leave all those marvelous biblical quotes and the excessive oratory at home. We needn't worry about bridging the gap. I'm confident that the spirit will take over and lead us in the right direction, and who knows, maybe the *nones* will be the *ones* to show us how to reach out to the others, where belief lies suspended. In this case, hope is a big part of the plan...for all of us.

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