



## WILL THE REAL CHRISTIAN PLEASE STAND? By Bob Waldrep

*"Donald Trump came up with a new nickname for Hillary Clinton, 'The Devil.' I like how he says 'it's true,' as if he traveled to Hell and confirmed it himself."*

Jimmy Kimmel

*"Members of the conservative Christian clergy met with Donald Trump. They came out of the meeting proclaiming 'THERE IS NO GOD!'"*

Conan O'Brien

Late night comedians, like most Americans have grown accustomed to religion and politics being intertwined. Since Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority in 1979, aligning followers of the movement with the Republican Party, this has meant Republicans have typically been portrayed as the "Christian" party and Democrats as the anti-Christians. That can be seen in the jokes by Kimmel and O'Brien. However, as we are learning, in this current presidential race the worlds of religion and politics have been turned upside down.

Twenty years ago who would have thought the Republicans would be backing a candidate that doesn't make faith a central part of their campaign while the Democrats are backing a candidate that – when needed – is embracing their faith as a reason for support. In fact, the Republican candidate has seemingly spent more effort on

convincing voters that his opponent is not a Christian than convincing them he is a Christian.

Addressing a group of Christian leaders on June 21, 2016, Trump said, "We don't know anything about Hillary in terms of religion...Now, she's been in the public eye for years and years, and yet there's no — there's nothing out there. There's like nothing out there."

<sup>1</sup> He made this claim despite the fact that Clinton has realized there is an advantage in presenting herself as the candidate of faith in this election.



For example, while campaigning in Iowa in January of 2016, Clinton was asked about her beliefs and in her comments stated, "I am a person of faith. I am a Christian. I am a Methodist. I have been raised Methodist". <sup>2</sup> While in this instance, she identifies herself as a "Christian", she more often simply refers to herself as a "Methodist" or a "person of faith".

Like Clinton, Trump rarely uses the "C" word, also preferring to identify himself denominationally as a Presby-

terian. Consider his answer when asked specifically about his faith in a January, 2015 meeting. The question was posed as to whether he had ever asked God for forgiveness, Trump replied, "I'm not sure I have." He added, "We take, when we go and church, and when I drink my little wine...and have my little cracker, I guess that's a form of asking forgiveness." <sup>3</sup>

Even more bizarre, due to answers like that above, the Republican candidate is widely viewed as being a person of little, if any, religious conviction – a large number of Evangelicals doubt he is even a Christian – yet, he still garners much of his support from the religious community. Consider that every candidate he faced in the Republican primary was very verbal about their Christian faith. Each of them openly identified with Evangelicals. Yet, the party known for backing the "Christian" candidate, rallied behind and elected Trump.

*"In an exclusive interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network Donald Trump said 'I believe in god.' But of course Donald thought he was talking about himself."*

Jay Leno

Meanwhile, the Democratic candidate, who does attest to being a person of faith (and does a much better job of pulling it off), draws much of her support from those who want nothing to do with religion. Polling by the Pew

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Research Center, released in July, 2016, indicates that 66% of the religiously unaffiliated voters – “those who describe their religion as ‘atheist,’ ‘agnostic’ or ‘nothing in particular’” would vote for Mrs. Clinton if the election were held at the time of the polling. A 2015 Gallup Poll found that the “religious nones” was the largest religious group among Democrats.

This same Pew poll found that 78% of white evangelical voters say they would vote for Mr. Trump if the election were held today. Incredibly, 44% of these voters also believe Trump is either “not too” or “not at all” religious indicating that, for a large and growing number of Evangelicals, it is no longer mandatory that the Republican candidate be a Christian. What has brought about this change among the Republican “faithful”?

*"Donald Trump announced that he's running for president. During his speech he told the crowd that if elected he would be 'the greatest jobs president that God ever created.' Then God said, 'Hey, don't drag me into this publicity stunt.'"*

Jimmy Fallon

Actually, the handwriting was on the wall during the 2008 election and culminating with the 2012 campaign. In 2008 the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama accused small town Americans of “clinging to their religion and guns” – the implication being that both were not necessarily good for the country. On the Republican side, Mitt Romney was going about getting a great deal of support from those who felt Obama was seeking to disenfranchise – the religious community. However, Romney faced his own religious hurdle in that he was a high-ranking member of the Mormon Church. Most Evangelicals believe the Mormon Church is a cult of Christianity, so they debated among themselves whether they could support a Mormon – who they did not accept as being a Christian – as their nominee.

When John McCain won the primary, it became a nonissue – or, did it?

In the 2012 election Romney again threw his hat in the ring. If the 2008 campaign had taught him nothing else, he had learned how to evade the questions about his Mormon faith and beliefs. This time he won the Republican primary and the evangelical community found themselves in a real dilemma as they had to decide if they would stay true to supporting only Christian candidates for President or support the Mormon nominee. They either had to admit they were supporting a person who was not of the Christian faith, or they must find some way to “Christianize” him.

Too many chose the latter option and

### **44% of Evangelicals supporting Trump believe he is either “not too” or “not at all” religious.**

helped Mitt Romney further blur the distinction between Christian faith and the Mormon religion created by its founding prophet, Joseph Smith and the subsequent Church Prophets.

In supporting Romney, Evangelicals made the leap to support a candidate who, despite all the effort to clean him up and make him appear to be one, was not a Christian. Having crossed this line, for many Evangelicals it would now be much easier to embrace a future candidate, such as Trump, who they do not believe to be a Christian without having to try and make him appear as such. In fact, the Pew polling found that Trump’s support among Evangelicals is greater than Romney’s which was only 73% during the same period in 2012.

During the 2012 campaign we called upon the faith community to recognize the religious pivot that was occurring, writ-

ing, “It may be that the days of having a Christian option [in our Presidential campaigns] are becoming rarer...[As such, our support should be] on the basis of why he is the best man for the job, not his being Christian, kind of Christian, or the closest thing to Christian we could find.”

It appears that the day of Evangelicals not having a Christian option was much nearer than even we thought when penning those words.

The question might be posed as to why Evangelicals don’t simply vote for the Democratic candidate who claims to be a Christian. However, this would be unthinkable since 72% of Evangelicals (2016 Pew Poll) and 49% of those who identify as “very religious” (2014 Gallup Poll) identify with the Republican Party. Since these numbers correspond to the support for Trump, obviously voting for someone highly regarded as a non-Christian is more acceptable than voting for a Democrat.

*"Tonight Hillary Clinton gave her big speech at the Democratic Convention, officially accepting the nomination for president. The speech went well, but the lightning shooting from her hands was a bit much."*

Jimmy Fallon

This shift among Evangelicals to support a candidate who is not a Christian may also be due to, or a reflection of, our views regarding the President and faith. Growing numbers of Americans believe it is unnecessary to have a President who is a person of firm religious convictions. According to Pew’s findings only 62% of U.S. adults say it is important for the President to have strong religious beliefs (similarly, a 2014 Pew Poll found 60% believe members of Congress should have strong religious beliefs). This was 67% in 2012 and 72% in 2008 – a decline of 5% with each of the last two presidential terms.

Ultimately, this probably stems from the American public's diminishing evaluation of the effectiveness of the Church. When asked if they think churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship contribute to solving important social problems, only 58% of those polled said they do - either to a great or to some degree. In 2012 this number was 65% and in 2008 it was 75%. A decline from 75% to 58% is quite startling particularly when it occurred in just eight years.

As confidence in the Church wanes so does Church attendance. In 2015 only 36% of Americans attended religious services at least once a week. 30% say they seldom or never attend religious services. Of the religiously unaffiliated, 52% believe religious organizations are too concerned with money and power; 51% believe they focus too much on rules and 48% believe them to be too involved in politics (Pew Research, November 2015).

Without question, Christians should vote and vote for the candidate(s) they

believe will be best for the country. However, turning around the numbers regarding the low evaluation of and diminishing participation in the Church



will not be accomplished by a presidential candidate or a political party. Positive change will only come as Christians – both Republicans and Democrats alike - learn to again join hands and make our foremost imperative sharing the good news with a culture that desperately needs to hear it. We must strive together

to restore the confidence in the Church that has been lost. This will not happen if we cannot first learn to be more graceful in our dealings with fellow Christians, particularly those with whose politics we may disagree.

*<sup>1</sup> First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup> This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

I Timothy 2:1-4



#### Foot Notes

1. [fox2now.com/2016/06/21/trump-we-dont-know-anything-about-hillary-in-terms-of-religion/](http://fox2now.com/2016/06/21/trump-we-dont-know-anything-about-hillary-in-terms-of-religion/)
2. [nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/01/25/hillary-clinton-gets-personal-on-christ-and-her-faith/?\\_r=1](http://nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/01/25/hillary-clinton-gets-personal-on-christ-and-her-faith/?_r=1)
3. [msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/trumps-religious-talk-causes-unease-among-social-conservatives](http://msnbc.com/rachel-maddow-show/trumps-religious-talk-causes-unease-among-social-conservatives)

## Invisible Scars Project Update

We placed 7,000 copies of *Honoring the Code* into distribution in the first seven weeks of its release. To show you how quickly this film is taking off, it took thirteen months to distribute the same number of copies of our first film *Invisible Scars*.

This could not occur without the generous support of so many corporate sponsors, churches, friends and, of course, the many organizations, ministries, and individuals who have joined with us as film distributors. Naturally, the main heroes are the many veterans who get the film and then share it with their fellow warriors. Here are a few quotes from emails we have received from veterans who watched the film:

*[While watching the film] I did experience some feelings not felt in some time, but I think it was healthy to revisit those feelings instead of keeping them suppressed. I have a counselor at the Vet Center I go to every couple of weeks and he is interested in watching as well to see if [it is something] he can use to help other combat veterans like myself... Thanks for all you do for us Vets and other folks that need help and resources to heal!*

A good friend introduced me to your website and the DVD. He and I were in the same Infantry company in Vietnam and have become friends in the past 25 years or so. Thank you for your efforts to ease the pain of those who suffer the spiritual and physical wounds of war and other trauma.

*I read about [Honoring the Code] in the weekly Lutheran Church Charities emailing. My husband served in Viet Nam and Desert Storm. When he came back from Desert Storm, I think it triggered events from Viet Nam. He suffered with PTSD and didn't want to admit it. He has since passed. I am a recent certified Lay Minister within the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and caring about the effects of PTSD is an area [of] meaning to me.*

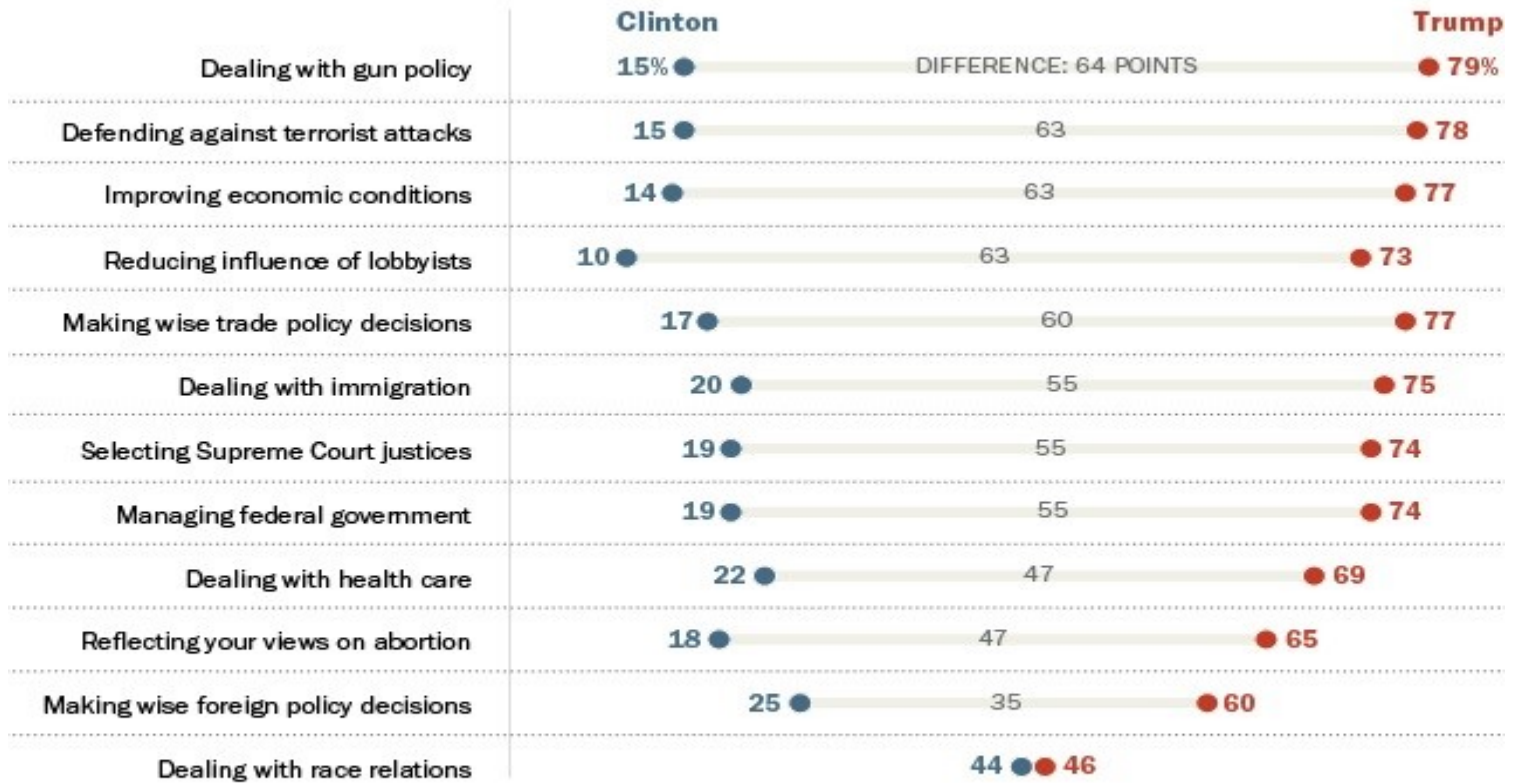
I intend to give my copy to a friend who was a Sniper in the Marine Corp. I think he will benefit from it greatly, as did I.



## Culture Tracks

### White evangelical voters prefer Trump to Clinton on almost every issue

Which candidate would do a better job of ...



To read the Pew Report go to: [www.pewforum.org/2016/07/13/evangelicals-rally-to-trump-religious-nones-back-clinton/](http://www.pewforum.org/2016/07/13/evangelicals-rally-to-trump-religious-nones-back-clinton/)

### YOUR HELP MAKES A DIFFERENCE


Every **\$2.50 gift** you make to the Invisible Scars Project provides a free DVD for veterans who are struggling with PTSD or Moral Injury

- **\$100 gift** provides a free DVD for 40 veterans.
- **\$50 gift** provides a free DVD for 20 veterans.
- **\$25 gift** provides a free DVD for 10 veterans.

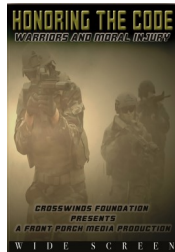
In addition to supporting the Invisible Scars Project, we very much need your help to sustain our ongoing efforts.

**Our staff is completely dependent upon your gifts for their support and ministry needs.**

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