

BELIEVERS VS. NON-BELIEVERS

Recent surveys on religion in public life reveal that America is still a vibrantly religious nation. But there is also evidence that the raging culture war is a reflection of the burgeoning disharmony between believers and non-believers. The believers are numerically stronger, but it is the secularists who staff the cultural command posts.

A recent Pew survey shows that 81 percent of Americans say prayer is an important part of their daily lives, and the same number report that there will be a Judgment Day for us all. When asked if they agree with the statement, "I never doubt the existence of God," fully 87 percent said yes. In a *USA Today/CNN/Gallup* poll, it was found that 78 percent of Americans favor prayer at school ceremonies, and 71 percent think it's okay for a monument of the Ten Commandments to be in a public area. Moreover, almost half of all Americans attend a religious service once a week or more.

All this is good news for believers, but it is also true that their ranks have dwindled. For example, in 1972 nearly 63 percent of the population was Protestant; today the percentage is 52 or 56, depending on the survey. Catholics are about a quarter of the population today, registering only a slight change from 1972. The percent who are Jewish has been cut in half, having dropped from 3 percent to 1.5 percent. The biggest change, proportionately speaking, has been among "other" religions and non-believers: only 2 percent belonged to the "other" category in 1972, but today 6-7 percent do; non-believers have increased from 2 percent to between 9 and 14 percent today.

So what's been going on and why does it matter? It is no secret that mainline Protestantism has been sidelined for the past thirty years. With the noticeable exception of evangelicals and fundamentalists, the big Protestant

denominations have succumbed to the culture. To be specific, the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans have absorbed the values of the secular elites, thus forfeiting their once special status. All of the mainline Protestant denominations, for example, are pro-abortion, and in many cases aggressively so.

With regard to the “other” religions, there are more Muslims in the U.S. than there are Episcopalians, and it is debatable whether they have overtaken Jews (they will very soon, if they haven’t already). The decline in Protestants and Jews is due mostly to their abysmally low birth rates, as well as to their tendency to join the ranks of the non-believers (there has also been an increase in the number of Catholics who have moved into this category, but Catholic immigration—largely Latino—has pretty much kept pace); in the case of Jews, their intermarriage rate has also quickened.

It is the non-believers who are the problem. Not because they are non-believers—those without faith can certainly be good persons—but because this community has become increasingly hostile to religion in recent times. It is one thing to be indifferent to religion, quite another to bear an animus. Worse, secularists hostile to religion are highly overrepresented in those jobs that shape our culture: college faculties, the media, the book publishing industry, Hollywood, non-profit public interest organizations, the foundations—all are top heavy with men and women who don’t look kindly on religion.

This divide is evident in politics as well. Unfortunately for John Kerry, the secular elites have stopped his campaign from reaching out to people of faith. According to Geoffrey Layman, a University of Maryland professor who has authored a book on this subject, “secularists have become an increasing portion of the Democratic electoral coalition and especially the party’s activist base.” Mike McCurry, former press secretary to Bill Clinton, explains why: “Because we want to be

politically correct, in particular being sensitive to Jews, that's taken the party to a direction where faith language is soft and opaque."

It's not as though some Democrats working for Kerry haven't tried. "Every time something with religious language got sent up a flagpole, it got sent back down, stripped of religious language," said one Democratic operative. Kenneth Wald, a political scientist and director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Florida, was just as blunt as McCurry: "There is a very strong tendency within the Jewish community to be worried about the people who are supporting Bush and Bush's tendency to promote Christian values from the bully pulpit."

Politics aside, the Catholic League has a dog in this fight. The secularists may be strategically positioned in the culture war, but we are not exactly without influence. And it is not in our constitution to ever run away from a fight.