

Bible-adherent pastor mentality and the tension between the Christian message and society

Purpose: To assess pastors' role in society and psychological impact of any adversarial attitudes of culture or government against ministry.

Methods: We surveyed seminary graduates currently pastoring.

Results: Pastors felt suppressed in their ability to express a political opinion while preaching (34%) and indicated they had suffered abuse (generally emotional) because of antagonism to their faith (44%).

Conclusions: Pastors perceive negative societal and governmental pressure because of their beliefs with potential psychological impact.

RESULTS

Demography - This survey was sent to 1064 pastors of whom 164 responded (15%). The background characteristics of respondents are shown in Table 1. Most respondents were from the Western US (32%), pastored a congregation with 100-200 attendees (32%) although a strong minority pastored a church of >1000 attendees (15%), were non-denominational (47%), attended The Master's Seminary (70%), pastored their church >20 years (40%) and held the position of Head Pastor (73%).

Foundational Role of Christianity - The results of these survey questions are shown in Table 2. Pastors overwhelmingly believed, at some level, that Christianity played an important positive role in shaping American history (92%). Even more, pastors generally agreed that Christianity currently helps promote a good, civil, ethical society and government (96%). Pastors also were supportive that Christianity assists in producing a healthy sense of wellbeing among individuals (95%). Pastors also believed, although to a lesser extent, that the underprivileged are best helped by the church and not government (79%).

Christianity and the State - The results of these survey questions are shown in Table 3. Pastors believed generally protecting constitutional freedoms is vital to allow the full expression of religious faith (74%). They also agreed, at varying levels, that a large government leads to repression of religion and replacement of God by the state (76%). Pastors also generally perceived the federal government favors one religion over another (72%) with the most common preference being towards Humanism (62%).

Effect of the State and Culture - The results of these questions are shown in Table 4. High minorities of pastors felt repressed, at some level, in expressing a political opinion from the pulpit because of governmental policy or popular culture (34%), felt limited in their freedom to articulate a political opinion while preaching because of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regulations (37%) and in voicing the Gospel in society (37%).

When asked if they had suffered physical or emotional abuse because of antagonism to their Christian faith almost half answered positively (44%). The most common forms of abuse were: being mocked (95%); social isolation (55%); or workplace or educational institutional bias (40%).

Pastoral Response - The results of these questions are shown in Table 5. Many pastors, at some level, agreed that they should express a political view from the pulpit (40%). Pastors more strongly agreed, again to a varying extent, that Christians should be active in politics in part to express their faith (76%). In addition, the majority of respondents noted that Christians should in general support political candidates who support freedom of expression in society (73%).

Table 1: Respondent characteristics (N = 164)

Question	Choices	Responses	Percentage
Geographical region	Northeast	36	22%
	South	27	16%
	Midwest	49	30%
	West	53	32%
Church attendance	<100	44	27%
	100-200	53	32%
	200-500	31	19%
	500-1000	12	7%
	>1000	24	15%
Denomination	Non-denominational	77	47%
	Evangelical Free Church of America	14	9%
	Presbyterian Church in America	11	7%
	Southern Baptist	11	7%

	Conservative Baptist	10	6%
	Orthodox Presbyterian Church	5	3%
	Other (incidence less than 5)	36	22%
Seminary	The Master's Seminary	22	18%
	Denver Seminary	85	70%
	Westminster Theological Seminary	15	12%
	Other (incidence less than 5)	42	26%
Years pastored a church	1-5	24	15%
	6-10	39	24%
	11-20	36	22%
	>20	65	40%
Position	Head pastor	119	73%
	Executive pastor	7	5%
	Associate pastor	30	20%
	Other (incidence less than 5)	8	5%

Table 2: Foundational role

Indicate your level of agreement on the scale (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)	Number agree	Percent agree	Rating average
Christianity played an important positive role in shaping American history.	151	92%	5.19
Christianity helps promote a good, civil, ethical society and government.	157	96%	5.52
Christianity assists in producing wellbeing in a country's citizens.	155	95%	5.46
The underprivileged are best helped by the church and not government.	130	79%	4.60

Table 3: Christianity and the State

Indicate your level of agreement on the scale (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)	Number agree	Percent agree	Rating average
Protecting constitutional freedoms is vital to allow the full expression of religious faith and the Gospel.	122	74%	4.31
A large government generally leads to repression of religion and replacement of God by the state?	124	76%	4.54
Do you believe the federal government favors one religion over another?	Response	Percent	
Yes	118	72%	
No	45	28%	
If you believe the federal government favors one religion over another, please indicate which it most favors (may choose more than one).	Response	Percent	
Christian	16	12%	
Humanism	81	62%	
Atheism	45	34%	
Muslim	34	26%	
Buddhist	5	4%	
Hindu	4	3%	
None	13	10%	
Other	13	10%	
No answer	33	20%	

Table 4: Effect of the State

Indicate your level of agreement on the scale (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)	Number agree	Percent agree	Rating average
Do you feel repressed in your ability to express a political opinion from the pulpit because of the current presidential administration or popular culture?	55	34%	2.45
Do you feel repressed in your ability to express a political opinion from the pulpit because of IRS regulations?	60	37%	2.60
Do you fear reprisal in expressing the gospel in society?	60	37%	2.40

Have you suffered physical or emotional abuse because of antagonism to your Christian faith?	Response	Percent	
Yes	72	44%	
No	91	56%	
If you have suffered physical or emotional abuse because of antagonism to your Christian faith, please describe abuse induced (may choose more than one).	Response	Percent	
Mocked	71	95%	
Social isolation	41	55%	
Anxiety	14	19%	
Despondency/depression	6	8%	
Fear of bodily harm	6	8%	
Workplace or educational institutional bias	30	40%	
Physical abuse not needing treatment	1	1%	
Financial loss	14	19%	
Litigation	2	3%	
Other (please specify)	6	8%	
No answer	89	54%	

Table 5: Christian response

Indicate your level of agreement on the scale (0 strongly disagree, 6 strongly agree)	Number agree	Percent agree	Rating average
Pastors should express a political view from the pulpit.	65	40%	2.63
Christians should be active in politics in part to express their faith.	125	76%	4.25
Christians should actively support political candidates who support freedom of expression in society?	121	74%	4.23

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