

The other reason people are ignoring Jason Collins's faith

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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I keep seeing [T. F. Charlton's Jason Collins post](#) everywhere, and with good reason:

Tim Tebow is an example of how the public face of Christian athletes, like the public face of American Christianity in general, is overwhelmingly white—despite the fact that [black Americans](#) are the racial demographic most likely to identify as “very religious.” A [recent](#) Barna poll found that Tebow is by far the most well-known Christian professional athlete in the U.S. (with 83% awareness from the public), with retired white quarterback Kurt Warner a distant second at 59%. Robert Griffin III (RGIII), a black quarterback who’s had a far more successful season with the Redskins than Tebow’s had with the Jets, trailed at 34%.

It's a good point, but I don't think it's the whole story. Race isn't the only difference between Tebow and Warner on the one hand and Collins and Griffin on the other; there's also the different ways they characterize their own faith.

Warner, like Tebow, has always described his faith in the distinct terms of popular evangelicalism. Griffin—a Baylor grad who [attended University Baptist Church](#) while in Waco (see the *Century's* [interview](#) with UBC's teaching pastor)—[tweeted the following last week](#): “The [Muhammad] Ali Center confirmed my belief that although we, as people around this world, are different, we can all help & learn from each other.” He's known not for public displays of scripture references but for [making the sign of the cross](#) on the field. Then there's [this quote](#): “There are a lot of different types of Christians everywhere, but my biggest thing is it's not our job to judge.”

Now, none of these mainline-ish examples rises to the level at which RG3 might have to actually turn in his evangelical (or [Jesus follower](#)) card. But nor do they reflect the language of popular evangelicalism. And popular evangelicalism tends to view more moderate or liberal expressions of the faith as *less Christian*. Black or white, people immersed in that world don't usually begin sentences with things like, “There are a lot of different types of Christians everywhere.”

Enter Jason Collins, who indeed talked [in his SI article](#) about not just his sexuality and his race but also his faith. “I take the teachings of Jesus seriously,” he said, “particularly the ones that touch on tolerance and understanding.” Why have people ignored his faith? It may be because his face doesn't look like the public face of American evangelicalism. But it's also because a lot of American evangelicals wouldn't think he was a real Christian—or at least not Christian *enough*—even if he were white.