

# A NEW DAY

*The Resilience & Restructuring  
of Religion in Canada*



**Reginald W. Bibby**

*Author of Beyond the Gods & Back*

Cover photo credit: Colin Milton.

The Claude Presbyterian Church's "Google" sign on p. 25 has been reproduced with permission of Rev. Randy Benson and his "brainchild member," William Horton. The church is located in Caledon, Ontario.

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## REGINALD W. BIBBY

is one of Canada's leading experts on religious and social trends. He holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge, and was recently reappointed for a further five-year term extending through 2016. For more than three decades, he has been monitoring Canadian social trends via his well-known "Project Canada" national surveys of adults and teenagers.

Reg has presented his findings in academic settings across Canada and around the world. But he also has taken his work well beyond the academic community through innumerable public appearances, extensive media exposure, and thirteen best-selling books. In recognition of his contributions to a clearer understanding of our evolving nation, the Governor General appointed him an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2006. In 2012, he also was awarded the Diamond Jubilee Medal



He believes that his most recent book in his "gods" series, *Beyond the Gods & Back* (2011), is easily his most important to date, with the findings having significant implications for the country's religious groups. *A New Day* is his attempt to make the heart of those findings and implications widely available.

## **Also by Reginald W. Bibby**

*Beyond the Gods & Back*, 2011

*The Emerging Millennials*, 2009

*The Boomer Factor*, 2006

*Restless Churches*, 2004

*Restless Gods*, 2002

*Canada's Teens*, 2001

*The Bibby Report*, 1995

*There's Got to Be More!*, 1995

*Unknown Gods*, 1993

*Teen Trends* (with Donald Posterski), 1992

*Mosaic Madness*, 1990

*Fragmented Gods*, 1987

*The Emerging Generation* (with Donald Posterski), 1985

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of Religion in Canada*

Reginald W. Bibby

 *Project Canada Books*

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A Project Canada Book  
Lethbridge, AB

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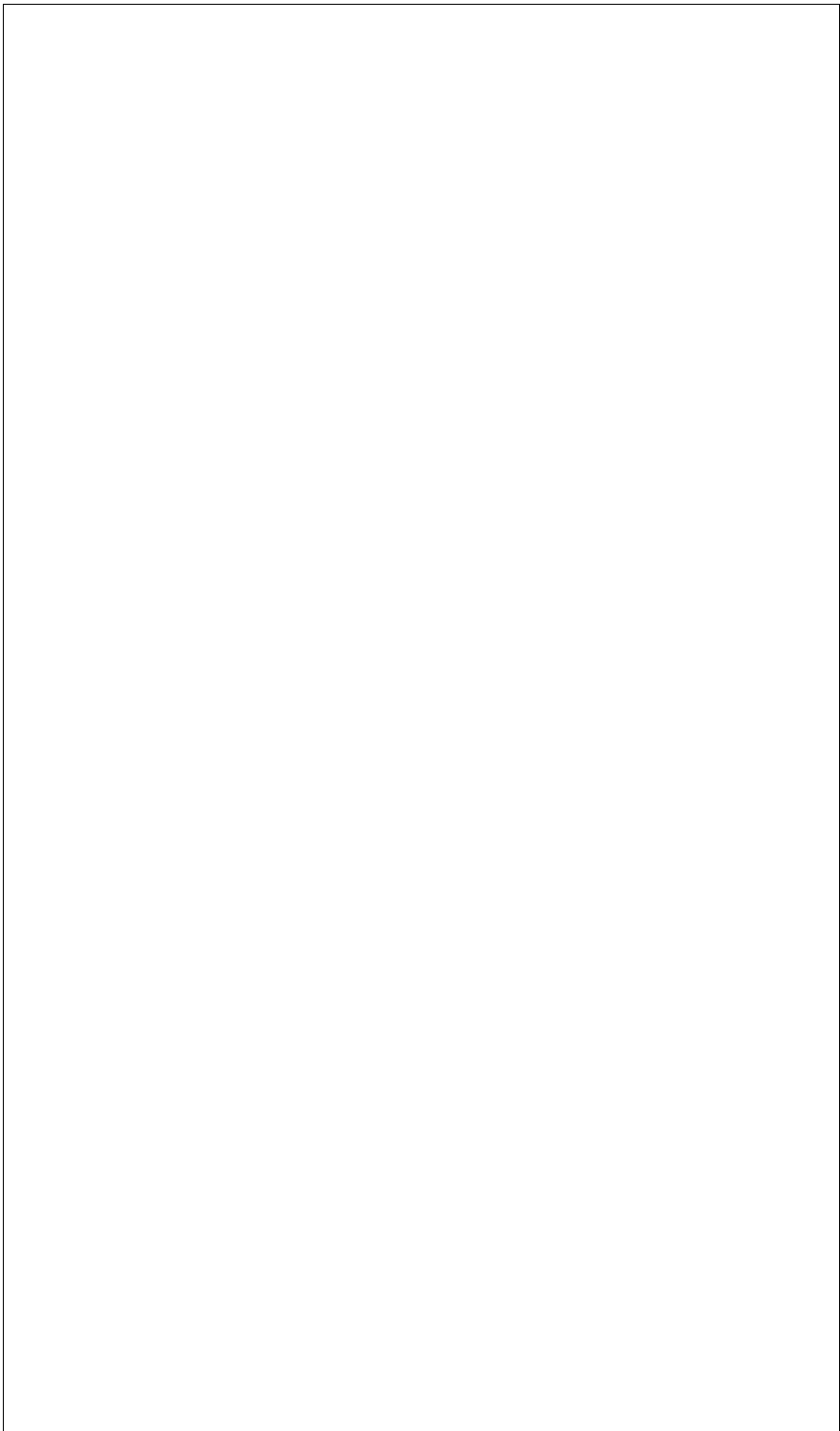
Available complimentary as an e-book; a limited number of hard copies are also available. For information, contact [ProjectCanadaBooks.com](http://ProjectCanadaBooks.com).

ISBN 978-0-98-10614-5-0

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication data available from  
Library and Archives Canada

**To Brian and The Cardinal**

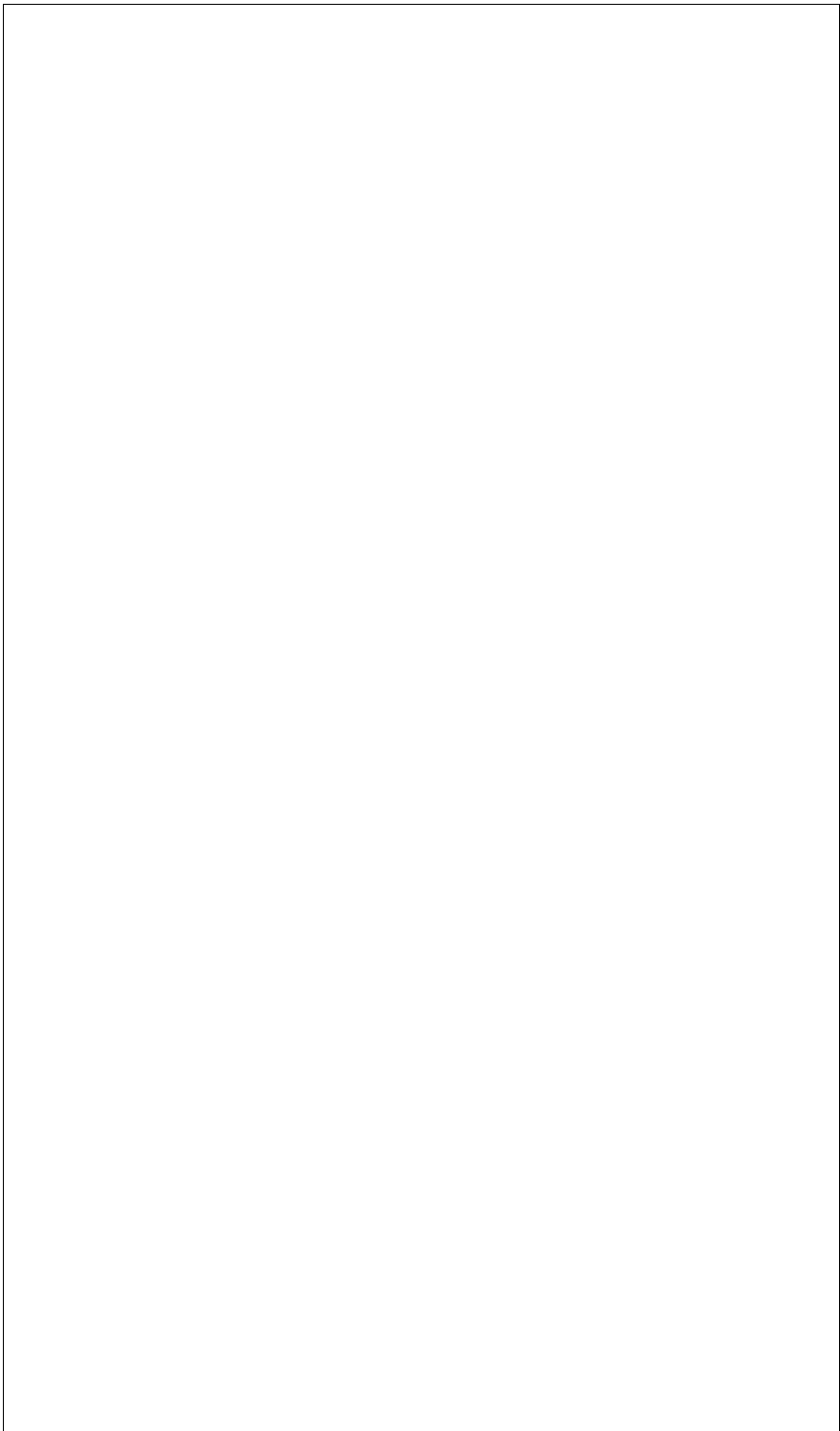
*Two exceptional leaders  
who worked hard for a new day  
that now is here.*





## Contents

	<b>Preface</b>	
	<b>Background</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>The Religious Situation</b>	<b>4</b>
	▪ A False ending ▪ Religion's persistence ▪ Polarization	
<b>2</b>	<b>The Ongoing Market for Religion</b>	<b>12</b>
	▪ Questions & longings ▪ The Immigration factor ▪ Receptivity	
	▪ Why the drop-off? ▪ Why the confusion?	
<b>3</b>	<b>The Restructuring of Religion in Canada</b>	<b>28</b>
	▪ A reshuffling of players ▪ Populations and performances	
	▪ Changes in market shares ▪ The future of major groups	
<b>4</b>	<b>Some Key Implications</b>	<b>37</b>
	▪ It's Time for a Mindset Change	37
	▪ It's Time to Explore Affinities	38
	▪ It's Time to be Part of the Restructuring of Religion	42
	▪ It's Time for Better Ministry	48
<b>5</b>	<b>More About Ministry</b>	<b>50</b>
	▪ Ministering well to "Insiders"	50
	▪ Locating the rest of "your people"	52
	▪ Ministering well to your "Outsiders"	55
	<b>Conclusion: A Call to Action</b>	<b>58</b>
	<b>Continuing the Conversation</b>	<b>60</b>





## Preface

### **It's a new day for religion in Canada.**

What most of us thought was happening isn't happening. Religion is not going away.

Many observers have focused their attention on the decline of a few of the previously prominent groups, and assumed their plight is the plight of religion as a whole.

They've been wrong. **The ongoing market for things religious has meant that other players have been given the opportunity to increase their market shares.** Some have been stepping forward.

**What's more, with accelerated immigration, the global vitality of religion is having and will continue to have a dramatic impact on the state of religion in Canada.** The immediate big winners? Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and Muslims.

**At the same time, the country as a whole is hardly embracing religion.** There has been a significant increase in the number of people who are rejecting religion, as well as a rise in the proportion who constitute something of "an ambivalent middle."

**It adds up to the current religious reality: polarization** - a story that I tell in detail in my most recent book, *Beyond the Gods & Back: The Demise and Rise of Religion in Canada* (2011).

**This is a critically important story that needs to be heard by everyone who cares about religion, and even some who don't. That's where this book comes in.**

**It highlights the central findings of *Beyond the Gods & Back*. But it does more: it looks pointedly at the implications, and offering reflections on some of the responses that are required.** While the book's anticipated audience is primarily Christian, the material should prove useful to people of all faiths – as well as those with no faith.

**This book also throws conventional academic caution to the wind in using a format that makes the information accessible.** Frequently I am asked for my PowerPoint slides; this book provides readers, in effect, with slides and text – in living colour!

And thanks to the arrival of “e-everything” – including the miracles of e-dissemination and e-economics, **the e-version of this book is being made available complimentary to readers.**

Please give it at least a good skim and generously pass it on. I want it reach a lot of people.

Oh, by the way, a few theists and atheists wonder, “*Where is Bibby when it comes to faith?*” The answer is simple: faith is very important to me – although my eclectic background and personal and family needs often leave me wondering where precisely to turn.

**My greatest hope** is that you who similarly value faith will come away with an improved understanding of what is happening with religion in Canada today. But I am hoping for much more – that you will feel encouraged and invigorated, and compelled to be part of the collective response that is needed.


Thank you so much for giving this a look!

Reginald Bibby  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
July, 2012


# Background

As some of you are aware, I have been trying to make sense of religious developments in Canada for close to four decades. In the early years, my primary data source was my Project Canada national surveys of adults and teens. Since the mid-1980s, some excellent complementary data have been produced by Statistics Canada's annual General Social Surveys – unique in having large samples of up to 25,000 people. Still further, since the turn of the new century, some invaluable and unprecedented global data have been generated by organizations and consortia including Gallup, the Pew Research Center, the World Values Survey, and the International Social Survey Programme. We now can view Canadian religious in global perspective.

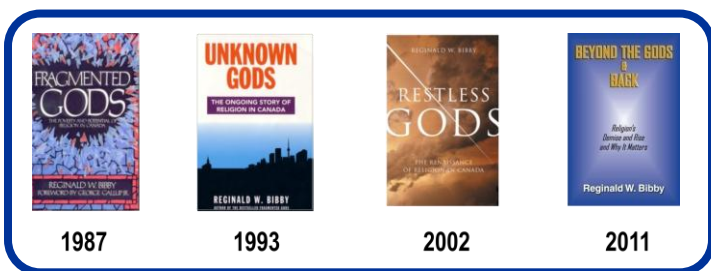
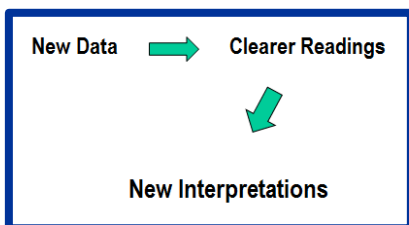
## Trend-Tracking



- \* 7 Adult...1975 → 2005: > 10,000
- \* 4 Teen....1984 → 2008: > 15,000

- Readings of
  - Boomers \* Pre-Boomers \* Post-Boomers
  - Teens 80s 90s 00s Now
- Statistics Canada's General Social Surveys: 1985-present
- New global surveys: 2000-plus 
- Together: surveys lots of information on how we have changed & not changed since 1960s

**The availability of new data has made it possible to see things more clearly.** In turn, the improved readings have called for a rethinking of existing interpretations and, as necessary, for the posing of new ones. That's why I have offered a number of summaries and explanations of developments over the years.



**After spending almost four decades monitoring religious developments in Canada, I think I have finally figured things out.** But that's for you to decide. A favourite sociologist of mine, Howard Becker, once commented that a basic test of sound research is that people should be able to recognize themselves in the things we write about them. My expectation is that what I am about to describe will resonate with reality as you know it.

**The words ring down from yesteryear...**

***...Old things are passed away;***

***Behold, all things are become new...***

**(2 Cor 5.17)**

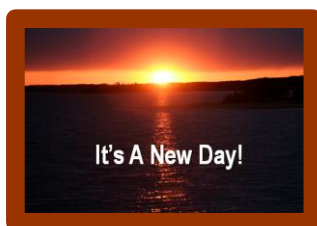
**Let me emphasize from the outset: things are anything but over for religion in Canada. That said, things are very different from the past.**

- The interests and needs that in days gone by called out for religion continue to call out today. A significant and fairly stable numerical core continues to value faith. That core is currently being enhanced considerably by immigration.
- At the same time, a growing number of people have decided to take a pass on religion.
- A noteworthy segment of the population is something like “the politically undecided” – neither embracing nor rejecting faith.

**Such “religious polarization” sums up the current Canadian religious situation.**

The ongoing market demand for religion means that some groups are winning, precisely at the same time that others are losing. So it is that “the Canadian religious marketplace” is characterized by a major reshuffling of the prominent group players.

Things are not the same. But in the midst of the reshuffling, religion persists. Indeed, it is precisely because of its persistence that the reshuffling of players is taking place.



# I. The Religious Situation

*A lot of people thought that religion was winding down...a thing of the past.*

*Like the Thessalonians of old, many felt it was pretty much over.*

People observing the Canadian scene between 1960 and 2000 were virtually unanimous in viewing organized religion as being in irreversible decline. Things were bad and would only get worse.

After all, secularization had seemingly taken place in much of Protestant Europe and in Catholic countries such as France and Italy. A similar scenario was believed to be unfolding in Canada.

## Predictions of Religion's Demise

- Freud 
- Tom Harpur 
- Marx 
- Michael Valpy 
- Pierre Berton 
- Michael Adams 
- An unnamed  sociologist 

Religion appeared to be moving to the periphery of Canadian life and Canadian lives. One indicator **was the sharp drop in regular service attendance**. Around 1950, Canada's weekly worship level of 60% was higher than that of the United States (50%). By 1975, that 60% figure had dipped to 30%.

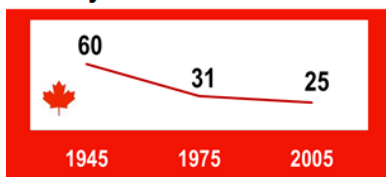


The groups that were hit the hardest? Mainline Protestants – the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches – along with the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec.

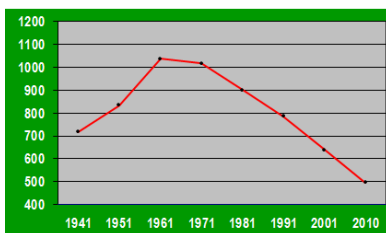
Leaders “spin” these numbers in a variety of ways. But a bit of perspective: when I have presented these kinds of graphs to my non-partisan university undergraduates and asked, “Would you invest in companies like these?” the answer has been a consistent, emphatic, “No!”

Most assume that quantity should be at least one important indication of quality – and performance.

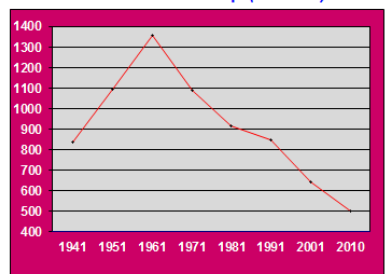
### Weekly Attendance: 1945-2005



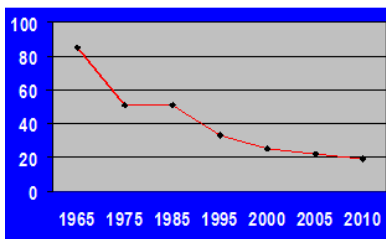
### The United Church Situation National Membership (In 1000s)



### The Anglican Church Situation National Membership (In 1000s)



### The Quebec RC Situation Monthly-Plus Adult Attendance, 1965-2010




SOURCES: Hans Mol, 1965; Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series, 1975; General Social Surveys, Statistics Canada, 1985-2010.

**Demographically-speaking, one age cohort has been primarily responsible for “the great Canadian attendance drop-off” – Baby Boomers, people born between approximately 1945 and 1965.**

As far back as 1975 – when the oldest boomers were just turning 30, only 15% were attending services weekly, well below the 37% level of their parents, grandparents, and others born before 1945.

There was much speculation in the 1980s and early 90s about Boomers “returning to church” as they got a bit older and began to have families of their own.

We now know that the hype wasn’t warranted – at least not in Canada. As of 2005, when the Boomers were now between 40 and 60, their collective weekly attendance level had gone up very little; the Pre-Boomer level held steady at 37% over the thirty-year period.

Weekly Attendance by Age Cohort: 1975 & 2005		
		
<b>1975</b>		<b>31%</b>
Pre-Boomers		37
Boomers		15
<b>2005</b>		<b>25</b>
Pre-Boomers		37
Boomers		18
Post-Boomers		24

Still, not all Boomers said good-bye to organized religion. A core of close to 20% was attending services every week. And the “Post-Boomer” cohort following behind them was showing signs of being even a bit more involved. Still, the two cohorts’ attendance levels were well below those of Canadians who had come before them.

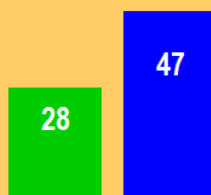
And as for  
teenagers...



As would be expected, there also was a predictable drop in attendance for Boomer children and grandchildren.

The national Project Teen Canada surveys found that the proportion of 15-to-19-year-olds who said they “never” attended religious services almost doubled between 1984 and 2008 – from about 1 in 4 to 2 in 4.

Teenage Attendance:  
1984 & 2008



NEVER

All this “bad news” about the waning of religion led to an array of declarations about its demise and the need for groups to be faithful in the face of what was happening.

- **‘POST-CHRISTIAN’**
- **‘FAITHFUL REMNANTS’**
- **‘PREVAILING CHURCHES’**
- **‘SECULAR SOCIETIES’**

It hardly made for a climate that stimulated inspiration, adventure, and creativity.

*About five years ago, an insightful Presbyterian minister graphically summed up the immobilizing impact of the secularization decree when she spoke of “the psychological shackles of the secularization outlook.”*



*We now know that  
the picture painted by academics,  
religious leaders, the media, & others  
was inaccurate.  
They were wrong.*

Well, to be fair, it isn't that the secularization thesis doesn't have a measure of applicability to some global settings – notably many parts of Protestant Europe. It also describes some aspects of the decline in the importance of religion in Canada.

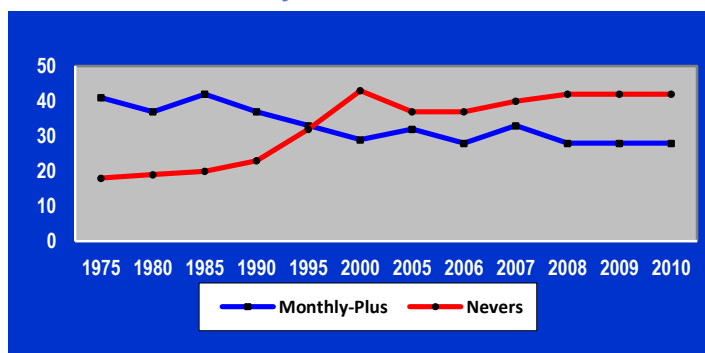
**However, to the extent secularization is viewed as linear and relentless, leading to the inevitable demise of religion, it simply does not provide an accurate analysis of developments in Canada.**

Unquestionably there was a significant decline in religious participation between the 1960s and 2000.

- The proportion of people who never attend services jumped from about 20% to 40%.
- At the same time, the core of people who were attending services monthly or more dropped from roughly 40% to 30%.
- However, over the past fifteen years, the proportions of Canadians who attend monthly-plus on the one hand and never attend on the other have not changed very much. The same, of course, is true for people “in the middle” who show up once in a while for services.

## Service Attendance: 1975-2010

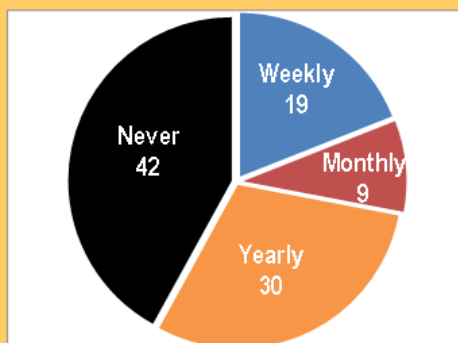
### Monthly-Plus and Never



SOURCES: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Surveys, 1975-80, General Social Surveys, Statistics Canada, 1985-2010.

Today, about 3 in 10 people across the country attend services at least one a month (about 20% weekly, 10% monthly), and about another 3 in 10 once to a number times a year. The remaining 4 in 10 indicate that they never attend a service.

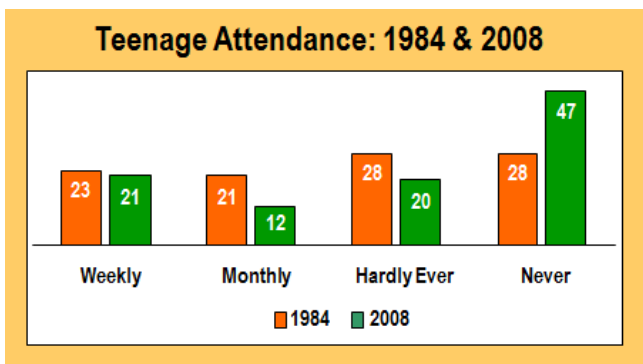
### Canadian Service Attendance: 2010



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010

**Those divergent inclinations are also evident when we look at teenage involvement over time.**

- As we just saw, the proportion of young people who never attend services doubled between 1984 and 2008 – with a many added from the “monthly” and “hardly ever” categories of the 1980s.
- However, during the same period, the segment of teens actively involved in groups remained virtually the same, at 21% in 2008 versus 23% in 1984.



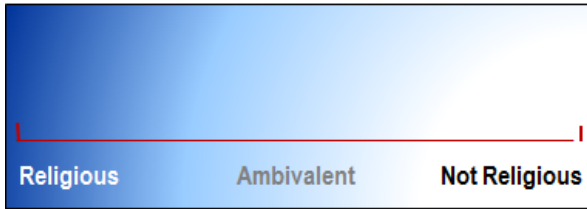
**These findings for adults and teens point to the key feature of religion in Canada today.**

*We awake today, not to  
a secularized Canada,  
but to a polarized Canada.*

*A solid core of people continue to value faith;  
but a growing core do not.*

*A significant proportion  
remain in the middle –  
something like “the politically undecided” –  
dropping in and not dropping out.*

## The Polarization Continuum



Source: Based on Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back*, 2011:56.

It is not written in the stars that Canada will become an increasingly secularized country, where religion is relegated to the past. Conversely, there is no guarantee that the pro-religious segment of the population will remain numerically stable, let alone grow.

**The key to Canada's religion and non-religious proclivities will depend primarily on the extent to which people do and do not find value in religion.** At this point in history, the market for "things religious" is still sizable and, if anything, appears to be growing.

*Because life is dynamic,  
movement in both directions  
of "the polarization continuum" takes place.  
But neither inclination will disappear  
in the foreseeable future.  
What 's at issue is the extent to which both  
will ebb and flow – grow or not grow.  
Those in middle could go either way.*

---

Note: In their book, *Amazing Grace* (Simon and Schuster, NY: 2010), Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell speak of polarization in the United States and emphasize tension and culture wars. I am merely speaking of the inclinations to embrace vs. reject religion. For the record, their book and *Beyond the Gods & Back* passed each other in press; for better or worse, my argument for polarization was made without an awareness of their explicit American application of the term.

## 2. The Ongoing Market for Religion

The reality in Canada and elsewhere is that religion is not going to go away.

For most people, the experience of life – as well as death – leads to questions of meaning, purpose, and what happens when we die. In addition, some observers have maintained that there is almost an innate restless-ness for something beyond ourselves.

*"Our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee" -St. Augustine*



*All of us have "a fundamental dis-ease" that leaves us "forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated, and aching" -Ron Rolheiser*



Obviously, everyone does not respond by looking to religion; but many have, and many will.

So it is that in Canada and around the world, religion continues to be present. Specific religious suppliers come and go. But the ongoing demand for religion itself means only that the specific "firms" that provide it will change. Religion itself will continue.

- **Emile Durkheim**

science doesn't move fast enough...  
may never be able to address  
some issues, notably death



- **Rodney Stark**

there is always a market for religion

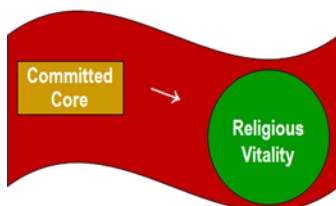


*"People continue to have needs that only the gods can satisfy"*

Secularization/= end of religion;  
secularization ➡ innovation



As we have seen, some 1 in 3 Canadians currently are involved in religious groups. That translates into a lot of people and vitality.




*But there's far more to the story.  
Throughout the world,  
there are literally billions of people  
who continue to identify with religions,  
led by Christianity and Islam –  
and by Roman Catholicism in particular.*

Religious demographers have recently been drawing attention to the fact that **religion is experiencing something of a global resurgence.**

David Barrett, for example, has gone so far as to project that “within the next 24 hours,” some 70,000 Christians and 70,000 Muslims will be added to the ranks of their respective groups. The Christian growth will be led by Catholics and Pentecostals. He pegs the atheist additions at about 1,200.

**The Numbers...**

- 2.0 billion **Christians** ✝
- 1.2 billion **Muslims** ﷻ
- .8 billion **Hindus** ॐ

 **Roman Catholics**

- ✓ 1 billion **worldwide**
- ✓ 75 million 
- ✓ >14 million 
- \* 7 million **Quebec**, 7 million **outside Quebec**



**World Religion Increases in the Next 24 Hours**

<b>Christians</b>	<b>69,000</b>
Roman Catholics	37,000
Pentecostals	30,000
<b>Muslims</b>	<b>68,000</b>
Hindus	37,000
Chinese folk	10,700
Buddhists	10,600
Atheists	1,200
Sikhs	1,100
Jews	350

Source: Barrett et al. 2001-4 and Bibby 2011:204

Sociologists emphasize the fact that we are influenced by the social environments – the social contexts – in which we live.



In the case of religion in Canada, **the extent to which we will discard or embrace religion obviously will be influenced by what is happening globally, and how those broader developments impact Canada through immigration.**

Global Immigration		
Top 10 Destination Countries: As of 2010		
(millions)		
1. United States		42.8
2. Russia		12.3
3. Germany		10.8
4. Saudi Arabia		7.3
5. Canada		7.2
6. France		6.7
7. United Kingdom		6.5
8. Spain		6.4
9. India		5.4
10. Ukraine		5.3

Source: "Faith on the Move," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, 2012.

The numbers help to provide a sense of the impact of immigration on life in Canada.

- Between 2001 and 2006, immigrants accounted for two-thirds of the population growth – 1.1 million of the 1.6 million people added.
- In 2010 a record number of just under 300,000 new permanent residents were admitted.
- As of 2010, the main sources were the Philippines (37,000), India, and China (30,000 each).

Since about 1980, there has been a significant shift in the dominant countries of origin of Canada's immigrants, with very important implications for religion. Growing numbers of people have been coming to Canada from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Immigration Patterns	
Top 10 Countries of Origin	
Up Until 1981	1981-2006
1. United Kingdom	1. China
2. Italy	2. India
3. United States	3. Philippines
4. Germany	4. Pakistan
5. Portugal	5. United States
6. Netherlands	6. South Korea
7. India	7. Romania
8. Poland	8. Iran
9. China	9. United Kingdom
10. Yugoslavia	10. Columbia

Source: Statistics Canada Census Data

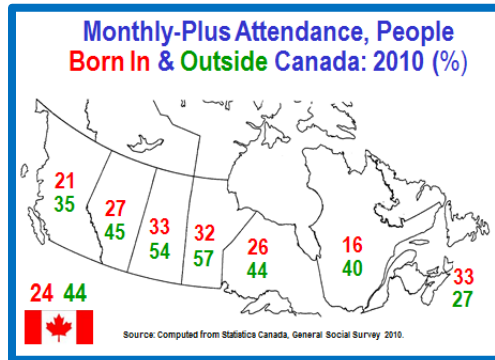
Reflecting those changing patterns, between 2005 and 2010, 5 in 10 arrived as Catholics or Protestants. About 3 in 10 identified with Other Major Faiths, while the remaining 15% reported they had no religion.

**Religious Identification of Immigrants:  
1990-2010**

	Roman Catholic	Protestant	Other Faith	None	Totals
<b>1990-2004</b>	22%	20	38	20	100
<b>2005-2010</b>	30	21	34	15	100

Derived from Statistics Canada, General Social Survey 2010.

As of 2010, a very important pattern was evident: the level of attendance of immigrants tended to be much higher than that of people born here.



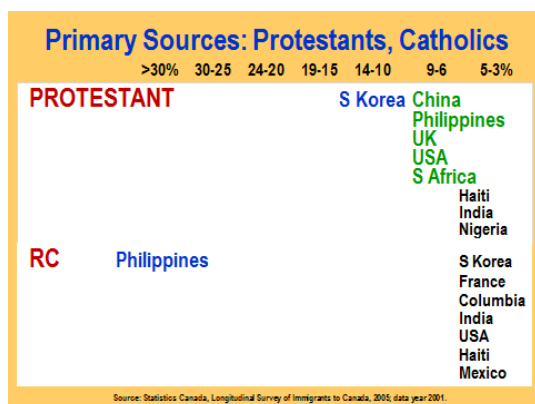
People who come to Canada clearly vary a great deal in their religious identity and inclinations.

- Statistics Canada data analyzed by my colleague Abdie Kazemipur show that **Protestants** currently are arriving from South Korea, followed by China, the Philippines, Britain, and South Africa.
- For **Catholics**, the Philippines is the most important source of new additions from outside Canada, followed to a much lesser extent by arrivals from countries including France, Colombia, India, and Mexico.

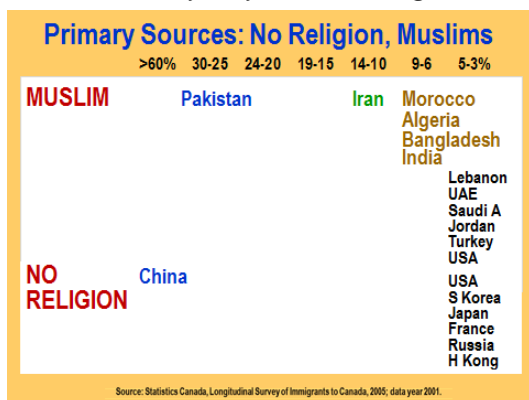
**Immigrant Faiths**  
Religion of Canada's 7.2 Immigrants (%)

1. Christian	59
2. Muslim	9
3. Hindu	4
4. Buddhist	4
5. Jewish	2
6. Other	4
7. No Religion	17

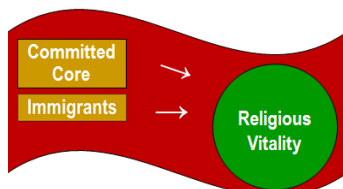
Source: "Faith on the Move," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC 2012.



- **Islam's** main source of arrivals from outside Canada – by a wide margin – is Pakistan, followed by Iran, Morocco, Algeria, Bangladesh and India.
- China is far and away the primary country of origin for those who say they have **no religion**.



Immigration obviously feeds the entire religion-no religion continuum. But, on balance, it appears it will be a particular stimulus to religion in at least the immediate future.



*Still further:  
surprisingly large numbers of people  
“in the middle” –  
even some “at the non-religious end” –  
have not shut the door on religion.  
For many,  
religion potentially has a role to play.*

Recent General Social Survey data generated by Statistics Canada make it very clear that **a majority of Canadians both engage in personal religious and spiritual practices as well as view related religious and spiritual beliefs as important to the way they live.**

These kinds of findings hardly point to a nation that has down-graded the importance of religion and/or spirituality.

#### Frequency of Personal Religious Practices or Spiritual Activities: 2010

*“How often in the past year have you engaged in personal religious practices or spiritual activities?”*

	Weekly+	Monthly	Few Year	Yearly	Never	Totals
	41%	9	11	4	35	100

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.

#### Importance of Religious or Spiritual Beliefs: 2010

*“To the way you live your life”*

	Very	Some	Not Very	Not At All	Totals
	34%	31	17	18	100

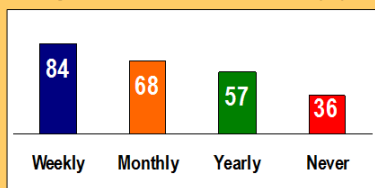
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010.



## Canada's teenagers also show a high level of interest in both spirituality and religion.

More than 1 in 2 indicate that they have **spiritual needs**. They include about 1 in 3 who say they never attend religious services.

Teenage Expression of Spiritual Needs by Service Attendance: 2008 (%)



While the **desire for rites of passage** has slipped somewhat from the 1980s, the demand continues to be extensive.

- Our youth surveys have found, not only that 9 in 10 plan to marry, but that all but about 5% of the marriage-minded will be looking to religious groups for their *wedding ceremonies*.
- More than 80% of teens say they anticipate turning to groups in the future for *funerals*.
- About 2 in 3 expect they will need *birth-related ceremonies*, such as baptisms and christenings.

Desire for Religious Rites of Passage in the Future: 1987-2008 (%)

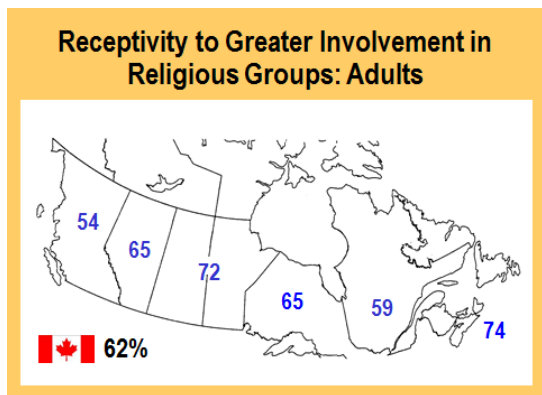
	1987	2000	2008
Wedding ceremony	94	89	84
Funeral	93	86	83
Birth-related	85	70	65

It also is intriguing to learn that large numbers of adults and teenagers who are in “the ambivalent middle” of the religion/non-religion continuum have not slammed the door on possible religious involvement.

Many who attend services less than once a month through never say they are open to greater involvement.

But there is an extremely important qualifier - *if* they can find it to be worthwhile.

Does this mean that everyone is open to religious group involvement? Of course not. But it does mean that significant numbers of Canadians haven’t said a final good-bye to religion – not surprising in view of the fact most have had some ties with groups and traditions and continue to make contact at least once in a while.



*But while large numbers of Canadians are receptive to greater involvement in religious groups, some very important outlook and workforce factors are critical determinants of that involvement.*

*Two outlook changes since the 1960s:*

*the shift from obligation to gratification  
and the shift from deference to discernment.*

**The Boomer era has seen themes like duty and loyalty replaced by a market model.**

That model stresses the importance of determining needs and then meeting them. Successful organizations emphasize what's in it for us.

❖ **From Obligation to Gratification**

❖ **From Deference to Discernment**




Such an outlook has become increasingly pervasive.

- It can be seen in consumption habits where we not only pursue best prices and best value but typically expect add-ons and first-rate customer service.
- Relationships are expected to add to our lives, or are readily ended.
- Church-going is viewed not as an obligation, but as something that needs to be worthwhile.

In the post-1960s, many religious groups failed the gratification test. It remains a critically important criterion for participation today.



## Gratification and Service Attendance

		PRE	BABY	POST
			BOOMERS	
My parents felt that they were "supposed to go to church"	61%	69	63	54
People who attend religious services should go not because they feel they have to but because they find it to be worthwhile	87	90	87	85



**Another particularly important mind-shift has been the movement from deference to discernment.**

For Boomers, higher levels of individual freedom have included freedom of expression. Better informed than ever before, Boomers have led the way in people insisting that they have a voice in all realms of life.

**They also are demanding. Religious groups do not receive an exemption.**

## Attitudes Toward Authority

		PRE	BABY	POST
			BOOMERS	
My parents taught me to respect people in authority	95%	96	95	94
I think that today people in authority have to earn our respect	86	94	85	82
Critical thinking – whereby we evaluate our leaders and experts – is generally a good thing	95	96	95	94

In a day when pluralism reigns, where themes such as racial, gender, and sexual equality are givens, resistance to such realities is not acceptable to the majority of people. It also is clear Canadians expect groups to be in touch with the times, and add rather than subtract from life.

## The Role of Disenchantment

### Worthwhile Involvement

*Factors Cited by People Attending Less Than Monthly Who Say They Would Consider Being More Involved*

Ministry Factors	37%
Organizational Factors	30
Changes in Style and Outlook	23
more open to diversity	5
more contemporary	5
more positive	5
less formal	2
other	6
Better Leadership	3
Other	4
Respondent Factors	30
Other Factors	3

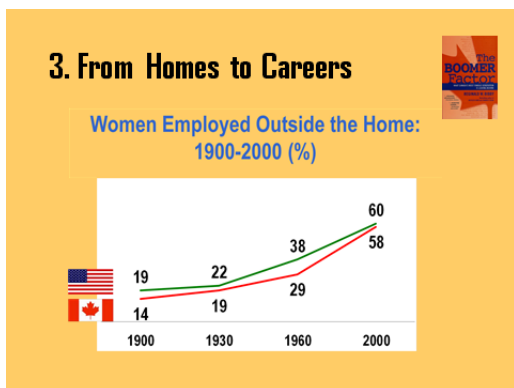
Source: Reginald W. Bibbey, *Restless Gods*, p. 221.

- Every business, organization offers "contact" information
- Every media outlet offers "feedback" opportunities
- Every big talent show offers viewer input
- Every religious group offers ???



It is difficult to overestimate the impact of a major post-1960s development: the increase in the number of women in the paid workforce.

The figure jumped from about 30% in 1960 to around 60% by 2000.



Robert Putnam, the renowned Harvard sociologist, is among those who have documented some of the time correlates of such a phenomenon – including the impact on religious service attendance.

### Robert Putnam



Describes the dramatic increase in the number of women in the U.S. as “the most portentous social change of the last half century.”

*“Comparing two women of the same age, education, financial security and marital and parental status, full-time employment appears to cut home entertaining by roughly 10 percent and church attendance by roughly 15 percent, informal visiting with friends by 25 percent, and volunteering by more than 50 percent. Moreover, husbands of women who work full-time are, like their wives, less likely to attend church, volunteer, and entertain at home.”*

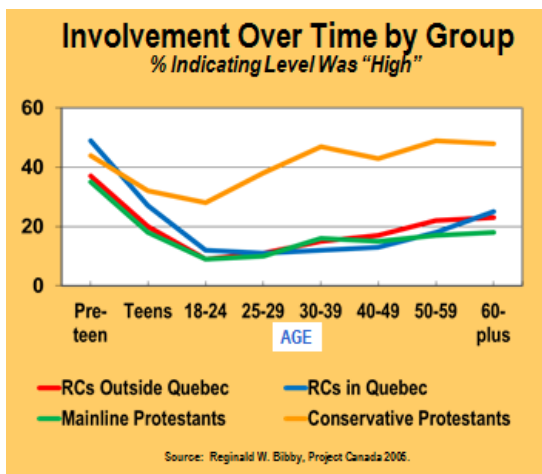
Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000:194-195.

There was and is nothing inherent in employment as such that led to women to be less involved in religious groups.

- But in addition to contributing to women and other people in their lives feeling additional demands on time, paid employment also fostered in women greater economic independence and personal freedom.
- Such autonomy and independence – along with higher levels of education associated with careers – in turn contributed to outlooks of gratification over obligation, and discernment over deference.



The net result was and is women having to make very pragmatic decisions about how they spend their time. Clearly they were open and remain open to those things that add to their lives and those of their families.



On the supply side, between approximately the 1960s and 1990s, **Mainline Protestants** cut back on their Sunday School programs, while **Roman Catholics**, apart from their schools, failed to give high priority to children's ministry. In contrast, **evangelical groups** continued to emphasize the importance of children and youth ministries.

The overall result? As parents gave religious groups what they thought they were worth, large numbers of people – led by Mainline Protestants and Catholics – showed up for seasonal services and maybe on some other special occasions. But that was about it. Some, of course, never quite got around to showing up at all.

...Which brings us to today.

*Large numbers of people are open  
to greater involvement.*

*But they are not in the market for churches.*

*They want much more...  
actually, something quite different.*



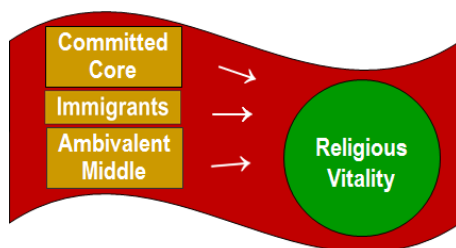
In both our 2000 and 2005 Project Canada national surveys, we asked people who indicated they were open to the possibility of greater involvement with groups “if they found it to be worthwhile,” we followed up the question by asking, *“What would you consider to be worthwhile.”*

In order to get a qualitative feel for what people were saying, I myself coded what people had to say.

I can say with authority that not a single person indicated that he or she was looking for “a good church.” On the contrary, as noted a few pages back, the no. 1 response was ministry.



**And so it is that religion in Canada – far from being relegated to the past and practiced by an aging remnant – continues to know considerable vitality.** The nature of the religion-no religion continuum will depend largely on how religious groups perform.



## PARENTHESIS

### Why have we so badly misread the Canadian religious situation?

- For one thing, we typically have been seeing the Canadian scene through **European glasses**. The assumption has been that Canada would eventually experience the same kind of secularization that is seen to have characterized much of Europe. In addition, many observers have focused on the problems of **Mainline Protestantism**, and have assumed they characterize religion as a whole – minimizing the important reality that “not everyone is losing” – as illustrated by many Conservative Protestant groups.
- For some peculiar reasons, researchers and practitioners have continued to use **“weekly” attendance** as the gold standard for religious involvement, despite the fact many people clearly have considerable difficulty attending that often.



#### So why all the confusion?

*Why have we misread things so badly*

1. **European & Mainline Protestant glasses:**  
a secularization mindset
2. **Outdated polling measures:**  
a 7-day obsession
3. **Misreading the significance of religion:**  
in personal lives → in public life

- Researchers have assumed that the diminished role of organized **religion in the public sphere** has meant that religion has a decreasing impact on Canadian life. Yet, given that how many people say religion and spirituality influence how they live, the “salt-like” impact of faith through the lives of individuals may be dramatically underestimated.



### 3. The Restructuring of Religion in Canada

*The good news for religious groups is that religion's future is not in question.*

*The ongoing needs of large numbers guarantee an ongoing role for religion.*

*But the sobering news for religious groups is that their futures are anything but guaranteed.*

*There are two keys to their futures: population and performance.*

**Fear not for the future of religion. It is obvious that religion is not going to disappear – in Canada and everywhere else.**

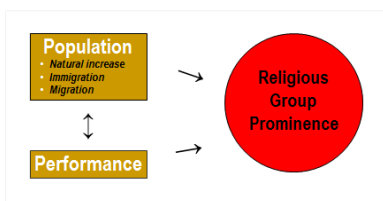
The only academic question is how pervasive religion will be in any given setting. An important related question is the place that religion will have in the lives of individuals and societies.

**Quite distinct from the question of *religion's presence* is the question of which *religious groups* will be prominent.**



Here the answer is not a mystery: the prominence of groups is primarily the product of their populations and performances.

- The size of their **populations** – like any populations – depends on **natural increase** (birth minus deaths), **immigration**, and net **migration** – the latter in this instance the difference between the number of people gained from other groupings and the number lost.
- The other key determinant is **performance** – the inclination and ability of groups to respond to what people want and need.
- Clearly population and performance interact – population size and makeup influence performance, and performance has an important impact on group size. Together, they determine religious group prominence.



In the case of Canada, one needs to be careful about prematurely writing off the old, established groups. They include long-standing players such as the United, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches.

Then again, the evidence suggests that a reshuffling of the major players is, in fact, taking place.

*Maybe the old...*



- Est. groups are not fly-by-night operations.
- Have long histories, recuperative powers.
- They retreat, retrench, revamp, resurface.
- Go down only so far – then come back.
- New leaders, new resources.

## Maybe Something Else

### Durkheim...

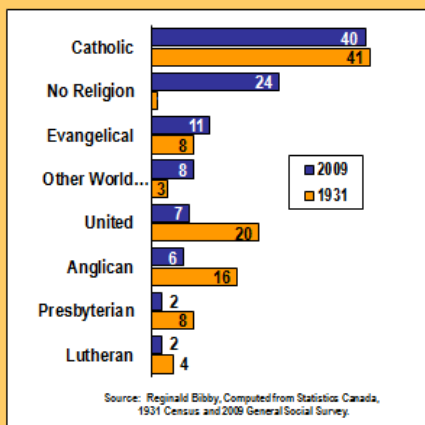


"The old gods are growing old or are already dead, and others are not yet born. There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones."

Over the past 70 years or so...

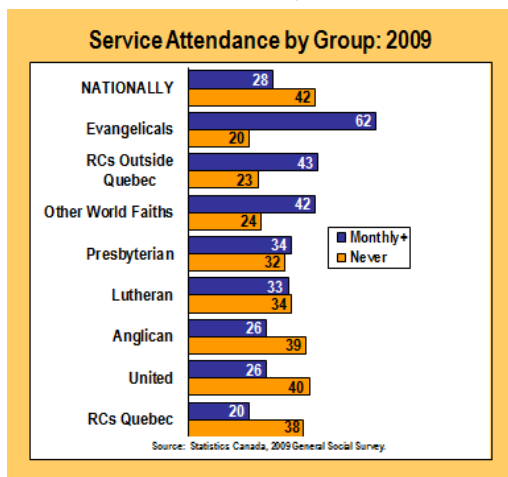
- the proportion of Canadians who have identified themselves as **Roman Catholic** has remained steady at around 40%;
- the **No Religion** category has jumped from less than 1% to about 25%;
- **evangelicals** (Conservative Protestants) have risen from 8% to 11% - with the increase taking place in this century;
- people identifying with **Other World Faiths** – including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism – now comprise 8% of the population versus 3% in 1931;
- all four major **Mainline Protestant** groups have experienced market share declines.

Religious Identification: 2009 and 1931



**Apart from identification with groups, there are noteworthy differences in participation.**

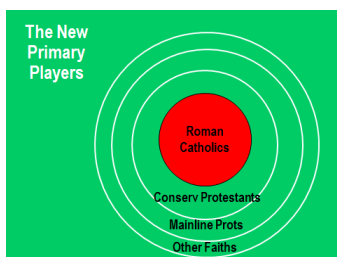
- Levels are highest for **evangelicals**, **Catholics outside Quebec**, and **Other World Faiths**.
- They are much lower for the **United**, **Anglican**, **Presbyterian**, and **Lutheran** churches as well as for **Roman Catholicism in Quebec**.



**These data point to an important restructuring of religion.** Roman Catholics and evangelicals are emerging as the foremost religious group players, with Islam in particular finding a growing market niché. Analogous to “the Big 3



Automakers,” Mainline Protestant groups no longer are dominating the country’s religion industry.



*The secularization fire has taken its toll,  
organizationally and emotionally.*

*But everyone isn't losing...and dying.  
In its aftermath, there is also much life.*

*Particularly among  
Catholics, evangelicals,  
and immigrants,  
there is a sense that  
this is a new day  
with new possibilities.*

*There is new hope, and  
new determination.*



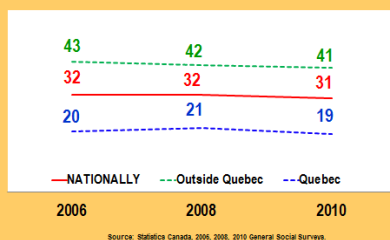
### **Prognosis:**

#### **ROMAN CATHOLICS**

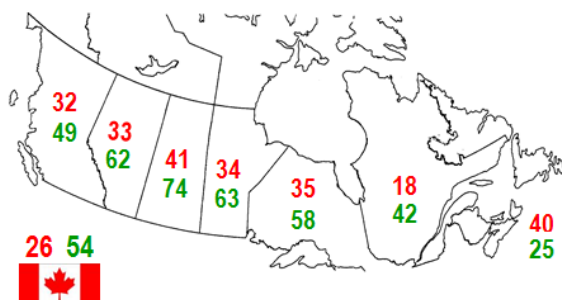
- The big player: 43%, 14 million; median age 38
- As RC Church goes, so goes organized religion
- Don't fear for their future...at end of day RC's rule
- Part of vast & powerful multinational corporation
- Quebec a problem spot; yet ID there still strong
- Immigration: key pipeline; large numbers receptive

The **Roman Catholic Church** in Canada benefits from the steady infusion of new people through immigration. In recent years, the decline in attendance has slowed, even in Quebec. Identification continues to be strong. Globally and in Canada, there is a renewed emphasis on reaching out to inactive Catholics, known as “the new evangelization.”

**Roman Catholic Monthly-Plus Attendance: 2006-10:  
Nationally, Outside Quebec and Quebec (%)**



## Monthly-Plus Attendance, Catholics Born In & Outside Canada: 2010 (%)



Source: Computed from Statistics Canada, GSS 2010.

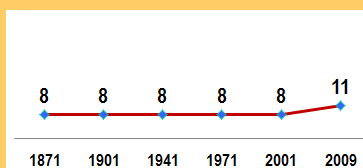
### Prognosis:

#### CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANTS

- Considerable vitality; median age 35
- Major accomplishment: 8% from 1871 to 2001
- Keys: immigration, tight-knit ministries, strong youth and family ministries
- Demanding, address ultimate questions
- Limited actual outreach but solid retention
- About to experience significant growth via immigration
- Will become even more racially diverse

**Evangelical groups**, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Alliance, Nazarenes, and many independent churches, have known considerable collective stability since at least the 1960s. Immigration is contributing to both numbers and vitality.

#### Canadians Identifying With Conservative Protestant Groups: 1871-2009 (%)



Source: Statistics Canada census data and 2009 GSS.

### **Prognosis:**

#### **MAINLINE PROTESTANTS**

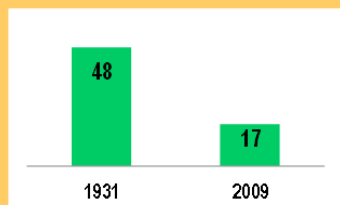
- United, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran churches
- Demographics do not look good
- Top-heavy with older people: median age c. 50
- Immigration pipelines have been drying up
- Not successful in retaining children
- Not engaged in very aggressive evangelism
- Strong “ultimate answer product lines”?

**Mainline Protestants** have seen their collective market share drop from close to 50% in 1931 to a current level of just under 20%. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of UC congregations dropped from 4,081 to 3,196, worshippers from 338,000 to 175,000.

A decline in growth through immigration, coupled with the simple fact that additions through birth and retention of children have not kept pace with losses through death, has resulted in a sharp drop in numerical prominence.

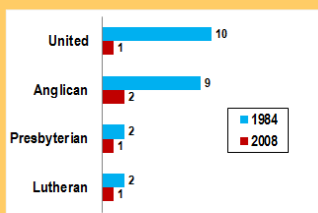
The corresponding loss of resources is making comebacks very difficult. Still, these are long-standing religious companies; anything is still possible.

**Mainline Protestants**  
As a % of the Canadian Population



Source: Statistics Canada.

**Teenage Identification with Mainline Groups: 1984 & 2008 (%)**



Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back* 2011/1996

### Prognosis:

#### OTHER FAITHS

- Noticeable growth since 1980
- Historical hurdle: retention of their children
- A number will continue to be smaller firms
- Islam: has potential to attain critical mass
- ✓ Retention of children, immigration = key factors
- ✓ Also strong: (1) demands (2) addressing of ultimate Qs

**Other major faiths**, along with small smaller religions, have been making numerical inroads in Canada. Immigration has planted these religions in Canada.

But the retention of offspring has proven to be very difficult, with many daughters and sons choosing to marry Roman Catholics, Protestants, and – increasingly – people with no religion.

Still, major world faiths such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism clearly are adding diversity and vitality to the Canadian religious scene.

#### Religious Identification: 1871-2009

	1871	1951	2009
Roman Catholic	42%	43	40
Mainline Protestant	41	44	17
Conservative Protestant	8	8	11
Other World Faiths	2	3	6
Other/unspecified	7	2	2
No Religion	<1	<1	24

Source: Statistics Canada.

#### Self-Identification: Other Religions

% of the Population: 1921-2009

	1921	1941	1961	1981	2001	2009
1. Muslim	---	---	---	.4	2.0	2.0
2. Jewish	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.0
3. Buddhist	.1	.1	.1	.2	1.0	.8
4. Hindu	---	---	---	.3	1.0	1.3
5. Sikh	---	---	---	.3	.9	.7
6. Jehovah's Witnesses	.1	.1	.4	.6	.5	.5
7. Latter Day Saints	---	.2	.3	.4	.3	.3

Note: Confucianism: .3% in 1921, .2% in 1941, smaller %s since. \*Estimated.

Source: Statistics Canada census data 1921-2001 and General Social Survey 2009.

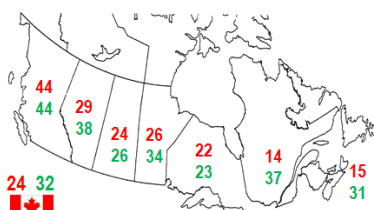
### Prognosis:

#### NO RELIGION

- Significant growth since the 1960s
- In the past frequently a temporary category
- Increasingly a life-long choice
- Tends to be associated with no involvement
- Not necessarily associated with non-belief
- A key player in influencing the religion-no religion continuum

In understanding the reality of polarization in

#### No Religion: Adults and Teenagers(%)



Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Teen Canada 2008 and Statistics Canada, 2010 General Social Survey

Canada, it also is extremely important to understand the large growth in the proportion of people who say they have **no religion** – from less than 1%

through 1961 to around 25% today.

Such a jump can be seen in comparing generations: *parents* increasingly are saying that they have no religion, with their *children* following suit. Differences between young males and females are now negligible.

Attendance is predictably low, but atheism – while up from the 1980s – still characterizes a *minority* of no religion people.

#### Teenagers With No Religion: 1984 and 2008

	1984	2008
Father no religion	50%	64
Mother no religion	41	57
Attend services <monthly	93	93
Atheist	30	38
Male	53	49
Female	47	51

Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Teen Canada 1984 and Project Teen Canada 2008



## 4. Some Key Implications

The current situation of religious polarization in Canada raises a wide variety of implications. For those who value faith, at least FOUR central implications readily come to mind.



### 1. It's time for a mindset change.

Contrary to widespread thinking, religion is not going away. A solid, durable core of Canadians continues to value faith. Secularization is not relentless and inevitable.

Religion will always be with us. The only question is what proportion of the population will embrace faith – versus reject it or be part of “the ambivalent middle.”

In view of such facts, it's time for a mindset change on the part of those who value faith. It's time to shed those “psychological shackles of the secularization outlook.”

- ✓ Sky isn't falling
- ✓ It's a new day
- ✓ Significant faith core
- ✓ Significant numbers on the margins...



- ~~“POST-CHRISTIAN”~~
- ~~“FAITHFUL REMNANTS”~~
- ~~“PREVAILING CHURCHES”~~
- ~~“SECULAR SOCIETIES”~~



## 2. It's time to explore affinities.

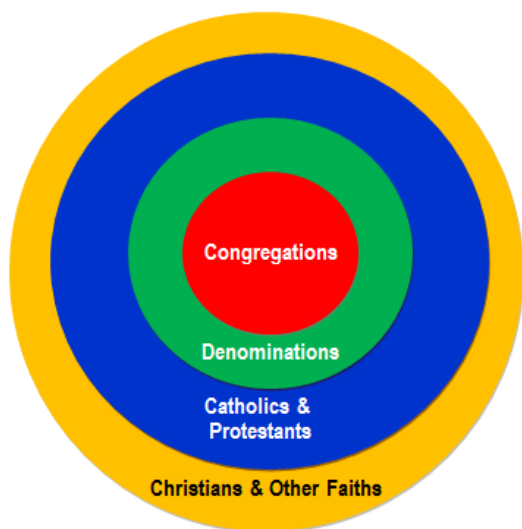
If Canada is religiously polarized, with the balance between religious and non-religious inclinations ever-changing, there is an obvious implication:

**groups that value faith need to work together to maximize their impact.**



The starting place is for congregations within the same denominations and religious families to locate like-minded people, with that pattern, as possible, extending outward to other religious groups as well.

### Exploring Affinities



## Two quick points.

**First, obviously such efforts at communication and cooperation are not new.** Denominational and interfaith ministerials, councils, and ministry initiatives have been around for a long time. I am saying that, in light of the reality of religious polarization in Canada, such links need to be given much higher priority.

**Second, I am not talking merely about co-existence or dialogue.**

*I am talking about individuals  
seeking out like-minded people  
in other congregations and groups  
for the purpose of  
making far better use of collective resources  
for the purpose of  
enhancing collective ministry to Canadians.*

**A parallel lesson can be learned from our experience with multiculturalism.** What makes multiculturalism potentially worth celebrating is not the fact that we merely learn to tolerate our differences, co-exist, and stay out of the way of each other.

No, what makes multiculturalism worth celebrating is our ability to tap into our diversity and draw on the best contributions of our varied cultures, so that the end result is a richer life for us all.



**At this point in Canadian history, we need people who will seek out like-minded spirits who value faith.** Beyond sheer co-existence, Canadian Christians have so much to offer each other.

For too long, people who value faith have been depriving themselves of the benefits of such ties – friendships, personal resources, mutual resources that can elevate ministries. That has to end.



**My personal passion about the great need for such women and men to locate each is grounded in experience.**

Very unexpectedly, my career as a sociologist specializing in religious trends in Canada has taken me into a remarkably diverse number of religious settings over the past four decades or so. They typically have been Christian, but occasionally have involved other faiths as well.

*One of the things I have been taken by  
is the fact that  
so many people in so many diverse settings  
have so much in common with each other,  
and would thoroughly enjoy  
and benefit from each other.  
The tragedy is that they typically don't know it.*

I am absolutely convinced that if people in Christian groups would explore affinities, they would be amazed as how many like-minded people they would discover in any number of diverse settings.

More importantly, such an accelerated crossing of bridges will make it possible for groups to do so much more together than they are able to do alone.

**No one is calling for the always elusive “union” of groups. The need is for people who value faith to get out of their ghettos.**

There is a need to “cross bridges” and explore affinities by literally crossing streets and religious group boundaries.

- It probably will involve a lot of coffees and lunches, and catching more than a few services, conferences, and other gatherings that are a shade foreign.
- The perusal of some group websites and the skimming of some well-known “other group” authors will also be helpful.
- Oh, and don’t forget the schools on both the Catholic and Protestant sides. Evangelicals and Catholics, for example, often have no idea what is going on in each other’s schools. Open houses aimed at each other – are long overdue.

What I know for certain is that latent commonalities exist all over the place, beginning with the mutual valuing of faith.

#### **Finding What Matters**

*“When I left seminary, I had a long list of things that I would have staked my ministry on. With every passing year, that list gets shorter and shorter.”*

**A prominent Baptist executive and speaker.**



A fast asterisk: am I so naïve as to think that such explorations will always result in the uncovering of like-minded spirits? Of course not. We always will encounter people with whom we find limited rapport.

Still, there is so much in the way of spiritual commonalities and commitment to good ministry that are there to be found.

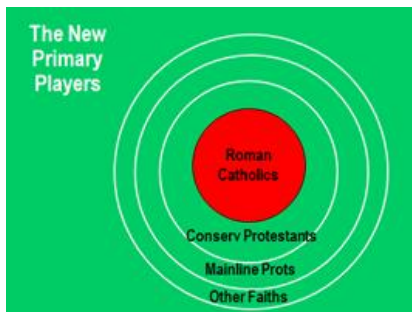
Those points of affinity need to be tapped.



### 3. It's time to be part of the restructuring of religion.

In the emerging restructuring of religion in Canada, the Roman Catholic Church is clearly the dominant player. The Church is the religious preference of some 45% of Canadians. It now is solidly entrenched in every region of the country. As emphasized earlier, the Catholic Church will continue to experience the infusion of significant new resources and new life through immigration. The revitalization of Canadian-born Catholics through initiatives such as “the New Evangelization” will function as an energizing bonus.

Consequently, the extent to which Canadians opt for religion on the religion-no religion continuum will be largely determined by the performance of the Catholic Church. Put bluntly, as the Catholic Church goes, so goes religion in the country.



**Conservative Protestants** comprise only some 12% of the population. But they are a very vibrant player, with human and financial resources matched by few other groups, large or small. More than 6 in 10 are monthly-plus attenders, double the national level of participation.

To date, these evangelical groups and congregations (many are independent) have directed much of their energies toward enhancing their own ministries. Resource providers such as Willow Creek Canada and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada have given their attention primarily to strengthening Conservative Protestant congregations.

*In the face of religious polarization and the prominence of the Roman Catholic Church, the time has come for evangelicals to explore how they might have a much greater impact on the national religious scene by working in tandem with Catholics.*

Such a possibility was extremely remote in the in the pre-1980s, when evangelicals and Catholics were wary of each other. It still is seen as radical by some people in both camps.

But today, in the restructuring of religion in Canada, closer ties between these two families – one with considerable size and the other with considerable vitality – is both possible but essential.



These signs appear on a classroom door and in a hallway of a Catholic school in western Canada.

Who knows what the diverse synergies might produce?

- It is readily apparent that **evangelicals** have much to offer with respect to child and youth ministries, preaching/homiletics, and music.
- **Catholics** have much to bring when it comes to areas including worship, spirituality, social justice, and ministry to immigrants.

**In the restructuring of religion in Canada, Mainline Protestants are no longer the dominant players.** As we have seen, demographics and economics are not on the side of the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran denominations, as well as many of their member congregations.

- Their market shares have been decreasing;
- Declining resources are making it more difficult for them to sustain national programs, educational institutions, and infrastructures such as the Canadian Council of Churches.
- The resource crunch is also making it very difficult for individual churches to enhance the kind of ministries that their affiliates are saying they want and need. Many congregations, for example, lack the facilities and the multiple staff expertise that is required to carry out effective, specialized forms of ministry.

A common response among Mainline Protestants is to buy into the secularization interpretation of religious developments in Canada. Some leaders say that the four denominations are simply experiencing in advanced form what every other religious group will eventually encounter.



*That view is simply an inaccurate reading  
of what is taking place in Canada.*

*As I have been emphasizing throughout,  
an extensive market for religion persists.*

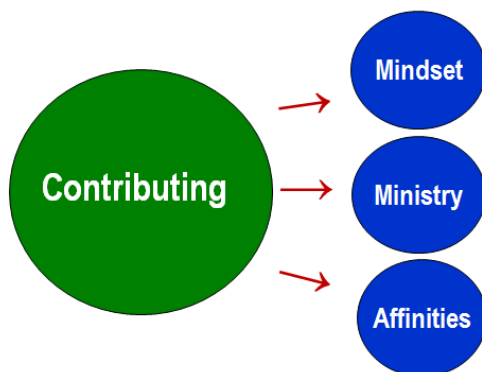
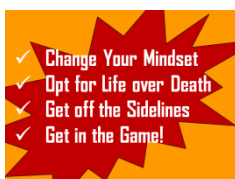
*Catholics and Conservative Protestants  
are outperforming Mainline Protestants  
in addressing the market demand.*

*They both are relatively healthy.  
Everyone is not losing.*

**What United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran leaders have to figure out is how they will fit into the restructuring of religion in Canada.**

Are they simply going to go down with sinking ships – continue to be part of declining businesses?

That's hardly necessary. The message to Mainliners is clear: rethink the times and your roles, and re-channel your energies.



**Clearly Mainline Protestants can contribute much to the emerging Canadian religious landscape.** They frequently have good ties with Roman Catholics. A few have good ties with evangelicals.

**In some instances they may be able to play a particularly important role in bridging Catholics and evangelicals, while working with both in enhancing everyone's' ministries.**

A number of existing denominations seem particularly well-positioned to “bridge” Mainline and Conservative Protestants as well as Protestants and Catholics. They include the Salvation Army, some non-denominational congregations, and, in some cases, Orthodox groups.

Para-church organizations such as the Canadian Bible Society, World Vision, and Alpha ministries already are doing considerable bridging, as are previously noted ministerials and councils of churches.

**Potentially key  
bridging roles?**



- ✓ Lutherans
- ✓ Presbyterians
- ✓ Salvation Army
- ✓ Non-denominational
- ✓ Churches of Christ
- ✓ Orthodox Churches
- ✓ Canadian Bible Society
- ✓ InterVarsity
- ✓ Alpha
- ✓ World Vision
- ✓ Willow Creek Canada
- ✓ Canadian Foodgrains Bank
- ✓ Cardus
- ✓ Ministerials
- ✓ Councils of Churches

As religious groups and religious organizations locate themselves and redefine themselves in a religiously polarized Canada, we can expect that some infrastructures will need to be created and many older infrastructures revised. Some will disappear.

Such organizational changes will reflect the fact that, as with religious groups themselves, collective infrastructures come and go. But religion itself will not disappear – now, or in the foreseeable future.

### Existing and Emerging Infrastructures



*The times cry out, not for huddling holy remnants,  
but for religious groups that  
can come together and work together  
to ensure that Canadians can experience  
the best that faith brings to life...  
and to death.*



## 4. It's time for better ministry.

*The research also shows that,  
at their best,  
religious groups have much to bring  
to Canadians  
who are looking for ministry  
that touches their lives  
and the lives of their families,  
as well as their communities and world.*

Canadians who emphasize that they are looking for ministry tend to emphasize three themes when asked what they view as “worthwhile”: the addressing of spiritual, personal, and relational interests and needs.

The detailed findings reported in *Beyond the Gods & Back* reveal that religion makes *noteworthy contributions* when it comes to personal well-being and spirituality. Ironically, those things that the involved say they receive are also what the uninvolved say they would like to be able to experience.

### Actives: What Involvement Brings

*“What is the main thing your religious involvement adds to your life?”*




Personal enrichment	56%
The People	22
God and spirituality	21
God-related	11
Spirituality	5
Strengthening of faith	2
Other	3
Nothing	1

Based on Reginald W. Bibby, “Why Bother With Organized Religion?”  
Canadian Review of Sociology 2012, 49:96

Moreover, religion makes unique contributions in at least two important areas of life: social-well-being and our responses to death.

**Interpersonal Values by Belief: Adults & Teens**

% Indicating "Very Important"

		Theist	Atheist
 Honesty	92%	94	89
Concern for others	75	85	74
Politeness	75	81	63
Forgiveness	75	77	65
 Honesty	81	86	75
Concern for others	65	72	54
Politeness	64	71	57
Forgiveness	60	72	44

Source: Derived from Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back*, 2011: 144

- Obviously, religion is not the only source of civility. But it is *one important source*.
- If it were to cease to be present in Canadian lives and life, some equally effective functional alternatives would have to be found.

**Religious groups**  
are consciously attempting  
to contribute to social well-being

\* personal compassion \* social justice  
\* individual, community, global needs




When it comes to addressing the question of what happens after we die, religion does not exactly have a lot of good market competition.

And here it has something unique that it can offer: *hope*.

**Responses to Death: Adults**

"Your primary response to the reality of death"

		ATTENDANCE	
		Weekly	Never
Sorrow	26%	19	33
Mystery	23	17	21
Hope	19	45	9
Fear	15	10	13
No partic feeling	17	9	24
TOTALS	100	100	100

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back*, 2011: 175

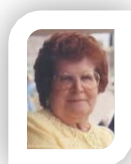
## 5. More About Ministry

The research findings point to *three* concrete features of effective ministry to Canadians.

### A. Ministering well to “Insiders.”

That should go without saying but, nonetheless, it needs to be underlined. The effort to reach out to people who are not actively involved – be they “seekers” or “searchers,” occasional attenders or the non-religious, should not take place at the expense of people who already are involved.

Congregational conflict over things like new forms of worship and music, for example, are typically unnecessarily waged with unnecessary negative consequences. I often tell people that my own mother reached a point at 85 where she no longer wanted to go to church – a casualty, I gather, of progress.



Those already present and active represent the essential resource base – “The Church” – that is required in order for ministry to others to take place. Good ministry to the initiated will include, of course, ministries that are culturally in touch with immigrants who think they have “come home.”



## B. Locating the rest of “your people.”

*Church leaders and laity  
used to view the locating of less actives  
as a tough task.*

*In large part it was because they didn't know  
very much about their sheep.*

The starting point in reaching out to people who are part of “the ambivalent middle” is to locate them. The good news is that it is not that difficult.

A long-standing message of mine that by now should be prosaic is that **people continue to identify with groups long after they have ceased to be actively involved.**




The research tells us that they – along with many “alumni” who tell the pollsters that they have “no religion” – actually show up for services at least once in a while. Large numbers also surface when they want rites of passage carried out – notably, weddings and funerals. Still further, a good number surface when they have specific needs relating to their children or marriages or health.


**People who identify but are not actively involved don't so much have to be located as tactfully “catalogued.”**

*If their people didn't show up much,  
leaders viewed them as lost...as drop-outs.  
In reality, many were not all that far from home.  
In fact, most typically wandered back home  
on their own every once in a while.  
They still do.*

**Incidentally, it is important to remind everyone that, contrary to widespread belief, the vast majority of the people who “identify but are not active” are not flirting with other groups.**

**Openness to Switching Traditions**  
“No”



		RCs Out Q	RCs Quebec	ML Prots	Cons Prots	Other Faiths
<b>Nationally</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Weeklys</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>**</b>
<b>&lt;Weekly</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>**</b>

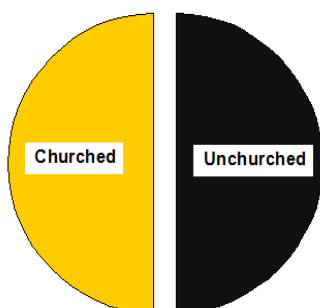
Source: Drawn from Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 2002:44

Consequently, the rule of thumb is simple: if Canadians identify with your group, you have a better chance than anyone else in the country of having a conversation with them. They are showing up occasionally at your services; they’ll be contacting you about a baptism or christening, a wedding or a funeral.

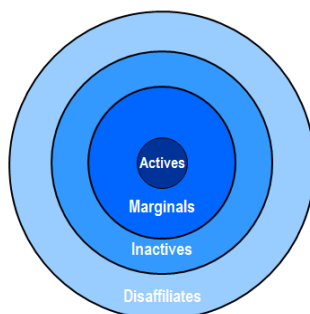
**We used to see people as either “in” or out. That has not been helpful. We need to see them as having varying levels of involvement.**



### The Old Paradigm



### The New Paradigm



If groups do not respond effectively to them, it's not readily apparent at all that they will simply move to "option B" or "option C." It is far more likely than they will take a pass on religious organizations altogether.

...Well, unless something else happens: through a relationship, such as a family tie, a friendship, or marriage, another person provides a relational bridge, whereby – based on commendation and trust – someone is willing "to try out" another group.

#### The Points of Connection



1 of 3: religious identification

2 of 3: interest or need

3 of 3: relationships

This leads to an important point that needs to be underlined about so-called "religious switching" from one group to another.


**There is considerable movement  
within the two Protestant families –  
particularly among evangelical groups.**

**There is very little movement  
between religious families.**

- *Protestant evangelicals* circulate fairly freely and seamlessly from one denomination to another (e.g., Mennonite ↔ Baptist ↔ Alliance ↔ Evangelical Free ↔ Nazarene ↔ Pentecostal). That's the primary reason many evangelical congregations have moved to non-denominational, generic names (e.g., The Rock, College Drive, Centre Street, Northview, The Meeting House).
- It also is not a gigantic jump for people to move between Anglican and Lutheran or between Presbyterian and United congregations. Still, such *Mainline Protestant* switching is far less common than it is among Conservative Protestants.

**In contrast, switching between religious families – Catholics, Mainline and evangelical Protestants, and Other Major World Faiths – is fairly rare.** The magnitude of the theological and cultural differences tends to exceed most peoples' comfort zones.

When "family switching" does take place, invariably one finds a relational bridge.



**The Identification Pools: 2009**

<b>Catholic</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>11,000,000</b>
Roman Catholic	38	10,500,000
Orthodox	2	500,000
<b>Protestant</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>8,300,000</b>
Mainline	17	4,700,000
Conservative	11	3,000,000
Other	2	600,000
<b>Other Faiths</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1,700,000</b>
Islam	2	600,000
Hindu	1	400,000
Jewish	1	300,000
Buddhist	1	220,000
Sikh	1	180,000
<b>No Religion</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6,500,000</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2009 (rounded).

## C. Ministering well to your “Outsiders.”

*and to other Outsiders to the extent  
you are given the chance.*

**Canadians both inside and outside of religious groups have the expectation that their involvement will be worthwhile.**

No surprise here: time is precious; there are lots of places for money to be spent. People have to have good reasons to participate in religious groups.

**Some critics respond that it's not the job of groups to respond to consumer demand.** But the research suggests that many if not most of the Outsiders are not overly demanding. They typically are favourably disposed to religion. Perhaps it is because it has been part of their upbringing – sometimes borne out of a sense of need for “something” beyond themselves. Most are not angry.

Frequently, their expectations are fairly minimal – the desire to satisfy spiritual longings, the need for some resources that would help them to live out everyday life, some positive things that would add to their most valued relationships and to the lives of the people they love.



This “famous toilet” that I have shown across the country sits about 6 inches from the floor in an Edmonton preschool classroom. It's a poignant symbol: this church is ready to minister to children.

Of course there is more to religion than responding to the needs of people. But interests and needs represent portals – entry points – for connecting with Canadians. In time, people can become aware of “the fullness of faith,” including ministry to others.

First, though, they have to find that faith and involvement help to elevate and complete life – and as such are “worthwhile.”

**Canadians on the outside of religious groups are looking for ministry – with spiritual, personal, and relational components front and centre.**

**But, as we have seen, they also have expectations of religious organizations.**

- They are not particularly deferential; they want the opportunity for input.
- They expect groups to be open to diversity.
- They want groups to be in touch with the times.
- They also want their involvement to be uplifting.

### **Marginals: What Would Make Involvement Worthwhile**

#### **Ministry Factors**

... If it would have to add value to my life...spiritual guidance related to everyday living and practices... if it was beneficial for my family...if it were uplifting...emphasis on the love of God and caring rather than pomp ceremony and ritual...programs for children...sermons given by a good speaker that are upbeat...

#### **Organizational Factors**

...Get away from the boring traditional ways and change with the times...a non-judgmental environment that emphasizes spiritual development rather than rules...if they had an inspirational minister...remove the “old boys’ club” mentality – accept things like gay marriage and offer women a greater role...no talk of heaven or hell...

#### **Ministry Qualities**

...A community of faith that is genuine and caring...more up-to-date and relevant sermons, good music, and local involvement...more age-appropriate things for teens and young adult groups...services that I am able to get something from...dealing with the real life issues...a group that really practiced what it preached...

#### **Personal Factors**

... I see myself attending again, but right now my life is congested and I have little time for anything else...if I had children and my partner wanted to expose them to religion...I have no time...make it Sunday afternoon, not morning...if it could have a positive influence on my partner and our children...time and money...

Excessive expectations? You decide. What the research suggests is that groups that cannot respond to Canadians with such mindsets will have little impact on Outsiders.

Those who can will not find that everyone wants more to do with them.

But some definitely will.



A major national study I conducted for the Vanier Institute of the Family in 2004 underlined a basic Canadian reality:

*there is nothing more important to Canadians than their families.*

The obvious implication for every organization:

***IF YOU WANT TO TOUCH PEOPLE'S LIVES,  
TOUCH THEIR FAMILIES.***

### The Youngest & Oldest ...and Those in Between



And, as we have seen, young people have not given up on religion or religious groups.

But they, like the rest of us, have to find that religious environments are in touch with who they are and what they value and enjoy.

**Teenagers are responsive to environments in touch with them**

- ✓ Friends
- ✓ Music
- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Authenticity
- ✓ Significance



Those central features are now well-known.

# Conclusion

## *A Call to Action*

**To return to where I began,  
we awake to a new day  
where religion is still very much with us.**

But today is very different from yesterday.

For those who place importance on faith,  
the new day, like any dawn,  
is characterized by a blend  
of darkness and light.

A solid and highly durable core of people  
continue to value faith,  
precisely at the same time that  
a growing number do not,  
with many others in the middle,  
neither opting decisively for or against faith.

**What makes it a new day  
is the fact that,  
while faith is neither gone nor going,  
we are polarized religiously  
to an extent we have never known before.**

Faith persists and will continue to persist  
because many people want it and need it.

**But, in addition to polarization,  
it's a new day for religion in Canada  
because an important reshuffling  
of the dominant players is taking place.**

Mainline Protestants –  
the United, Anglican,  
Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches –  
no longer occupy centre stage.

The mistake many observers made  
in interpreting the times  
was in equating Mainline decline  
with the demise of religion more generally.

The restructuring of religion in Canada  
is seeing Roman Catholics –  
always number one in Quebec –  
now in the national spotlight,  
joined by Protestant evangelicals,  
with Muslims potentially a important member  
of the emerging *supporting cast*....  
along with *Mainline Protestants*.

The acceleration of immigration,  
in response to Canada's aging workforce,  
will, on balance, add considerable life  
to the three lead players in particular,  
and to religion in the country as a whole.

**What transpires in Canada  
as far as the religion-no religion balance  
will depend largely  
on the collective performance  
of its religious groups.**

These consequently are times that call  
for a new outlook, new alliances, and new effort.

These are times  
that call for the best ministry possible,  
to both the initiated and to others.

*One thing is certain:  
large numbers of people here and elsewhere  
will continue to have some needs  
"that only the gods can satisfy."*

*What remains to be seen is  
how Canada's religious groups  
will respond....*



## Continuing the Conversation.

There obviously is considerable value in being able to keep this conversation going.

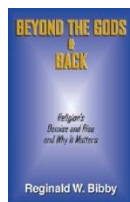
To help facilitate that,  
I have set up an interactive blog at  
[www.beyondthegods.com](http://www.beyondthegods.com).

It will be good to hear from those of you  
who want to offer some thoughts.



As mentioned, *A New Day* draws heavily on  
***Beyond the Gods & Back:***  
***The Demise and Rise of Religion in Canada*** (2011).

If you would like more detailed documentation  
and thought, including valuable global data,  
give it a look.



In addition, considerable information on my entire Project Canada,  
research program, including complimentary material,  
is available at

[www.reginaldbibby.com](http://www.reginaldbibby.com).



*Hard copies of this book are also available.  
They can be obtained through either of the above websites or*

[www.projectcanadabooks.com](http://www.projectcanadabooks.com).



The material in this book has benefitted from being shaped by the extensive feedback received from a fairly large number of Bibby presentations and publications since the appearance of *Beyond the Gods & Back* in late January of 2011.

They have included the following:

## 2011

Cathedral Arts Lecture Series, Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa, January



Ambrose University College, Calgary, February  
Nazarene clergy consultations in Calgary, Toronto, and Abbotsford, Feb, Mar, and Nov



Pacific Sociological Association, Seattle, March  
"A mirror of faith on the Canadian wall." *Globe and Mail*, April 25

Canadian Council of Churches, Toronto, May



Atlantic Catechetical Association, Moncton, May

"Canadian Catholics should plan for a larger future." *Western Catholic Reporter*, July 18. Also appeared in the *National Post*, July 24.

The Global Leadership Summit, shown in 22 cities, Willow Creek Canada, September



Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, Toronto, October

Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, October



Salvation Army Leaders, Jackson's Point, ON, November

Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, Waterloo, November



*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, December



## 2012

Break Forth Canada, Edmonton, January

*Canadian Review of Sociology*, January



Holy Spirit SD Administrators, Lethbridge, February

Edmonton Council of Churches, March



Canadian University College, Lacombe, April



Durham Catholic School Board, Oshawa, April

Ontario Catholic Supervisory Assoc (Superintendents), Toronto, April

Churches of Christ leaders' summit, Calgary, May



Canadian Sociological Association, Waterloo, June

The high level of interest and the many requests for slide summaries underscored to me why this accessible overview needed to be written.

*Thank you! I am extremely happy to make it widely available.*

...And Just for Perspective...

**Table 3.13. Salience, Identification, Belief, and Attendance: Select Countries**

	<i>Salience</i>	<i>ID</i>	<i>Belief</i>	<i>Attend</i>
Thailand	97%	99	98	80
Nigeria	96	99	99	89
Philippines	96	99	99	64
Saudi Arabia	94	99	99	68
Pakistan	92	99	99	56
Ethiopia	90	99	99	78
India	90	99	99	73
Dominican Republic	87	99	97	53
Brazil	87	93	97	49
Iraq	86	99	99	53
South Africa	85	84	99	57
Iran	83	99	99	45
El Salvador	83	83	98	68
Mexico	73	83	97	60
Italy	72	83	82	49
Greece	71	97	96*	29
Poland	69	92	96	62
United States	65	84**	88	43
Ireland	54	94	96	56
Israel	51	96	95	39
Spain	49	84*	92	39
Ukraine	46	58*	85	23
Korea, Republic of	43	63*	98	35
<b>CANADA</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>84**</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>26</b>
Germany	40	75*	77	30
Cuba	34	90**	75	20
Russia	34	52*	91	15
New Zealand	33	74	79	27
Netherlands	33	58	74	26
Australia	32	81	83	23
France	30	57*	80	20
Finland	29	85	91	12
United Kingdom	27	77	86	20
Hong Kong	24	85**	56	19
Japan	24	48*	87	38
Czech Republic	24	41	57	15
Sweden	17	75*	70	17
China	---	7**	60	9

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back* 2011: 59.



*"Everything you thought you knew about  
religion in Canada is wrong.  
That's the impression you just might get  
from Reginald Bibby."*

-Edmonton Journal

The Canadian religious situation is being read through the old, tired eyes of secularization. Most people continue to think that religion is winding down, as seen in trends characterizing Mainline Protestants – the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches.

This highly accessible report draws on Bibby's important new book, *Beyond the Gods & Back*, in showing religion in Canada is not dying but persists in a new environment of religious polarization. It's "A New Day" for religion.

- A significant market for religion persists, precisely at a time when growing numbers are rejecting religion.
- Changing demographics and market performances are seeing a reshuffling of players, with Mainliners losing market share to Catholics, evangelicals, and Muslims.
- Those who value faith are called to explore their affinities and discover the roles they can play in the collective enhancement of ministry to Canadians.

*"The times cry out, not for huddling holy remnants, but for religious groups that can come together and work together to ensure that Canadians can experience the best that faith brings to life...and to death."*

-from A New Day

**Absolutely essential reading from  
Canada's leading religion trend-tracker**

Project Canada Books