

BEYOND THE GODS

&
BACK

*Religion's
Demise and Rise
and Why It Matters*

Reginald W. Bibby

Best-selling author of *Restless Gods*

REGINALD W. BIBBY

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His explicit commitment to taking his work beyond the academic community has resulted in his making a very large number of public appearances, having a high media profile, and writing twelve best-selling books that to date have sold more than 150,000 copies. In recognition of his outstanding contribution to the nation, the Governor General appointed him an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2006.

Also by Reginald W. Bibby

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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Project Canada Books

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**To Doc Watts, Don Burke,
Armand Mauss, and Rodney Stark**

*Four exceptional people who
put their stamp on my work and life*

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Takes on the Past, Present, and Future

*“The present must have become the past
before one can win from it
points of vantage
from which to gauge the future.”*

-scientist Sigmund Freud

*“The assumption that the future will be like the past
generally turns out to be wrong.
The trick is anticipating where things are moving,
not where they have been.”*

-journalist John L. Allen, Jr.

Preface

This is quite a different book from the first volume of what has evolved into a four-part series on religion in Canada. There are four main reasons why it is different.

First, the first book, *Fragmented Gods*, was written in 1987 – almost 25 years ago when the religious times were not the same. We were living in the immediate aftermath of a fairly long period where religion had been highly pervasive. Its shadow still could be seen in relatively high levels of service attendance, in greying but still very present men and women who had lived during more prosperous religious times. The attendance in many instances is now lower, those people no longer with us.

Second, I was in the early years of monitoring the religious and social situation in Canada. I had completed three “Project Canada” national adult surveys in 1975, 1980, and 1985, along with one national youth survey in 1984. We now have four additional adult survey data sets to draw on, bringing us to 2005 – and additional survey work of others that brings us to the present day. That first youth survey has been followed by others in 1992, 2000, and 2008. It now is possible to see with considerable clarity what has been taking place since the 1960s.

The third factor is highly personal but also is very important, since the way we put life together is significantly influenced by the personal. I have an eight-year-old daughter, Sahara, who has been a late addition to my life. She has been nothing less than a great gift, without question one of the most consistently happy and buoyant individuals I have ever known. She begins her days singing, smiles much of the day, sings in the bathtub before she goes to bed – and loves to laugh and tease. We have a wireless connection. But she has been slow to talk, and also has been a bit slow with some of her fine motor skills. The good news is that she is catching up. Her situation has given me, as a sociologist accustomed to explaining things in terms of social environment, a new appreciation for physical and neurological sources that influence who we are and what we can be.

And then there is the Internet – that wonderful resource that has made it possible to access unlimited information on a world-wide scale.

All four elements colour this book, along with my growing awareness of my own mortality.

The current times require a careful reading. With the help of the extensive trend data at my disposal, my appreciation for the importance of a wider range of possible sources of beliefs and behaviour, and the global information sources that can be accessed, I think you will find this book to be considerably richer than its three predecessors. It simply has had much more material, resources, and life experiences at its disposal.

Precisely because the resources are potentially so extensive, the book also has taken longer than the others to write. The explosion in the information at our fingertips means more people than ever before are competing to be read and heard. As a result, it is not easy to be adequately cognizant of all the important things that people have to say.

So as I frequently have reminded readers in the past, I have no illusions that this book says it all, but rather hope that it provides a contribution to the extensive conversations that are taking place about religion and spirituality, and why they matter.

I again thank my wife Lita for her support, and Sahara for her daily life-giving presence. I remain so very grateful to the University of Lethbridge for providing me with resources and tranquility now for close to four decades, along with the Lilly Endowment, the Louisville Institute, and Jim Lewis specifically for providing indispensable funding since 1990. I also have benefited greatly from the encouragement of a number of important friends, notably Jim Savoy, Stan Biggs, Trevor Harrison, Diane Clark, Ian MacLachlan, Grant Howell, Steve Kotch, Tim Callaway, and Mark Imbach – along with my three guys – Reggie, Dave, and Russ. Dave, in particular, has played a pivotal role in data collection and entry in recent years. I also want to thank James Penner for the major role he played in procuring the Project Teen Canada 2008 sample. Many thanks again to Donna McCloskey for both her valuable editorial contributions and her ongoing positive spirit.

Thanks to you, as well, for taking time to look at the book. Everyone gives contact opportunities these days, and I am no exception. Your comments and correctives are welcomed, primarily via the book website “www.beyondthegods.com.”

Once more, my hope is that this book will stimulate thought and elevate life for all of us.

Reginald Bibby
Lethbridge, Alberta
January, 2011

Introduction

The person on the plane a short time back put the question to me: “So what’s the situation with religion today?”

I wish I had been able to offer a quick and simple answer. After all, I wasn’t sure that she wanted to go into much detail. I suspected that the question was asked out of an effort to be polite. I decided to take the easy way out. “It’s a pretty tough question, and we only have about a four-hour flight,” I said with a laugh.

But she surprised me by persisting. “No, I’m serious,” she said. “I’ve actually been quite interested in religious developments in the country. I came out of a fairly religious home. My mother is still a pretty devout Anglican; my dad died a few years back. My husband and I attend once in a while. One of our three teens is involved with a church youth group that seems to be doing a lot of things, and she seems to enjoy it. Her grandma likes that,” she added with a smile, as she took another sip of her wine.

“So what’s up with religion in Canada?” she asked. Are many people still bothering with it? And do you know anything about what’s going on with all the atheist talk that seems to be popping up a lot in the media? Some of those people like Dawkins and Hitchens seem to think we’d all be better off without religion,” she added, showing that she obviously keeps an eye on the topic. “What do you make of all that?”

Tough questions, no quick and easy answers. But they are important questions these days both for people who value religion and those who do not. They are not just questions about religion. They are questions about life. If religion is slipping into the background in Canada – becoming something of a peripheral relic from the past, like other cultural memories such as old schools, old cars and old music – what, if anything, does it mean for Canadian life and Canadian lives?

These are the questions I want to address head-on.

The Trilogy Plus One

This is my fourth effort to assess the Canadian religious scene. The first appeared in the 1987 book, *Fragmented Gods*. At that time there seemed to be considerable support for the secularization thesis. With few exceptions, attendance and membership had declined steadily since the 1960s. People continued to identify with religious traditions. But most appeared to be pursuing religion in a fragmented, pick and choose, à la carte fashion.

In 1993, I updated the earlier analysis in *Unknown Gods*. The available data, I argued, pointed to ongoing participation problems for the country's dominant religious groups. However, I suggested that the situation was due not only to the selective consumption habits of individual Canadians but also to the failure of religious groups to respond well to widespread interests and needs.

The first two books were informed by and provided empirical support for the secularization thesis. Religion, by and large, I maintained, had suffered a significant loss in influence in Canada at the individual and institutional levels from the 1960s through the mid-1990s.

In 2002, a third book was released – *Restless Gods*. It carried the subtitle, *The Renaissance of Religion in Canada*. This book drew on extensive new data in maintaining there were signs of new religious life. Service attendance among teenagers and adults seemed to be plateauing across the country, with the exception of Quebec. To be sure, the new life was fairly modest, and I noted that it might turn out to be merely a minor blip on the secularization screen. The argument did not lack for critics both outside and inside the churches.¹

To speak of “a renaissance” might have been to exaggerate developments a bit. Still, the available data did not support an ongoing, linear-like decline in participation similar to what occurred between about 1960 and 1990. My friend Roger O’Toole playfully suggested during an early “Author Meets Critics” session on the book that it might have been wise to put a question mark after the subtitle.

Still, some good theory developed by Rodney Stark, amended a bit to fit Canada, pointed to the very real possibility of a measure of revitalization taking place among the nation's long-standing, well-established groups.

This Latest Work

Life obviously is dynamic. New readings and new interpretations are always needed and should not be greeted with surprise. After all, social scientists are just that; we are not social psychics. With new data come new understandings of both the past and present.

Such is the case with this book.

In the course of seeing Canadian religious developments through secularization glasses, many of us thought the picture was fairly clear and the trends fairly obvious through most of the last century. Religion was in trouble, and things were going from bad to worse.

To the extent that our thinking was informed by prominent social scientists of the past, including Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, along with contemporary thinkers such as Harvey Cox, Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, and even "our own" Pierre Berton, what was unfolding was what was expected. Religion didn't really have much of a future in highly developed societies. Post-1960 patterns signalled the fact that what much of Europe had experienced was now being experienced in Canada. As academics, we were well-advised to give our attention to more lasting and uplifting topics.

However, the work of Stark and important new data opened my eyes to the possibility that a measure of religious revitalization was taking place around the turn of the new century.

As I write these words today, it is as if the current Canadian religious situation has come into focus – where a discernible reality is emerging that makes sense of the disparate information at hand.

It is the reality of religious polarization.

In much of my earlier work, I have made extensive use of my own Project Canada national surveys of adults and teens that span 1975 through 2008 (see Appendix A for details). These surveys, now eleven in all, provide considerable information on social and religious trends over a period of time that has been characterized by significant change in Canada. I will again make much use of that material.

But since approximately 2000, some fascinating survey work that spans the entire globe has been carried out by a number of organizations and research consortia. They include Gallup, the Pew Research Center, the World Values Survey, and the International Social Survey Programme.

What is invaluable about the information that is being generated is that, for the first time in history, we have data that allow us to look at religious developments in Canada in global perspective.

This book, I think, is easily my most informative, both because of the breadth of information it provides on Canada and because of the unprecedented view it provides of Canada in global perspective.

It consequently goes beyond anything that was possible in the first three books in “the gods series.” It provides both good news and bad news for people who value faith and those who do not. As such, I have little doubt it will be received with the proverbial cheers and jeers.

But as the sports guy from yesteryear used to say, “I call it the way it is.”

Let’s be clear from the outset: the religious times have changed significantly over the past five decades. Some groups, led by the Roman Catholic Church outside Quebec, continue to flourish. Other groups, led by the United Church of Canada, may soon be on life-support. In the midst of such diverse experiences of prosperity and peril, the dominant story is the emergence of unprecedented polarization between those who are religious and those who are not, and what it means for personal and social life.

↑ The Days of God's Dominion

"He shall have dominion also from sea to sea" – Psalm 72.8, KJV

To view religion across Canada these days is like viewing devastation after some tragedy has hit. It's as if a secularization fire has devastated much of what, through the early 1960s, was a flourishing religious forest.

Around 1950, national service attendance, led by Quebec and the Atlantic region, was actually higher than that of the United States. Church-going – and for most Canadians it *really was church-going* – was relatively high pretty much everywhere.

To varying degrees, Protestant and Catholic groups had a significant place in Canadian life. One only has to think of leaders such as Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger in Quebec, Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan, and E.C. Manning in Alberta; of the large number of people heading out to services on almost any given Sunday morning; of Sunday "Blue Laws"; of Christian radio stations and broadcasts; of the Lord's Prayer in schools....

Now, some 60 years later, that secularization blaze has destroyed much of religion's presence and influence. The collective devotion of the Atlantic region has been significantly reduced both by scandal and modernization. In Quebec, the Quiet Revolution of the early 1960s was accompanied by a

**Figure 1.1. Religion's Fall:
Weekly Attendance: 1945-2005 (%)**



Source: Gallup & Project Canada Survey Series.

“quieter religious revolution” that decimated religious participation and authority. In Ontario, the west, and the north, the fire of secularization has torched Mainline Protestantism in particular.

However, as is often the case with devastating fires, secularization has not consumed everything. In some instances, there has been scorching rather than torching. Amidst the rubble, there are pockets of life – even vitality. Evangelical Protestant churches have been left largely untouched in many parts of the country, as have a large number of Roman Catholic dioceses and congregations and some Mainline Protestant groups.

And just when it seemed much of the Canadian religious forest was reduced to ruins, new seeds and new plants from other countries have begun to replenish parts of the forest. Growing numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists have added new diversity and life to the old, fire-ravaged forest.

So it is that the Canadian religious situation today is characterized by death and life, disintegration and reorganization, abandonment and participation, aging congregations and youthful congregations, disbelief and belief, the discarding and the embracing of religious rituals surrounding marriage, birth, and death.

The extensive variations are there for the viewing. What is far less clear is the overall picture that gives clarity to the seemingly disparate patterns.

This book offers such a picture. The evidence is illustrative and the argument is succinct. After all, this is not an overly long flight.

	1991	2001
TOTAL	3.8%	6.0%
Muslim	253,265	579,640
Jewish	318,185	329,995
Buddhist	163,415	300,345
Hindu	157,015	297,200
Sikh	147,440	278,415

Source: Statistics Canada.

The Way We Were

Historians tell us that the new country of Canada that came into being on July 1, 1867 was, collectively, a highly religious country.

It was a time, wrote historian John Webster Grant, when membership in a particular group “ranked high as a badge of personal identity.” To know a person’s religious affiliation, he said, was to have an important clue about the individual’s moral and political leanings, school system preferences, and even one’s favourite newspaper.¹

The founding Aborigines had placed considerable importance on spirituality. To varying degrees, First Nations people across the country believed in a Creator who was seen as the source of everything that lived. Extensive beliefs and forms of worship and celebration existed. By 1867, missionary work had seen large numbers become at least nominally Christian.² In some instances, Christianity left room for elements of indigenous spirituality, resulting in syncretistic expressions of faith.

In Quebec – previously Canada East and, even earlier, Lower Canada – settlement from France dating back to the early seventeenth century had been accompanied by the arrival of Roman Catholicism. The Quebec Act of 1774 gave French-speaking habitants the right to practice the Catholic faith and French civil law. At the time of Confederation, the province was heavily Catholic – with observers claiming that much of the public and private life of Quebecers was controlled by the Church.

In Ontario – previously Canada West and, earlier, Upper Canada – the arrival of large numbers of settlers from England resulted in Anglicanism being the numerically dominant religion in 1867. Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists were also prominent, in large part because of the magnitude of immigration from England and Scotland. Immigration also produced a significant Catholic presence: the Irish Famine of the 1840s, for example, resulted in the arrival of some 40,000 Irish Catholics.

The two other British colonies that were part of the new Confederation – Nova Scotia and New Brunswick – also knew a pronounced religious presence. Immigration from France brought Acadians to Nova Scotia, where they co-existed with Protestant immigrants from Britain. New Brunswick's creation in 1784 was due in large part to the arrival of significant numbers of United Empire Loyalists on the heels of the American Revolution.

The influx of large numbers of slaves from the United States via the Underground Railroad added further to the early religious mosaic as Black Baptists took up residence, particularly in Nova Scotia and southern Ontario.

As the young nation expanded to include further areas – Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (1870), British Columbia (1871), Prince Edward Island (1873), the Yukon (1898), Saskatchewan and Alberta (1905), along with Newfoundland (1949) – the number of people with religious ties also grew.

There is nothing surprising about the early Christian numerical monopoly. It was the direct result of the top-heavy emigration from France, Britain, and other western European countries where Christianity was pervasive – patterns documented thoroughly in two recent valuable works compiled by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak.³

Nationally-speaking, religion group numbers, as with the population as a whole, are primarily a function of net migration and natural increase – of net gains via immigration and birth, along with intergroup “switching.” The early years favoured Christians.

**Table 1.2. Religious Identification:
Early 1840s**

	Upper Canada 1842	Lower Canada 1844
Roman Catholic	13%	82
Church of England	22	6
Presbyterian	20	5
Methodist	17	2
Baptist	3	1
Jewish	<1	<1
Other denominations	8	1
No response	17	3

Source: Census of Canada, 1870-71, Vol. 4, Ottawa: 1876.
Cited by Kalbach and McVey, 1976:223.

So it was that immigration played a major role in Protestants and Catholics making up more than 95% of the national population from the time of the first census in 1871 through 1961. Over the 90-year period, the percentage of people claiming to have “no religion” never reached 1%.

**Table 1.3. Religious Identification of Canadians:
1871-1961**

	1871	1901	1931	1961
Roman Catholic	42%	42	41	47
Protestant	56	56	54	49
Eastern Orthodox	<1	<1	1	1
Other Faiths	2	2	3	2
No Religion	<1	<1	<1	<1

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada census data.

Participation

“Hard data” on actual involvement in religious groups, over against mere identification, are difficult to locate for the early years of Canada’s existence.

Yet, in describing the religious situation just after Confederation, historian Grant wrote that “the morale of the churches was higher than ever. They were building larger edifices, devising more effective programs, and successfully shaping the moral values of the nation.”⁴

More specifically, Peter Beyer of the University of Ottawa notes that things were looking numerically good for organized religion as Canada entered the twentieth century. Allowing for more than one service, says Beyer, churches had enough seating capacity in 1901 to accommodate more than the total Canadian population — “3,842,332 seats for a total population of 5,371,315.” A survey carried out by Toronto newspapers in 1896 showed that 57% of the available seats in the Toronto area were occupied during any given service.⁵

But things seem to have gotten even better. The post-World War II years of the 1940s and 1950s appear to have

been something of a golden age for church attendance and influence in Canada. According to the first known national attendance poll, conducted by the Gallup organization in 1945, 65% of Canadians over the age of twenty said that they had attended a religious service in a three-week period following Easter Sunday. A similar Gallup survey in the U.S. found that 58% of Americans had attended a service over a four-week period following Easter.

- Levels here were slightly higher for those 21-29 (69%) than others (64%) and for women (73%) than men (61%).
- In Quebec, where Catholics made up 95% of the population, 9 in 10 people said they had been to Mass during the three-week period.

The pollster noted that the levels were lower in “some western provinces” than elsewhere, and suggested it might have been related to “greater distances to travel.” In footnote fashion, the release concluded with the statement, “The present survey compliments the one conducted by the Poll some months ago, in which ninety-five per cent of Canadians expressed their belief in God; and eighty-four per cent, their belief in a life after death.”

CANADIAN INSTITUTE  OF PUBLIC OPINION

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For RELEASE
SATURDAY, MAY 12, 1945 -- after 9 a.m.

GALLUP POLL OF CANADA

ABOUT ONE THIRD OF POPULATION
FOUND CHURCH ABSENTEES BY POLL

Yet Canadian Record Better
Than That Found in U.S.

Such high levels of religious participation continued through the 1950s and '60s.

- Catholic attendance appears to have held steady at about 85% both in Quebec and in the rest of the country, while weekly Protestant attendance remained strong at around 45%. This was a time when Cardinal Léger would say of Montreal, “When I bow to say the evening rosary, all of Montreal bows with me.”⁶
- Indicative of Protestant numerical prosperity, the membership of the United and Anglican churches peaked at over one million in 1965. During these heady days of the mid-40s to mid-60s, the United Church alone built some 1,500 new churches and church halls.⁷
- Other faith groups were growing as well. Between 1941 and the end of the 1960s, the number of Jews jumped from 169,000 to 275,000. During the same period, Jehovah’s Witnesses experienced explosive growth, increasing from 7,000 to 170,000.

The religion business seemed to be booming.⁸

Table 1.4. Membership of Select Groups: 1871-1966 (1000s)^a

YEAR	United	Anglican	Baptist	Pent	Lutheran	Presbytn	Roman Catholic	
1871	---	---	---	---	---	---	43%	1586
1881	170*	---	---	---	---	117	41	1773
1901	289*	368	---	---	---	214	42	2256
1921	401	690	---	---	---	351	39	3427
1931	671	794	132	---	---	181	39	4047
1941	717	836	134	---	---	174	42	4806
1951	834	1096	135	45	121	177	43	6069
1961	1037	1358	138	60	172	201	46	8343
1966	1062	1293	137	65	189	200	46	9160

Drawn from Bibby, 2002:11.

*--- Figures unavailable. Anglican figures = inclusive membership; in 1967, full Anglican membership = 657,000 vs. 1,060,000 for the United Church; United figures for 1881 and 1901 = Methodist; RC = % of Canadian population and approximate numbers; Baptist = Canadian Baptist Federation; Pentecostal = Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada; Lutheran = Evangelical Church of Canada, Lutheran Church in America, and Lutheran Church-Canada (Missouri Synod).

SOURCES: Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1916-1966; United, Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian yearbooks; McLeod 1982.

Influence

There is widespread consensus that religion once had an impact on Canadian lives and Canadian life. Writers tell us that religion was a central feature in the lives of our founding First Nations peoples. They have been described as “deeply committed to religious attitudes, beliefs and practices” which were grounded in “communion with nature and a connectedness with all of life.”⁹ Religion is also seen as having been an integral part of the earliest Roman Catholic and Protestant settlements.

Beyond pre-Confederation, religion appears to have had a major place during Canada’s first century – from the 1860s to the 1960s. As one thinks of the past, it is difficult to envision Quebec without Roman Catholics, Ontario without Anglicans or Presbyterians, the Prairies with no evangelical Protestant presence, B.C. and the Atlantic region without the Church of England.

Religion’s presence was fairly blatant in many of our institutions. By way of some broad illustrations...

- A large number of *hospitals and social service programs* across the country were initiated by religious groups.
- Individual *schools and entire school systems* were created by religious groups, notably Roman Catholics.
- *Universities* including McMaster, Queen’s, Ryerson, Wilfred Laurier, Ottawa, Montréal, Laval, Acadia, Mount Allison, St. Mary’s, Winnipeg, Brandon, and Regina were founded by religious organizations.
- Initiatives to establish fairness in *the workplace*, including supporting labour unions, were undertaken by many groups, including Roman Catholics in Quebec and social gospel-oriented Protestant denominations elsewhere, notably the United and Anglican churches.
- The influence of religious groups was also evident in the public sphere generally and the *political sphere* specifically. CBC footage of an event in Montreal in the 1960s reveals three prominent platform guests: Mayor Jean Drapeau, René Lévesque, and Cardinal Léger.¹⁰

One of the obvious reasons why religion was having significant input into Canadian institutions was because it also knew an important place in many individual lives.

At its best, religion is supposed to play itself out in everyday life. It therefore is not surprising that, to varying degrees, the personal faith of individual Canadians who were involved in religious groups was having an impact on them, beginning with their families.

But through individuals, along with the efforts of the groups themselves, religion's reach extended to the full range of institutional spheres in Canada – schools, the economy, government, the media, social services, sports and leisure, and so on. To the extent religion was important to individuals, it coloured life in Canada. Highly-regarded American historian Mark Noll goes so far as to say that, as of around 1950, Canada had a much stronger claim as a Christian nation than the United States.¹¹

Today, in the early years of the twenty-first century, things have changed. Religion no longer occupies centre stage. Protestantism is not a pivotal feature of Anglo culture, while Catholicism is no longer at the heart of

Québécois culture. Religion's importance for many other cultural groups has similarly declined as those groups have been increasingly integrated into mainstream Canadian life.

Religion obviously continues to have a presence. Old and new places of worship serve as reminders that it remains important for some people. We welcome visits by the Pope or the Dalai Lama, just as we welcome visits of the Queen or a President.

Yet, religion is expected to be both non-partisan and respectful of pluralism. Graduation invocations are no longer prayers; religious symbols have been decreed to have no place in public buildings. Even the Canadian Charter's declaration that "Canada is founded upon

Table 1.5. Frequency of Religious Instruction of Children: 1975-2005

	1975	1990	2005
Regular	36%	28	19
Often	10	7	6
Sometimes	31	26	24
Never	23	39	51

*Item: adults with school age children: "How frequently – if at all – do your children attend Sunday School or classes of religious instruction which are not part of their regular school days?"

principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law” sounds somewhat anachronistic.

In the case of many Baby Boomers, the poetry of Kris Kristofferson still applies. The things that remind them of religion, such as a church bell or a Sunday School chorus, tend to take them back to something that they lost somehow, somewhere along the way.¹² For most Post-Boomers and emerging millennial youth, however, the bell is just a bell, the chorus just another kind of music.

The obvious question is, “What happened?”

Two factors appear to have been of central importance.

The first was a shift in *immigration patterns*. During the last few decades of the twentieth century, Mainline Protestants in particular saw their immigration pipelines largely dry up. Conversely, the Catholic Church was continuing to benefit from large numbers of arrivals from other countries, as were a number of other world faiths led by Islam. The Mainline Protestant immigration void was not made up via births. Something had to give, and it did.

Table 1.6. Religious Identification by Immigrant Status and Period of Immigration: 1951-2001

	Foreign-Born			Immigration Period		
	1951	1971	2001	<1991	1991-00	1000s
NATIONALLY	15%	15%	18%	12%	6%	1,830
Roman Catholic	7	12	14	11	3	422
No Religion	---	---	19	11	8	391
Muslim	---	---	72	24	48	276
Orthodox	40	40	45	27	18	103
Baptist	12	11	16	11	5	36
Anglican	24	18	14	12	2	31
Jewish	44	38	31	24	7	22
United Church	12	8	5	5	<1	18
Presbyterian	24	23	18	15	3	12
Lutheran	37	34	21	20	1	9

Source: Statistics Canada census data.

The second key factor was the changing mindsets of Canadians – led by the *Baby Boomers*.

2 The Boomer Bust

"The age where religious leaders could appeal to obligation and duty to get people into the pews is over."

–The Boomer Factor, 2006:71.

DEMOGRAPHICALLY, what happened was fairly straightforward. Canada's Great Religious Recession took place in large part because Protestant Mainline groups no longer knew the luxury of gushing immigration pipelines. To make matters worse, their birthrates were down and their policies and strategies for retaining their children were not always well-developed and well-executed. Their third and last numerical life-line – recruiting outsiders – was not really a viable solution, given the low priority that many assigned to evangelism.

The math was consequently pretty simple: by the 1970s the number of active members who were dying outnumbered the people who were taking their places.

Some social analysts at the time spoke of the inevitability of cultural forces eroding organized religion. Some theologians spoke of the death of Christendom. In retrospect, the demographer probably deserved the "A."

But immigration changes, declining birth rates, and limited "switching" only tell part of the national story and little of the story in Quebec.

Historian Noll has recently offered a provocative analysis of the marginalization of Christian groups as organizations in the post-1960s. He sketches the impact of rising nationalism on the Church in Quebec, governments' co-opting of personal welfare on the United Church, disestablishment on the Anglican Church, and isolation on evangelical groups.¹

At the level of individuals, the decline in the importance of organized religion coincided with a number of significant social and cultural shifts in Quebec and the rest of Canada, the United States, and much of the western world. Occupying centre stage, due to both historical timing and their sheer size, were the Baby Boomers.

The Boomers and Religious Involvement

The post-World War II baby boom saw an annual average of 400,000 Canadian children born between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s. As onlookers such as David Foote of the University of Toronto remind us, Boomers were bound to have a dramatic impact on Canadian life, if for no other reason than that “there were so many of them.”²

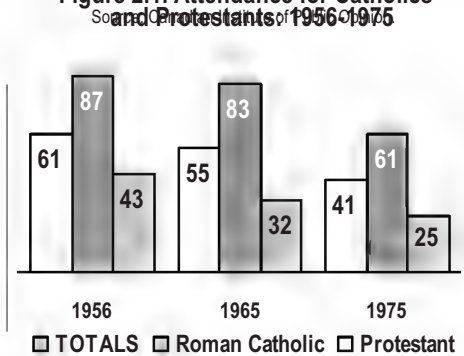
By 1966, the oldest members of the cohort were entering their 20s, while the youngest reached that age by 1986. From about 1980 to 2000, Boomers comprised more than 50% of all adults in the critically important and influential, 20-to-64-year-old cohort. Because of their size, they have been positioned to have a particularly significant impact on all spheres of Canadian life.

By 2015, they will make up only 30% of that strategic cohort, by 2020 just 20%. But since the 1960s, Baby Boomers have had an impact on everything they’ve touched – including, of course, religion.

Gallup polls found that, in 1956, 61% of Canadians claimed they had attended a service “in the last seven days,” a figure that is very similar to what we saw earlier for 1946. But, by 1965, that level dropped to 55%, and by 1975 to 41%.

The somewhat stricter measure used in our Project Canada national surveys, “How often do you attend religious services?” produced a lower, 31% figure for 1975.

Figure 2.1. Attendance for Catholics and Protestants, 1956-1975



This drop in attendance that began to show up in the mid-1960s was largely a Boomer phenomenon.

- The Project Canada surveys show that weekly service attendance among Pre-Boomers – people born before 1945 – remained a consistent 37% between 1975 and 2005.
- However, as early as 1975, the level of Boomer attendance was much lower (15%), and remained near that same level right through 2005 (18%).
- *In Quebec*, Pre-Boomer and Boomer differences were dramatic as early as 1975 (48% vs. 11%). Pre-Boomer attendance slipped somewhat (to 33%) while Boomer attendance, rather than showing signs of recovery, fell further (to 7%). In the apt line of journalist Konrad

Table 2.1. Weekly Attendance by Age Cohort: 1975 & 2005

	CANADA	Quebec	Else-where
1975	31%	35	29
Pre-Boomers	37	48	33
Boomers	15	11	16
2005	25	15	28
Pre-Boomers	37	33	37
Boomers	18	7	22
Post-Boomers	24	13	28

Sources: Project Canada 1975 & Project Canada 2005.

Yakabuski, “church attendance in Quebec didn’t so much collapse as vaporize – at least among those born after 1945.”³

- *Elsewhere*, by 2005, there was a mild increase over time, but the Boomer level (22%) remained well below that of Pre-Boomers.
- In short, contrary to some highly-publicized rumours, Boomers never “returned to church” in sufficient numbers to offset earlier losses.
- The generation that has followed the Boomers – the “Post-Boomers” – has exhibited higher attendance levels than Boomers, but the cohort’s participation level is still well below that of their Pre-Boomer grandparents.

These findings clearly show that “the religious recession” of the post-1960s was tied not only to changes in immigration patterns but also to the inclination of large numbers of Boomers to stay away from the churches. This leads us to again ask, “Why?”

Four Critical Shifts

The 1960s brought with them a number of key cultural and social trends. I have discussed ten in detail in *The Boomer Factor*. Four shifts appear to have been particularly significant in reshaping religion.

1. From Dominance to Diversity

Boomers were strongly influenced by the 1960s “rights revolutions” relating to civil rights, sexuality, women, and the posing of alternative, countercultural lifestyle possibilities. In Canada, many Boomers grew up with bilingualism, multiculturalism, and the Charter.

The net result has been what some writers have referred to as “the death of the monoculture” – the movement from sameness to diversity, accompanied by the explosion of choices in every sphere of life.

As I suggested two decades ago, Canada is a country with multiple mosaics that go well beyond intergroup relations. Pluralism at the group and individual levels has become part of the Canadian psyche. For some time now we have had not only a cultural mosaic but also a moral mosaic, a meaning system mosaic, a family structure mosaic, a sexual mosaic. And that’s just the shortlist. Pluralism has come to pervade Canadian minds and Canadian institutions.⁴

The legitimation of choice can be seen as far back as the mid-70s. Our surveys show that young Boomers – in a remarkably short time – were breaking dramatically with their parents and grandparents in their views of such things as racial intermarriage, women being employed outside the home, sexual orientation, family life, and valid religions. Those portrayals of intergenerational conflict between Archie and “Meathead” in those *All in the Family* episodes in the 70s – remembered by at least a few of us – in retrospect were not an exaggeration. They summed up pervasive differences in outlook between Pre-Boomers and Boomers in both the U.S. and Canada.

Table 2.2. Approval: Boomers and Pre-Boomers: 1975

	Boomers	Pre-Boomers
Whites & Blacks marrying	81%	46
Homosexual relations	43	21
Women being employed when their husbands can support them	84	58

Source: Project Canada 1975.

Such milieus in which options were emerging everywhere and truth was increasingly viewed in relativistic terms were hardly conducive to any religions that proclaimed absolutes and exhibited intolerance for things different. In fact, any religion that did not champion flexibility and freedom could expect to see its market share shrink.

Yet, ironically, religions that aligned themselves with social change ran the risk of becoming indistinguishable from culture, and – in the memorable words of Lutheran theologian William Hordern, failing “to tell the world something that the world [was] not already telling itself.”⁵

2. From Obligation to Gratification

Many of us who lived back in the 1950s and 60s found those days very different from today with respect to some of the primary factors that seemed to motivate people.

To a fair extent, people seemed to be moved by loyalty, obligation, and duty – even, on some occasions, altruism. There was a sense that one should be loyal to one’s country, old school, and maybe even a local grocery store or gas station. Some people felt it was their duty to get out of bed on a Sunday morning and attend church. It

Table 2.3. Church-Going as a Duty

“My parents felt that they were supposed to go to church”

Roman Catholics: Quebec	79%
Roman Catholics: Elsewhere	71
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	66
Conservative Protestant	61
Mainline Protestant	56
No Religion	48
Other Faith	41

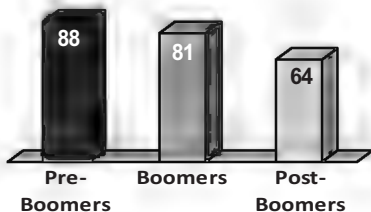
Source: Project Canada 2005.

wasn't unusual to find someone who would spontaneously help out when needed. They'd change a stranger's flat tire, offer a couple of dollars if a person came up short at a check-out till, or lend a hand shovelling a neighbour's driveway – all with no expectation of return.

What's more, those themes of obligation and duty were drawn upon by organizations and companies, including sports teams. There was a sense that a parent should help out at the school, that a Catholic should attend mass, that a Canadian cultural icon like Eaton's should receive our support. In Regina, people were called on to save the Roughriders and in Calgary to save the Stamps, while in Winnipeg and Quebec City people were asked to get behind efforts to save the Jets and the Nordiques.

Why? Because, depending on the situation, it was our civic duty...or nationalistic duty...or religious duty.

Figure 2.2. Parents Felt They Should Go to Church: Quebec Catholics by Age (%)



Source: Project Canada 2005.

And then, of course, there was marriage. Ceremonies involved declarations that marriage was not to be entered into lightly – with couples solemnly swearing that they would remain faithful to each other, “for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, so long as [they] both shall live.”

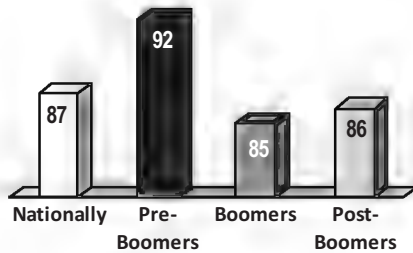
The Boomer era saw a major shift in motivational emphasis from obligation to gratification. Themes like duty and loyalty were replaced by a market model. That model stressed the importance of following the axiom of the marketing gurus: successful organizations determine needs and then meet them. In the process, they emphasize what's

in it for us. What's more, they offer more – “value-added” features such as travel points or seasonal discounts or gift vouchers. We don't just get something we pay for; we get “more.” By the new century, such an outlook had become pervasive, shared by Canadians of all ages.

So it is that, for some time now, the majority of us have been highly selective consumers in every area of life. Religion has not received an exemption.

Figure 2.3. Shopping Loyalties by Cohort (%)

“I usually shop where I can get the best product for the best price”



To the extent that people consider the possibility of involvement in religious groups, they do so in highly pragmatic, consumer-like fashion. Large numbers of their parents may have considered that church-going was a duty – something becoming, for example, of “a good Catholic,” with no questions asked.

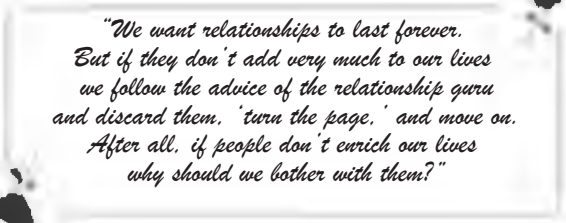
But these days, the dominant sense of Canadians of all ages is that people should attend services not out of a sense of obligation but rather because they find it worthwhile.

Table 2.4. Views of Motivations for Church-Going (%)

	NAT	Pre-Bs	BBs	Post-Bs
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

Source: Project Canada 2005.

Lest religious leaders take such selective consumption personally, they only need to look at the way that Canadians, younger and older, approach relationships.⁶



*"We want relationships to last forever.
But if they don't add very much to our lives
we follow the advice of the relationship guru
and discard them, 'turn the page,' and move on.
After all, if people don't enrich our lives
why should we bother with them?"*

Of course there are people who continue to be motivated by duty, obligation, and loyalty. There still are people who act out of a concern for others. But they are in the minority.

If religious leaders still expect people to show up for services because that's what a good _____ does, my message is simple: "Good luck!"

3. From Deference to Discernment

For Canadians who lived in the 1950s and 1960s, a buzzword was "respect." People were expected to "respect" their elders and parents, their teachers and ministers, their doctors and the police, journalists and politicians – pretty much everyone who was an adult, and definitely anyone who had some credentials. There was also a high level of deference shown institutions, including schools, universities, governments, and churches. Acquiescence to the Church, for example, allegedly was particularly widespread among Roman Catholics in Quebec.

For Boomers, higher levels of individual freedom have included freedom of expression. Better educated, exposed to television and travel, and equipped in recent years with the Internet, Boomers have led the way in Canadians insisting that they have a voice in all realms of life.

They want input. They also are extremely demanding.

The result is that individuals and institutions are carefully scrutinized. They have to earn the right to be seen as authoritative and to be respected. We take it for granted that the critical evaluation of our leaders and experts is a positive thing.

Table 2.5. Attitudes Toward Authority

	NAT	Pre-Bs	BBs	Post-Bs
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

- A doctor’s diagnosis is checked and supplemented with information gleaned from the Web – giving new meaning to the old cliché about “getting a second opinion.”
- A teacher or school counsellor’s assessment of our children is evaluated in terms of what we ourselves know and further information we gain from “Googling” an assessment such as ADD or a learning disability or a speech delay.
- Individuals who serve as coaches and referees for our children find themselves having to contend with parents who are not lost for thoughts about abilities, playing time, and good and bad calls.

So it is that almost every business and every organization today offers us “contact” information. Every media outlet offers us “feedback” opportunity. Every big talent show offers viewer input. The emphasis on facilitating interaction is summed up in the fact that businesses and organizations, large or small, are on Facebook and Twitter, inviting us to enter into conversations.

It's not as if they have a choice. If they want to be successful, they have to be willing to hear us out.

But try as they might, virtually all of our primary institutional players have had difficulty in being the recipients of high levels of confidence – with the trends suggesting things will get worse before they get better.

- Only the police enjoy the confidence of a clear majority of Canadians.
- Schools, the media, the court system, religious leaders, politicians, and labour unions fare much worse.
- In general, confidence levels have declined since the 70s.

The highly critical outlook that Canadians have also can be seen in survey results reported by Leger Marketing.

In recent years, the polling company has found a decline in our trust of people in virtually every occupation.

Firefighters and nurses rank at the top of the trust rankings, while teachers, doctors and police officers also fare quite well. But there is trust slippage with bankers, church representatives, and – gasp – pollsters, along with lawyers and journalists. Trust in publicists has dropped significantly. Trust in politicians – well, let's just say it remains very low.

Table 2.6. Confidence in Leadership: 1975-2005

Have "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit" of Confidence

	1975	2005
The Police	75%	69
Schools	49	47
Newspapers	40	43
The Court System	49	42
Radio	***	40
Religious Groups	51	34
Television	44	33
Major Business	***	33
Your Provincial Govt	31	27
Labour unions	21	27
The Federal Govt	30	21

Sources: Project Canada 1975 and 2005.

Table 2.7. Trust in Select Professions: 2002-2007

"Do you trust or distrust..."

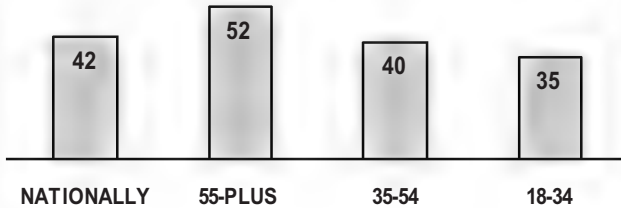
	2002	2007
Fire fighters	98%	97
Nurses	96	94
Teachers	88*	89
Doctors	92	87
Police officers	88	84
Bankers	72	68
Church reps	73	61
Pollsters	70	59
Lawyers	54	52
Journalists	53	48
Publicists	47	31
Politicians	18	15

Source: Leger Marketing 2007. *2003

Indicative of “the death of deference,” a national poll in the United States found that by the turn of the new century, younger Catholics were far less inclined than their older counterparts to blindly accept the teachings of the Church. Deferential obedience was giving way to critical discernment.

Figure 2.4. Deference vs. Discernment: U.S. Catholics

“It’s important to obey Church teachings even if I don’t understand them”



Source: National Opinion Research Center, 2000.

Another American research finding that would appear to be equally applicable to Canada: Catholic teenagers are now no more likely than other teens to express feelings of guilt. Christian Smith’s research suggests Catholic young people often do not know enough about Church teachings to feel guilt; others are aware of teachings but disregard them rather than internalizing them.⁷

The shift from deference to discernment has put considerable pressure on religious groups to respond. People want opportunities for input. Yet groups have been put in a position of determining what is and what isn’t negotiable. They also have had to cope with accelerated expectations.

They have not always been successful. Canadians who were not actively involved in religious groups in 2000 were asked if they would be receptive to greater involvement if they “found it to be worthwhile” for themselves or their families. Some 65% said either “yes” or “perhaps.”

- Asked “what kinds of things would make it worthwhile?” 37% cited ministry factors – better meeting of spiritual, personal and relational needs.
- But another 30% said that organizational factors were an issue for them, such as wanting changes in style and outlook, as well as better leadership.
- Most of the remaining 33% indicated that the problem rested with factors related to themselves, such as work schedule, family indifference, and getting older.

Table 2.8. 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	
Better Leadership	3	
Other	4	
Respondent Factors		30
Other Factors		3

Source: From Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 2002:221.

These findings indicate that large numbers of people have strong feelings about what they expect from religious groups. The days of passive acquiescence are over.

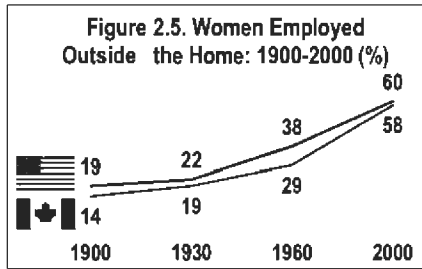
Consistent with such thinking, renowned McGill philosopher Charles Taylor has written that, during the 1950s and 60s, the secularism mindset that dated back to the Enlightenment made a leap from intellectuals to the public sphere. One key component was a “coming of age narrative” where people felt they did not need to look beyond themselves for norms and values.⁸ “Self-authorization,” says Taylor, is “an axiomatic feature of modernity.”⁹ He maintains that such a sense of self-authorization has done more to advance secularism than scientific thinking.

4. From Homes to Careers

Between 1960 and 2000, the proportion of women employed outside the home doubled from some 30% to 60%. In 1930, the figure had been around 20%. A similar shift took place during the same period in the United States.

The extent of the social impact of this dramatic escalation in female employment during the Boomer era is difficult to overestimate. It affected family life, altering

both the age that couples married and the inclination to marry or the necessity of remaining married. It had an influence on the number of children a couple



could have. It altered the amount of time that women and men could give to their children and to each other. It created new pressures on time, adding a significant level of pragmatism to time-use choices. In the process, it significantly affected social and organizational involvement – including church-going.

Highly respected sociologist Robert Putnam of Harvard, in his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone*, released in 2000, maintained that the increase in the number of women in the labour force in the U.S. was “the most portentous social change of the last half century.” Controlling for other factors, Putnam says, “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,” he adds, “husbands of women who work full-time are, like their wives, less likely to attend church, volunteer, and entertain at home.”⁸

In short, something in the way of a revolution was taking place in the way that personal life, family life, and work life were being experienced. One of the most prominent correlates was the widespread feeling of being short on time. Of course couples had felt busy in the past. But employment outside the home brought with it the loss of control over schedule and location. It translated into large numbers of people feeling that they were being pulled in an array of directions and, overall, simply not having enough time.

The data we have available suggest that it was not necessarily a case of dual-employed Canadians in the post-1950s becoming negative about religious involvement. A more accurate reading is that they frequently were feeling pressed for time. As a result, they were increasingly pragmatic about how they spent their time, and their resources more generally. They were open to things that added to their family life – why wouldn't they be?

If they could arrive at a church service and find that religious groups “were ready” for somewhat weary parents and their children, providing atmospheres that were relaxing, uplifting, and gratifying, then great!

However, there is little evidence that religious groups – even those like the United Church who saw themselves as progressive and in touch with the times – “were ready” – that they understood something of the magnitude of the family and workplace transformation taking place.¹¹

On the contrary, at a time when groups should have been adding resources that would result in improved ministry to babies, young children, teenagers, and tired moms and dads, quite the opposite often was taking place.

- Between the 1960s and 1990s, Mainline Protestant groups cut back on their number of Sunday Schools.
- Catholics, despite their official commitment to a “family, parish, and school” model of ministry, were not particularly strong in providing environments conducive to stressed-out parents...and children.
- Evangelical groups may have been an exception – not so much because they read the times better – but because “they lucked out”: many already had good children and youth ministries in place, almost accidentally possessing the infrastructure to minister to the dual-employed.

NATIONALLY	47
Employed married mothers	77
Employed cohabiting mothers	65
Employed married fathers	59
Employed divorced/separated mothers	58
Non-employed mothers	49

As a result, rather than abandoning faith and their traditions, many pragmatically-minded Boomers gave churches the time they felt they warranted, in keeping with what they added to their lives and those of their families.

For many, that meant not dropping out altogether, but showing up on special occasions, notably Easter and Christmas, along with baptisms and christenings, weddings and funerals.

The Project Canada surveys since 1995 have shown that large numbers didn't rule out greater involvement. But they had to find that such participation enriched their lives and those of their family members.

In the light of such findings, one is hard-pressed to escape the conclusion that the problems of organized religion in the post-1960s, in large part, were tied to the fact Canada's groups too often did a poor job of responding to the changing family roles and needs of Boomers.

As a result, most continued to place a measure of importance on faith and retained their psychological and emotional ties with religious traditions. But, on weekends, sizable numbers found better things to do with their time.

The Aftermath

The net effect of the reluctance of Boomers to embrace organized religion is reflected in the finding that weekly attendance in Canada slipped from over 50% in 1960 to about 30% in 1980 and 25% by 2005.

However, except for Quebec Catholics, the cores of people actively involved in groups stabilized by 1980 – and have in fact increased since then in both the Conservative Protestant and Other Faith instances.

**Table 2.10. Weekly Attendance:
1957 and 2005**

	1957	1980	2005
■✚■	53%	28	25
Protestant	38	24	29
Conservative	51	53	64
Mainline	35	19	20
Roman Catholic	83	41	29
Outside Quebec	75	44	42
Quebec	88	38	14
Other Faiths	35	11	22

Sources: 1957: March Gallup poll; 2005; Project Canada 1980 & Project Canada 2005.

It is important to remember, however, that to base a percentage on who identifies with what group can be misleading if the size of the identification pools are shrinking. Such is the case with Mainline Protestants – the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches.

On the surface, their combined core of weekly attenders has remained steady at about 20% since about 1980. However, the percentage of Canadians identifying with the four groups dropped from 32% in 1981 to 20% by 2001. In light of their age structures as of the 2001 census, there is good reason to believe the combined total of the Mainline Protestant pool may now be no higher than around 15%.

Table 2.11. Catholic and Protestant Identification: 1931-2001
 % of the Canadian Population

	RC	MLPROT	United	Ang	Pres	Luth	CPROT	Bap	Pent
1931	40	48%	20	16	8	4	8	4	<1
1961	46	41	20	13	4	4	8	3	<1
1981	46	32	16	10	3	3	8	3	1
2001	43	20	10	7	1	2	8	3	1

Source: Statistics Canada census data.

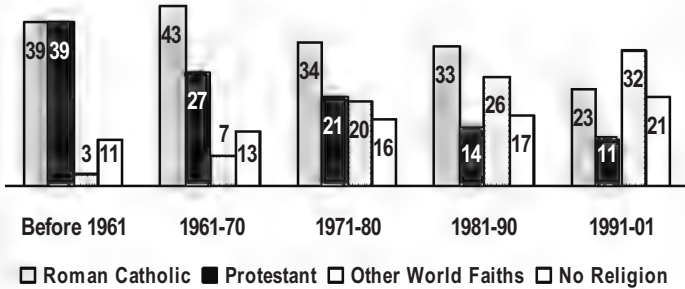
This brings us back to the importance of immigration in determining group sizes. In analyzing the findings for the 2001 census, Statistics Canada noted that one reason for Roman Catholic growth has been immigration. Catholics accounted for nearly one-quarter of the 1.8 million people who came to Canada between 1991 and 2001. The pattern is not new: Roman Catholics “have remained the largest [single] religious denomination within each new wave of immigrants since the 1960s.”¹²

As a result of what amounts to “a global circulation of the saints,” Roman Catholics have continued to benefit from the arrival of Catholics from other parts of the world. In greater Toronto, for example, the Church has 1.7 million Catholics in 225 parishes, and celebrates Mass each week in 36 different ethnic and linguistic communities.¹³

Since the early 1960s, Protestants have not been anywhere as fortunate. Their share of “the immigrant market” has decreased steadily, first being surpassed by Catholics and then by new arrivals who either identified with other world faiths or said they had no religion.

Figure 2.6. Major Religions of Immigrants by Decade of Arrival (%)

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.



Apart from sheer numbers, with few exceptions, the primary countries of origin have been changing in favour of Catholics, Other World Faiths, and people with no religion.

Table 2.12. Those Changing Immigration Pipelines

Top 10 Ethnic Origins by Generation Status: 2006

First Generation 6 million <i>Foreign-Born</i>		Second Generation 4 million <i>Canadian-Born, 1-2 Parents Born Elsewhere</i>		Third Generation-Plus 16 million <i>Self & Parents Canadian-Born</i>	
1. Chinese	15%	English	26	Canadian	47
2. East Indian	10	Scottish	16	English	24
3. English	9	Canadian	15	French	23
4. Italian	6	German	13	Scottish	18
5. German	6	Irish	12	Irish	18
6. Filipino	5	Italian	11	German	10
7. Scottish	4	French	7	Aboriginal	5
8. Irish	4	Netherlands	6	Ukrainian	4
9. Polish	3	Ukrainian	5	Netherlands	2
10. Portuguese	3	Polish	5	Polish	2

Population, 15 years of age and older; some respondents reported more than one ethnic origin.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 census, analysis series 97-562.

The Legacy

Young people obviously do not emerge out of a cultural vacuum. The key to understanding Canadian youth today is to look at their Boomer and Post-Boomer parents. Our most recent Project Teen Canada national survey of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 allows us to do just that. The survey, the latest in a series of surveys of teens conducted every eight years since 1984, had a sample of more than 5,500 young people, including a special oversampling of Aboriginals.¹⁴

It provides an intriguing snapshot of how the children and grandchildren of Boomers are looking in light of many of the explicit goals, efforts, and emphases of Boomers.

We know – thanks to the census – that the percentage of Canadians who said they had no religion jumped from 4% in 1971 to 16% by 2001. Their children and grandchildren would be expected to follow suit. And they have.

Today’s teens are reporting the highest level of “non-affiliation in Canadian history. Some 32% say that they have “no religion” – up dramatically from 12% in 1984.

The declines and diminished pools in the case of Quebec Catholics and the United and Anglican churches are almost breathtaking.

Table 2.13. Religion Identification of Teens: 1984 & 2008

	1984	2008	Census
Roman Catholic	50%	32	43
Outside Quebec	29	23	19
Quebec	21	9	24
Protestant	35	13	25
United	10	1	8
Anglican	8	2	5
Baptist	3	1	2
Lutheran	2	1	2
Pentecostal	2	1	1
Presbyterian	2	1	1
Other/Unspecified	8	6	6
Orthodox	--	2	2
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	--	3	3
Other Faiths	3	16	6
Islam	<1	5	2
Buddhism	<1	3	1
Judaism	1	2	1
Hinduism	<1	2	1
Sikhism	<1	2	1
Aboriginal Spirituality	<1	2	<1
Other/Unspecified	2	2	1
None	12	32	20

- Between 1984 and 2008, Quebec teens who said they were Roman Catholic dropped from 21% to 9%.
- During the same period, the percentage of teenagers across the country who identify with the United Church has fallen from 10% to 1%.
- The drop-off in the case of Anglican identification also has been sizable – from 8% to 2%.

A comparison of what teens say about their affiliation and what their parents told the 2001 census takers reveals considerable slippage: young people are typically less likely to say they identify with religions. The exception is Islam, where – perhaps reflecting a greater sense that one can be open – teens are *more likely* than adults to acknowledge their religion. The same pattern holds for a variety of additional faiths.

Millennial youth are also staying away from religious services in the largest numbers on record.

And if those headline findings on identification and attendance are not bad enough for religious groups, a further headline should be more than a shade unnerving:

God is slipping in the polls

The latest youth survey has found that the proportion of teens who say they are atheist is higher than anything we or any other pollsters have ever found.

Such findings undoubtedly lead observers to conclude we are seeing further evidence of rampant secularization. One prominent media commentator recently proclaimed, “If the future for institutional religion lies in the hearts and minds of the young, a dark night is sweeping down on the country’s churches, synagogues, and temples.”¹⁵

Actually, such a conclusion is a misreading of the times.

A synopsis of the new reality was provided by the highly publicized debate in Toronto between Christopher Hitchens and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in December of 2010. In noting that it was the fastest selling show in the history of Roy Thomson Hall, journalist Lorna Dueck suggested the interest level was “a sign that religion is far from dead in the public imagination.”¹⁶

The fact the two combatants had two different fan bases was also a tip-off on the current Canadian situation.

3 The New Polarization

*“Sure, lots of people are leaving,
but lots of people are also staying.”*
—a beleaguered church leader

SECULARIZATION seemed to sum up the Canadian religious situation well as the 20th century came to a close. Proponents of the thesis, dating back to such luminaries as Comte, Durkheim, Marx, and Freud, all saw religion as giving way to science as civilization evolved. More recently the argument had been echoed and updated by prominent sociologists, including Bryan Wilson, Karel Dobbelaere, and Steve Bruce. Significantly, all of these individuals have been Europeans.

This “old story” about religion is still the story that the media typically tell. In December of 2010, Michael Valpy and Joe Friesen expressed things this way in the introduction to a five-part *Globe and Mail* series on the future of faith in Canada: “What we’ve seen is a sea of change in 40 years, a march toward secularization that mirrors what’s happened in Europe.”¹

The Secularization Argument

Put simply, secularization refers to the decline in the influence of organized religion. While the line is not perfectly straight, it nonetheless is linear: secularization proceeds in a fairly relentless and non-reversible fashion.

Dobbelaere, the Belgian sociologist, offered an important clarification of the concept in pointing out that it has at least three major dimensions – institutional, personal, and organizational.² The spheres of life over which religion has authority decrease and its role becomes more and more specialized; religion has less and less of an

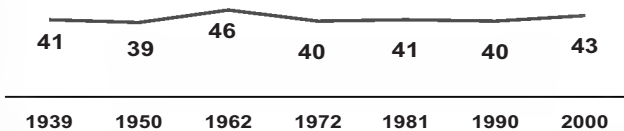
impact on the daily lives of individuals – what Berger has referred to as “a secularization of consciousness”³; and religious organizations themselves are increasingly influenced by society and culture in the way they operate – their goals, their means, their content, and the way they measure success, for example.

By the 1980s and 90s, all three dimensions of secularization were generally recognized to characterize at least much of Protestant Europe, as well as Canada.

The United States, as one of the world’s most advanced societies, appeared to be an important exception to the secularization rule. Such apparent anomaly, however, was readily explained away by many prominent observers, including Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.⁴

They argued back in the early 1960s that, despite high levels of religious participation in America, secularization was already rampant. Their explanation was that secularization was taking the form of “secularization from within” rather than “secularization from without.” On the surface religion was flourishing; but if one looked more closely, they said, the structures and content of religion in the U.S. were being ravished by secularism. By way of one memorable illustration, Berger wrote that, when it came to values, “American Christians [held] the same values as anyone else – only with more emphatic solemnity.”⁵

Figure 3.1. U.S. Weekly Attendance: 1939-2000 (%)



Source: Gallup, U.S.

The American religious situation aside, the secularization thesis was assumed to be applicable to Canada. I certainly concurred, providing considerable documentation in support of the argument in *Fragmented Gods* (1987) and *Unknown Gods* (1993). There didn't seem to be much more to say. Things appeared to be bad and getting worse for organized religion "up here."

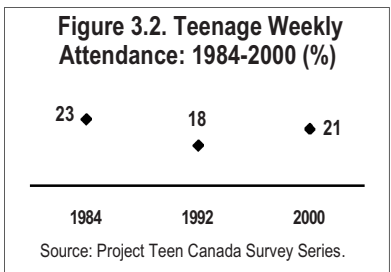
The Revitalization Argument

What makes life interesting, of course, is when the unexpected occurs. In 2000, a surprising finding emerged from the national youth survey.

A Cause for Pause Finding

In 1984, we had found that some 23% of teenagers claimed to be attending services on approximately a weekly basis. In 1992, that figure dropped to 18%. When we did the 2000 youth survey, I expected that the teen attendance level would probably drop another five percentage points or so – to around 13%. It didn't happen.

Instead, we found that the percentage of weekly attending teenagers rose to 21% – reaching essentially the same level as in 1984. Increases took place across all major religious groupings – Catholicism, Protestantism, and other world faiths, with the single exception of Roman Catholicism in Quebec, where attendance continued to drop off.



That surprising national finding resulted in my reflecting on a fairly radical possibility – that a modest resurgence in religious participation might be taking place in Canada. After all, people like Harvey Cox and Peter Berger were acknowledging they had made an error in buying into secularization thinking, and underestimating religion's resiliency.⁶ Maybe I had too.

Later in 2000, we completed the Project Canada adult national survey, providing an opportunity to obtain a new reading of adult attendance. What that new survey revealed was that attendance had slipped very modestly from 1995 – the weekly level from 24% to 21%, the monthly levels from 34% to 30%. However, upon closer examination, I discovered that the apparent decline was camouflaging some signs of life that were corroborated using Statistics Canada data.⁷

- Among *Conservative Protestant groups*, an increase in attendance levels had taken place since 1990.
- In the case of *Mainline Protestants* – the United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian denominations – the collective numerical haemorrhaging stopped in the 90s.
- As for *Roman Catholics*, attendance declines during the decade had slowed significantly both inside and outside Quebec – although levels in Quebec remained very low.
- *Other major faith groups*, despite facing problems of sustaining growth, together had experienced a heightened profile and, to varying degrees, added quantitative and qualitative vitality to the Canadian religious scene.

Table 3.1. Weekly Service Attenders in Canada: 1957-2000

	1957	1975	1990	2000
NATIONAL	53%	31	24	21
Protestant	38	27	22	25
Conservative	51	41	49	58
Mainline	35	23	14	15
Roman Catholic	83	45	33	26
Outside Quebec	75	48	37	32
Quebec	88	42	28	20
Other Faiths	35	17	12	7

Sources: 1957: March Gallup poll; 1975, 1990, 2000: Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

In presenting these data in *Restless Gods*,⁸ I concluded, “These overall findings about the churches suggest that some important new developments are taking place – that there is something of a renaissance of organized religion in

Canada.”⁹ Whether or not it continued seemed to be highly dependent on how the dominant existing religious groups responded to readily apparent consumer demand. Here my thinking was influenced considerably by Rodney Stark.

Stark’s Challenging of Secularization

I had met Stark in 1972 when I was a graduate student at Washington State University and he was a newly arrived professor at Seattle’s University of Washington on the other side of the state. A decade or so earlier, he had been a graduate school student at Berkeley with my primary WSU mentor, Armand Mauss. Originally from North Dakota, he started out as a journalist; he also played briefly for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

Stark took chances with flair. In the early 1980s he took on the secularization school of thought by posing a fairly simple but creative and compelling argument – the kind of argument which, after the fact, left many of us wondering, “Why didn’t we think of that?” His provocative argument, now well-known, has been variously described as a market model and as rational choice theory.

Put very succinctly, Stark – in collaboration with key associates William Bainbridge, Roger Finke, and Laurence Iannacone¹⁰ – maintained that there are some needs “that only the gods can provide.”¹¹ They pertain particularly to death, along with purpose and meaning – including the meaning of life and the meaning of events in life.

Using a market analogy, Stark argued that the persistence of such questions means that, in any setting, there is a fairly constant market demand for religious responses. What varies is the supply-side. In societies where the religious economy has been “deregulated,” groups or “firms” that have difficulties will lose “market share” to groups that are more vigorous and less worldly.

Consequently, for Stark, secularization does not lead to the end of religion; on the contrary, secularization stimulates innovation. He gave particular attention to the emergence of sects (breakaway groups from existing religious bodies) and cults (new religious traditions).¹²

So it is, said Stark, that “In an endless cycle, faith is revived and new faiths born to take the places of those withered denominations that lost their sense of the supernatural.”¹³

As for which groups tend to win and which ones tend to lose, the key is costs and benefits. The higher the costs of membership, the greater the material, social, and religious benefits of membership. “People tend to value religion according to how much it costs,” wrote Finke and Stark, and “because ‘reasonable’ and ‘sociable’ religion costs little, it is not valued greatly.”¹⁴ Individuals consequently make “a rational choice” to belong and participate.¹⁵ Conversely, as religious bodies ask less of their members, their ability to reward them declines. In short, the more mainline a denomination becomes, the lower the value of belonging to it, resulting eventually in widespread defection.

Stark and his associates claim extensive historical and contemporary support for their general thesis, as a result of their research in the United States, Canada, and Europe. They found a consistent positive correlation between the existence of cult centres and people having no religion.¹⁶

A Canadian Adaptation of Stark

There is an important practical problem with trying to apply Stark’s stimulating thinking to religious developments in Canada: things don’t fit – at least without some important alterations.

As I pointed out in some detail in *Restless Gods*,¹⁷ census data on religious identification over time reveals two distinct patterns: the stable dominance of established Christian groups and the difficulty new entries have had in cracking that monopoly.

Table 3.2. Religious Composition of Canada: 1891-1991

	1891	1941	1991
Catholic	42	44	47
Protestant	56	52	36
Other	2	3	5
No Religion	<1	<1	12

Source: Canadian census data.

- Between 1891 and 1991, the Catholic share of the population grew while the Protestant share declined. The drop for Protestants, however, was not due to new groups expanding.
- The decrease in the size of their market share instead coincided with a rise in the proportion of Canadians who said they had “no religion” – an increase due in large part to the methodological fact that “no religion” only became an acceptable census option in 1971.¹⁸
- During the 1951-2001 period when “the market” seemingly was ripe for newer entries to make inroads, groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Latter Day Saints made tiny gains.
- Further, as of the beginning of the 21st century – by which time the country’s well-established groups had been in numerical decline for some three decades, the actual numbers for would-be competitors were extremely small. For all the media hype about disenchanted and disaffiliating Canadians turning to new options, relatively few in reality seized the opportunity.
- In a nation of some 30 million people, less than 25,000 identified with such highly publicized alternatives as Pagan (including Wicca), with the figures for New Age and Scientology under 2,000. The New Age total in allegedly receptive British Columbia was 690, with the numbers for Ontario and Quebec only 380 and 25 respectively.

Table 3.3. Population Percentages of Select Groups: 1951 and 2001

	1951	2001
Baha’i	**	.1
Jehovah’s Witnesses	.2	.5
Latter Day Saints	.2	.3
Unitarians	.1	.1

Source: Statistics Canada Census Data.

Table 3.4. Sizes of Select Religious Groups: 2001

Pagan	21,080
Baha’i	18,020
New Thought*	4,000
Humanist**	2,105
New Age	1,530
Scientology	1,525
Gnostic	1,160
Rastafarian	1,135
Satanist	850

*Includes Unity, New Thought, Pantheist

**Technically not a religious group.

Source: Statistics Canada 2001 Census.

These data point to the fact that we have an extremely tight “religious market” in Canada, dominated by Catholic and Protestant “companies.” New entries find the going very tough.

A more plausible argument that is compatible with Stark’s thesis is that secularization may stimulate not only the birth of new groups but also the rejuvenation of older ones.¹⁹

Throughout his work, Stark stresses that religious economies will be stimulated by religious pluralism resulting from “deregulation.” Presumably some of the older companies would go back to the drawing boards in the light of changing times and a more competitive marketplace. In fact, in the last chapter of Stark’s third major work on the topic, he and Roger Finke acknowledged such a possibility, whereby “the sect to Church cycle” reverses itself. They commented that the literature provided few hints of such a possibility, despite the historical example of something as blatant as the Counter Reformation of the seventeenth century.

They saw a key component of such possible resurgence to be new, highly committed clergy, who in turn call their congregations to commitment and emphasize traditional religious content. Only people like this, they maintained, will be motivated to be involved in declining groups where secular rewards are low. Growth, they theorized, will take place initially at the congregational level, and they provide preliminary data on a number of U.S. groups that are consistent with their argument.²⁰

Long-standing major corporations and other organizations realize that in order to survive and thrive they have to be in an ongoing mode of change. The primary players who occupy the Canadian religious scene are no exception.

As I reminded readers a decade ago,²¹ denominations such as Anglicans, the United Church, Presbyterians, and Lutherans, along with the Roman Catholics in Quebec and elsewhere, are no fly-by-night operations. They have long

histories and recuperative powers. They don't just roll over and die. Many are part of durable multinational corporations with headquarters in places like Rome and Canterbury. Such well-established religious groups don't readily perish. They retreat, retrench, revamp, and resurface.²²

To sum up: participation declines are neither inevitable nor irreversible. On the contrary,

1. if people continue to identify, and
2. if they are reluctant to turn elsewhere, and
3. if they have interests and needs, and
4. if their identification groups respond,

it will be only a matter of time before the established groups experience numerical revitalization.

Theoretically, it all seemed to make perfect sense.

~

So, which is it? Secularization or revitalization? Is religion in Canada in a downward spiral that dates back to the 1960s? Or are there signs of new life as the country's dominant religious groups respond to ongoing interests and needs?

Actually, the answer is that both patterns are facets of the dominant pattern that makes sense of everything: polarization.

The Canadian Religious Reality

To the extent that many of us bought into the secularization thesis, one of the key sources of data was the steady decline in religious participation in the post-1960s.

Yes, that oft-cited summary chart, corroborated by other sources, that pegged weekly attendance at around 60% in 1945, 31% in 1975, and 25% by 2005 was pretty convincing. The reason is that the trends resonated with what most people had been experiencing.

The attendance figures in turn appeared to be fairly highly correlated with the membership numbers for major Protestant groups, and a general sense of Roman Catholic participation trends, particularly in Quebec. Moreover, it

was widely acknowledged that religious influence in the lives of individuals and the life of the nation had known a corresponding decline over the charted period.

Still further, following Dobbelaere, Luckmann, and Berger, there was ample evidence that secularization had not stopped at church steps, but had invaded many congregations and denominations. Secularization was widely visible “within.”

In short, I found that few people ever challenged the general attendance slide trajectory. The numbers documented experience. As such, many religious leaders, for example, were almost relieved to be given some data that confirmed what they felt had been taking place.

The fact that the decline in religious participation did not continue unabated – as seen in the increase in regular teenage attendance and the levelling off of adult attendance in the 1990s – was what led to speculation about religion experiencing something of a comeback. Even a respected public opinion pulse reader like Allan Gregg mused about the possibility.²³

But the speculation was hardly limited to survey research findings. The theorizing of Stark provided a reputable and credible academic explanation for the unexpected resurgence that seemed to be showing up in national surveys.

Blame It On the Pollsters

The primary reason for much of the confusion in reading the Canadian religious situation is that we typically have been looking at only part of the picture. It’s been like taking a family photo and leaving out dad or a couple of the kids.

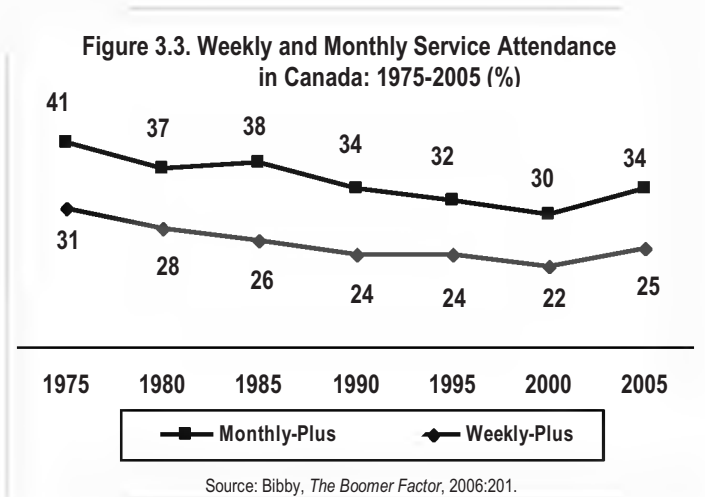
We have been focusing our attention on the proportion of people actively involved in religious groups. As the proportion went down, we saw evidence of secularization. As the proportion levelled off and even went up, we saw evidence of revitalization.

For example, typical Gallup polls over the years focused on the percentage of Canadians who had attended a religious service “in the past seven days.” I myself have zeroed in on people who say they attend at least weekly or monthly. In the U.S., Gallup’s regular reports on service attendance continue to do the same thing.

Here’s a quick, two-question test:

1. Approximately what percentage of Canadians attend services every week?
2. Approximately what percentage of Canadians *never* attend services?

Now, if you are following polls reasonably closely, chances are you would say, in response to the first question, “between 20 and 25%.” As for the second question, you – like just about everyone else – would draw a big blank.

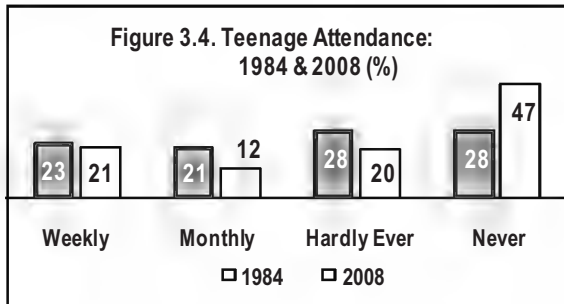


In probing participation trends, what we have failed to do is keep a close eye on everyone – not only the religiously active but also those who are not particularly active or not active at all.

As a result, the photos we have been using to splice together the religion story have been incomplete. Important information that could help us understand the total situation has been left out.

This first became apparent to me when I was analyzing the Project Teen Canada findings on attendance spanning 1984 through 2008. If one only looks at what amounts to weekly or monthly-plus attendance, the religious situation appears to be remarkably stable.

- As noted earlier, some 23% of young people were attending services on a regular basis in 1984, with the figure for 2008 a very similar 21%.
- A typical and seemingly obvious interpretation would be that things haven't changed very much. Right?



Actually, wrong. When we take a snapshot that includes everyone by looking at other responses to the attendance item, what we find is that the percentage of teenagers who say they “never” attend services has almost doubled since the 1980s, from about 25% to 50%. The middle of the attendance continuum has been shrinking.

This, everybody, is an example of growing religious polarization.

Such evidence suggests that religion in Canada is far from a thing of the past. But in recent decades, there has been an important momentum shift away from religion. Non-religion’s market share has been increasing. Growing numbers of people are living life “beyond the gods.” That trend is what has led many of us to think in terms of *secularization*.

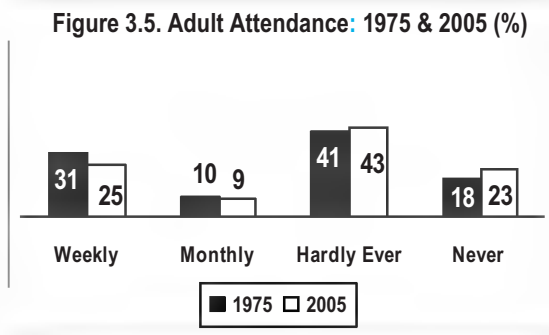
However, during the same period, a significant segment of Canadians has continued to value religion. The size of that proportion of pro-religious people has remained fairly constant. To the extent it has shown signs of increasing, some of us have raised the possibility that *revitalization* is taking place.

When we look at the trend data for everyone – the involved and non-involved alike – what we see is a pattern of growing *polarization*.

The polarization can be seen through the eyes of a number of measures of religiousness or what some refer to as “religiosity.” Three of these are service attendance, identification, and belief in God.

Attendance: Weeklys and Nevers

We have just seen that Canadian youth have become increasingly polarized with respect to attendance. A solid core of close to 1 in 4 are attending religious services at least once a week. However, almost 2 in 4 say they “never” attend services.



Among adults, attendance polarization has been increasing since the mid-1970s. Weekly worship-going decreased from 31% to 25%, while the percentage of those never attending increased from 18% to 23%.

Obviously, if the youth pattern persists as teens move into their 20s, 30s, and beyond, the adult distribution will be characterized by greater polarization.

Identification: Affiliates & Non-Affiliates

Since the 1960s, an increasing number of Canadians have been indicating that they have “no religion.” At first the percentages were fairly small – only 4% in 1971 when the response became an acceptable category for the census-takers for the first time.

However, with each census since, the figures have increased, reaching 16% by 2001. That doesn’t look like a pronounced dichotomy between “religion” and “no religion.” But two related findings are worth noting.

First, the number of adults in the “no religion” category is

second only to Catholics. They also tend to be young. As such they constitute a significant bloc of people. In theory, to the extent they have some common characteristics, they could wield a fair amount of influence in public affairs.

Second, the “no religion” sector has been growing at a fairly fast rate.

As we saw earlier, the 2008 Project Teen Canada survey findings reveal Boomers and Post-Boomers, including immigrants, have been producing a generation of young people with the highest

percentage of “no religion” on record.

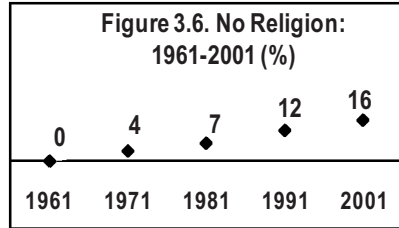


Table 3.5. Canada’s 10 Largest Groupings

	Numbers	%	Median Age
1. Roman Catholic	12,793,125	44%	37.8
2. No Religion	4,796,325	16	31.1
3. United Church	2,839,125	12	44.1
4. Anglican	2,035,500	8	43.8
5. Christian (<i>unspecified</i>)	780,450	3	30.2
6. Baptist	729,475	3	39.3
7. Eastern Orthodox	606,620	2	40.1
8. Lutheran	606,590	2	43.3
9. Muslim	579,640	2	28.1
10. Protestant (<i>unspecified</i>)	549,205	2	40.4

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

- In 1984, 12% of teenagers said they had “no religion.”
- In 2008, that level jumped to 32%.

Currently, the proportion of teens who say they have “no religion” is neck-and-neck with those who say that they are Roman Catholic.

Table 3.6. Religion Identification of Teenagers: 2008

Roman Catholic	32%
No Religion	32
Other Major Faiths	16
Protestant	13
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	3
Orthodox	2
Other/Unspecified	2

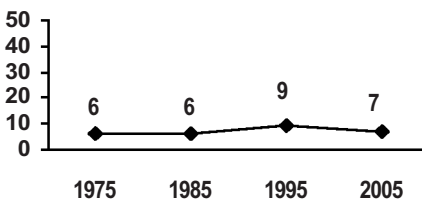
Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Belief: Theists & Atheists

There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the rise of atheism in Canada, particularly in the light of the popularity of books by the so-called atheist writers – notably Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris.²⁴

Such assumptions have been short on hard data. We’ve been monitoring thoughts about God since the inception of the Project Canada surveys in 1975. What we have found is that there has been very little change in the percentage of Canadians who say that they definitely do not believe in God. In 1975, the figure was 6%; in 2005, it was 7%.

Figure 3.7. Atheists in Canada: 1975-2005 (%)

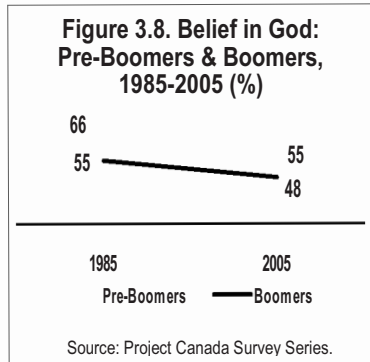


Source: Project Canada Survey Series.

But as with the monitoring of service attendance, it's important to include everyone, rather than prematurely cropping the photo.

A closer look at “the God data” shows that some important shifts in thinking have been taking place over the past few decades.

- While the percentage of outright atheists has remained fairly stable, there has been a significant *decrease* in the proportion of Canadians who say they “definitely” believe in God.
- The ambivalence was showing with Boomers and Pre-Boomers, undoubtedly reflecting in part the deference to discernment shift.
- In turn, that ambivalence and critical attitude have been passed on to their millennial children and grandchildren.



The latest cohort of emerging teens is considerably less likely to assert “definite” belief in God or a higher power, and far more inclined to say either that they “don’t think” they believe in God or to say they “definitely do not” hold such a belief.

A striking and significant finding? To the best of my knowledge, the 16% total for atheism among teens today is the highest level of atheism ever recorded for any age group in Canada.

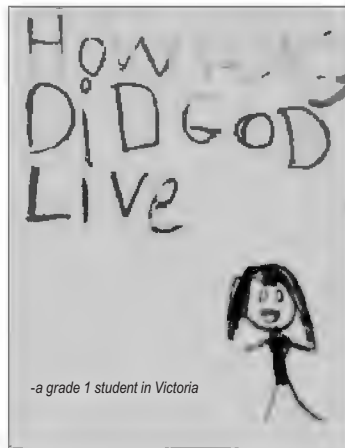
Table 3.7. Belief in God or a Higher Power*: Adults & Teenagers, 1980s & Now (%)

	ADULTS		TEENS	
	1985	2005	1984	2008
Yes, I definitely do	61	49	54	37
Yes, I think so	23	32	31	31
No, I don't think so	10	11	9	17
No, I definitely do not	6	7	6	16

*1984 & 1985: “God exists”; in 2005 & 2008: “God or a higher power”
Source: Project Canada Survey Series.

At this point in time, unequivocal theists – at around 50% – readily outdistance unequivocal atheists – at just under 10%. But another 40% of the population are sitting in the middle of “the God continuum,” undecided on belief versus non-belief. These adults will soon be joined by “the new breed” of God-thinkers – the emerging millennials.

Belief in God represents a third area of religious polarization in Canada.



Obviously these three measures – attendance, identification, and belief – are interrelated. However, while the correlations between them are fairly high, they are far from perfect. Now, don't get dizzy with numbers and miss the point of the following.

- Some 95% of *weekly attending teens* identify with a religious group, and 75% are unwavering theists. However, 45% of those who *never attend* services identify with a religion, and only 29% are outright atheists.
- Just 30% of teens *who identify* with a religion are weekly attenders, but about 50% are ardent theists.
- And among teens who *definitely believe in God*, only 44% are weekly attenders and 20% never attend – even though 93% of them identify with a religion. That said, 26% of atheists identify with a religion, even though a mere 15% ever attend a service.

If all that sounds a bit bewildering, it should. The reason is that there are lots of complexities to these three religion variables. Fortunately, they are summed up fairly concisely in the correlation matrix table below (1.000 = a perfect relationship, .300 and higher is generally seen as an appreciable association).

It's precisely because of their less than perfect relationship to each other that I want to draw on all three in looking at some of the characteristics of people who are religious and those who are not.

		Identification	Belief
ADULTS	Attendance	.418	.496
	Identification	---	.477
TEENS	Attendance	.442	.508
	Identification	---	.528

Polarization in Summary

This examination of attendance, identification, and belief reveals that Canada is not a country characterized by either pervasive secularization or revitalization.

Rather, the findings show that solid cores of people are either involved or not involved in religious groups, either identify with traditions or do not identify with any, and are either theists or atheists.

According to these data, religion remains important for a fairly stable segment of the population. However, since the 1960s, what has changed is the proportion of people who are ambivalent about religion.

	Adults		Teenagers	
	1975	2005	1984	2008
Attendance				
Weeklys	31%	25	23	21
Nevers	18	23	28	47
Identification				
Yes	91	85	88	68
No	9	15	12	32
Belief in God				
Theists	61	49	54	37
Atheists	6	7	6	16

Source: Project Canada Survey Series.

As some Canadians in the “ambivalent middle” have moved toward religion, observers – including myself – have suggested that a measure of “renaissance” and “revitalization” might be taking place.

As others in the “ambivalent middle” have moved away from religion, we have suggested that we are witnessing the latest manifestations of secularization.

More accurately, what has been emerging is polarization – two dominant postures toward religion.

Polarization is almost equally common among *women* and *men*.

Table 3.10. Polarization and Gender: Adults & Teenagers

	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFICATION		BELIEF	
	Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
ADULTS						
Females	25%	21	86	14	54	4
Males	25	25	85	15	45	10
TEENAGERS						
Females	21	47	70	30	38	14
Males	21	47	67	33	35	18

Sources: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008.

However, there are some notable variations by place of birth, regions of the country, and religious “families.”

Young people born outside Canada, along with those born here but with at least one foreign-born parent, tend to be slightly more religious than their Canadian-parent counterparts. Immigration in recent years has added vitality as well as numbers to the Canadian religious scene

Table 3.11. Polarization by Geographical Background: Teens

	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFICATION		BELIEF	
	Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Foreign-born	28%	37	76	24	51	10
Parents foreign-born	26	43	72	28	40	13
Canadian parents	17	52	64	36	32	20

Sources: Project Teen Canada 2008.

- Religiousness is most pronounced in the *Atlantic* region, along with *Saskatchewan* and *Manitoba*.
- *Ontario* and *Alberta* are characterized by similar levels of attendance and belief, with identification slightly higher in Ontario than Alberta.
- *Quebec* and *British Columbia* are characterized by similar low levels of weekly attenders. But Quebecers are much more inclined than people in B.C. to show up at least occasionally, and are far more likely to identify with a religion, notably, of course, Roman Catholicism. At minimum, a cultural attachment to faith remains strong.
- *Polarization* is most pronounced in *British Columbia*.

Table 3.12. Polarization and Region: Adults

	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFICATION		BELIEF	
	Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Atlantic	39%	16	92	8	63	4
Sask-Manitoba	36	13	83	17	61	4
Ontario	28	21	84	16	53	7
Alberta	27	27	77	23	54	8
Quebec	15	21	94	6	40	8
British Columbia	17	38	65	35	36	11

Sources: Attendance, belief - Project Canada 2005; identification - Statistics Canada 2001.

These findings challenge some long-standing stereotypes about religion in Canada. The infamous Bible Belt that has been ascribed to Alberta dating back to Premier “Bible Bill” Aberhart in the 1930s and 40s hasn’t really known much empirical support for quite some time; sociologist Harry Hiller argued back in the 1970s that the depiction never knew actual empirical support.²⁵ Now we see that Alberta has equal proportions of weekly and never attenders. Religiously and non-religiously, the province is closer to Ontario than Saskatchewan and Manitoba. For some time now, Canada’s “real” Bible Belt has been found in the Atlantic region.

“Beautiful B.C.” is without question the most secular province in the country. Yet it continues to have significant numbers of people who attend, identify, and believe.

One needs to be careful in assuming that polarization is not very common among people who identify with religious groups.

Can an Anglican be an atheist? Can a Baptist never attend church? Of course; our correlation matrix documents such common realities. The empirical question is how prevalent are these patterns?

- Polarization, as measured by attendance or belief, is least pronounced among *Conservative Protestants*, followed by *Catholics outside Quebec*. That said, 1 in 3 Conservatives are not weekly attenders, and 1 in 3 Catholics outside Quebec do not express unequivocal belief in God.
- Polarization is more pronounced among *Mainline Protestants*, *Other Faith* groups, and *Quebec Catholics*.
- However, it's also important to note that the percentages of people who occasionally attend or are ambivalent believers constitute majorities or near-majorities in the case of all three of these latter groups. At this point they are not lost to the groups. But they could go either way.

Figure 3.9. Attendance Polarization: Groups (%)

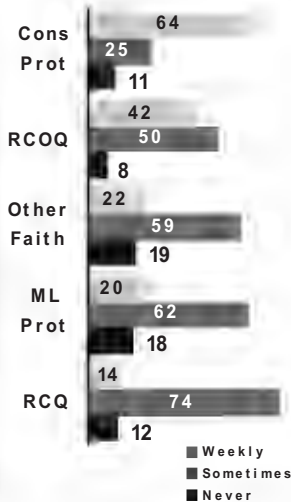
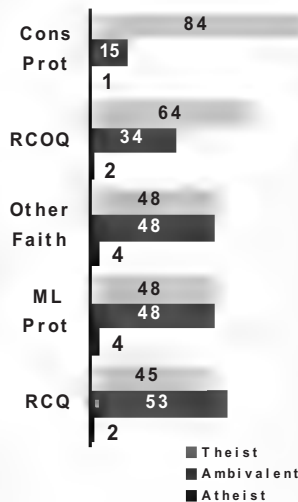


Figure 3.10. Belief Polarization: Groups (%)



The extensive data from the Project Teen Canada survey in 2008 serve as a reminder that one needs to be cognizant of the tremendous variations that exist within the very broad and heterogeneous “Other Faith” category.

- The survey shows that religiosity levels are particularly high among Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu young people.
- Patterns for teens identifying with Christian groups are similar to what we have just seen for adults. Conservative Protestant youth exhibit high levels of religiousness, followed in turn by Roman Catholics outside Quebec, Mainline Protestants, and Quebec Catholic teenagers.

Teenage Polarization in the Mosaic				
Service Attendance & Belief in God or a Higher Power				
	Monthly+	Never	Theist	Atheist
NATIONALLY	33%	47	37	16
Roman Catholicism	37	35	41	5
Outside Quebec	47	28	49	3
Quebec	16	51	27	13
Protestantism	68	18	66	4
Conservative	91	5	91	5
Mainline	44	29	44	29
Orthodox	43	24	63	1
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	69	15	78	2
Other World Faiths	46	30	66	7
Sikhism	82	7	57	2
Hinduism	61	12	52	4
Islam	56	22	83	2
Judaism	41	26	41	9
Aboriginal Spirituality	25	45	45	7
Buddhism	19	59	27	17
No Religion	7	79	9	38

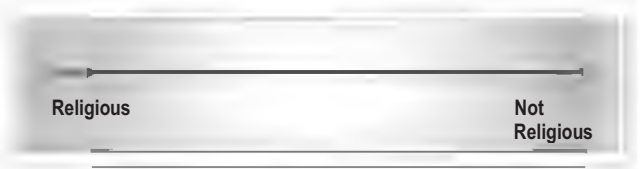
The Project Teen Canada 2008 national survey of more than 5,500 young people – including a special oversample of 500 Aboriginals attending band-run schools – makes it possible to look at teenagers by their religious and non-religious identifications. Such illustrations follow throughout the book.

These findings on differences by region and religious groups document the fact that the national polarization pattern clearly has some important variations.

What’s more, because life is dynamic and ever-changing, movement in both directions of “the polarization continuum” has been taking place and will continue to take place.

But overall, nationally-speaking, the two positions have become increasingly entrenched. Neither will disappear in the foreseeable future. What is at issue is the extent to which both will ebb and flow – grow or not grow.

Figure 3.11. The Polarization Continuum



The Global Situation

How unique is the Canadian polarization situation? The question is straightforward. The answer is not. It requires a global examination of religion – obviously a mammoth undertaking.

Fortunately, a number of invaluable poll resources for pursuing such a task have emerged recently.

- Among them is the World Values Survey, produced by a cooperative network of social scientists. It dates back to 1984 and has been repeated about every ten years. It now includes some 100 societies and 90% of the world’s population.²⁶
- Since 2005, Gallup has conducted worldwide polls that have included more than 140 countries.²⁷
- Global data have been generated through the International Social Survey Programme, whereby researchers from some 50 countries have included topical sections in their national surveys dating back to the mid-1980s.
- The Pew Research Center in the United States has carried out international surveys since 2001.²⁸

I again have to express my deepest appreciation to the Gallup organization, the World Values Survey researchers, the Pew Research Centre and the International Social Survey Programme for providing the rich and priceless data that make the following summaries, analyses, and conclusions possible.

Recently, an invaluable synthesis of the global survey work to date was produced by Tom W. Smith, the highly regarded survey director and prolific author at the National Opinion Research Centre in Chicago.²⁹ His comprehensive report for the Templeton Foundation was released in late 2009. It is entitled, *Religious Change around the World*.³⁰ The Centre describes Smith's report as "the most comprehensive analysis to date of global religious trends."

Looking at data for the United States, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Muslim countries, Smith concludes, "No simple generalization adequately captures the complexity and nuance of the religious change that has been occurring."³¹ He offers a number of key points in his summary.³²

1. On balance, the evidence indicates that the world, including the United States, has been moving in a secular direction. Modernization and education are associated with a tendency for religious beliefs and behaviour to decline. However, these correlations are neither overly strong nor uniform. They do not add up to simple confirmation of the secularization theory.
2. The patterns of religious decline are characterized by variation and diversity. In Europe, for example, secularization has continued. But overall changes are modest and less striking than differences between nations. In Eastern Europe, the collapse of Communist rule has seen religion rebound in some places but not in others. There is no uniform post-Communist pattern.
3. In many settings, there are clear elements of transformation in addition to decline. Still, on average, there has been "a secular tilt to religious change."
4. All that said, secularization is not inevitable. Religion exhibits resilience and the ability to rebound.

The three indicators of religiousness we have used to gauge polarization in Canada are also helpful in examining the prevalence of polarization around the globe. Of particular importance, an international reading enables us to explore some of the correlates of polarization worldwide.

It is easy to drown in all the numbers that can be presented. I consequently want to remind readers of something I invariably emphasize in presentations: I myself am not particularly interested in numbers; I am interested in ideas.

As a result, I want to present just enough numbers to allow us to get a good reading on religiousness around the world. Every country will not be included. However, I will provide information on my sources so that the statistics for many other countries of interest can be pursued.

Some Quick Bottom Lines

The three measures of religion – attendance, identification, and belief – provide an initial reading of the range in religiosity around the planet. *Salience* – religion being a part of one’s daily life – is also a valuable measure in making comparisons across groups. Worship attendance, for example, may not be equally valued. While cutting points are far from absolute, some general patterns are fairly clear.

- *Extremely high* levels of religiosity are found in settings such as Thailand, Nigeria, the Philippines, and India.
- A *second tier* of high religiousness is found in countries like Brazil, Iraq, Iran, and El Salvador.
- A *third tier* includes Mexico, Italy, Poland, and the U.S.
- With the *four tier* – Israel, Spain, Canada, Germany, Russia, and Australia – polarization is more pronounced.
- In the *fifth tier*, religiosity is low. Countries include France, Britain, Hong Kong, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and China.

Some countries such as the Philippines, Pakistan, Greece, and the Ukraine are enigmatic, knowing high levels of salience, identification, and belief, yet relatively low levels of attendance. Japan is characterized by salience and identification levels that fall below belief and attendance.

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

	Saliency	ID	Belief	Attend
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
CANADA	41	84**	85	26
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

*The items: "Have you attended a place of worship or religious service in the past 7 days?"; % identifying with a religion; % neither agnostic nor atheist; religion is an important part of one's daily life.

Sources:

Attendance, saliency - Gallup WorldView 2010; ID - World Factbook, CIA 2010; *Dentsu 2006, **varied sources (e.g., attendance for China = WVS, ID for Canada = 2001 census); Belief: computed from the World Religion Database in Smith 2009:284-287.

Overall, global variations in religiousness are readily evident. I leave it to readers to draw their own specific cut-off points depending on the importance one gives to each of the four religiosity measures.

Generally speaking, religion is viewed as personally important by higher percentages of women than men in many national instances, including Canada. The gender differences are predictably smaller in settings where levels of religiousness are very high, such as Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia.

That said, it is not quite so readily evident as to why pronounced gender differences in the importance accorded religion are found in a fairly large and diverse number of settings. Among them are places where religious identification is high – Honduras, Peru, Brazil, and Poland, but also settings where identification is much lower, including the Ukraine and Russia.

Come to think of it, we still haven’t really answered the gender difference question well with respect to the U.S. and Canada. Maybe it’s nurture, maybe nature – maybe neither.

Table 3.14. Identification and Religion’s Personal Importance by Gender: Select Countries

	ID	Women	Men
Nigeria	99%	92	92
Pakistan	99	91	91
Honduras	99	81	63
Turkey	99	69	60
Peru	97	76	63
Indonesia	96	95	95
Brazil	93	82	69
Poland	92	46	24
United States	84	66	52
Mexico	84	66	46
CANADA	84	37	23
Italy	82	37	17
United Kingdom	77	35	30
Germany	75	25	17
Ukraine	58	42	26
France	57	12	9
Russia	52	21	6

Source: "Global gender gaps," Pew Research Center 2004.

Assessment

Canada is experiencing a growing level of religious polarization. As such, we stand in contrast to settings that are characterized by both religious and secular monopolies. We most closely resemble countries such as the Ukraine, Germany, and Australia.

Some of Canada's long-established groups, led by the United Church, Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec, have been losing significant ground. The sizes of the two Protestant groups have been shrinking due to declining immigration additions that have not been offset by the retention of their children. Adding to such problems is the fact that they are characterized by considerable polarization re: involvement and belief. In Quebec, Catholic identification remains strong. But, like their Mainline counterparts, Quebec Catholics are highly polarized when it comes to both participation and belief.

Given their aging demographics, it is no exaggeration to say that the United and Anglican denominations are in the midst of serious numerical crunches that are having daunting human and financial resource implications.³³ The former is said to be closing one church a week, and has "shuttered" 400 in the past decade.³⁴ It makes old ministries difficult to sustain, new ministries difficult to implement.

As for the Catholic Church in Quebec, it knows the luxury of people who continue to think they are Catholics. However, greater involvement and greater commitment to the Church and faith remain highly elusive.³⁵

The importance of documenting the reality of religious polarization in Canada and elsewhere does not end with simply getting a clearer understanding of what is happening to religion here and in the rest of the world.

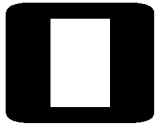
The far more significant question that potentially is of interest to just about everyone is the question of consequences – the implications for the quality of personal and collective life, starting with the ability of people who are religious, and those who are not, to co-exist.

To these important questions we now want to turn.

4 Polarization & Pluralism

*"Our image is of a land of people with many differences...
but a single desire to live in harmony."*

-Pierre Elliott Trudeau



OUR Canadian mosaic is supposed to encompass pretty much everything imaginable. What started out as a cultural mosaic with Pierre Trudeau's unveiling of the federal government's multiculturalism policy in the House of Commons in 1971 has given birth to a multi-everything psyche in Canada.

As discussed earlier, the multiculturalism infant left its racial and cultural group cradle soon after it was born. In the course of growing up over the past several decades, it travelled across the country, visiting our moral, religious, family, educational, and political spheres. Pluralism is enshrined in our minds and institutions. We now have multiple mosaics in virtually every area of Canadian life.¹

Pluralism's familiar emphases consist of tolerance, respect, appreciation for diversity, and the insistence that individuals be free to think and behave according to their consciences. Ours is a society in which just about everything within the limits of the law and civility is possible.²

Great principles. What's more, they have been increasingly realized in Canada since the 1960s.

However, having faced some monumental challenges to pluralism in areas such as language, race and ethnicity, gender, Aboriginal issues, sexual orientation, disabilities, and age, one of the biggest challenges has been emerging in recent years – religion.

In fact, concern about the difficulties in accommodating different religions – notably Islam – prompted the *Globe and Mail* to revisit the merits of multiculturalism as a whole in a series of articles in late

2010. The headline of an October editorial declared that the time has come to “Strike multiculturalism from the national vocabulary.” The editorial called for replacing the term multiculturalism with pluralism, and refocusing the debate on the concept of citizenship with responsibilities.³

Then there’s the question of whether there is an alleged “religious right” emerging that could impose theocratic government in Canada – according to Marci McDonald.⁴ The argument is provocative but precarious: just 44% of evangelicals identify with the Conservative Party; so do 32% of Mainline Protestants, 23% of Catholics outside Quebec, and 20% of people who identify with other faiths.

Two decades ago, in my book, *Mosaic Madness: Pluralism Without a Cause*, I questioned the value of a visionless coexistence that emphasized the virtues of differences over commonalities. “If what we have in common is our diversity,” I asked, “do we really have anything in common at all?”⁵ I argued that we needed to transcend our mindless relativism, interact with each other and determine what is better and best from our rich body of cultural options. In that way, I maintained, we could realize Pierre Trudeau’s goal of creating “a richer life for us all.”

For the record, the book was a bestseller. But in practice, few people seemed to listen. With religion, rather than race or ethnicity the key issue, they are listening now.

Debates about things like marriage commissioners and same-sex marriages, Christmas stories and preschool settings,⁶ serve as reminders – says journalist Susan Martinuk – that “there are only so many rights to go around. Giving more rights to one group inevitably means taking rights from another.”⁷ As Rex Murphy wryly notes, that can translate into something like the crucifix being ruled out and global warming beliefs being ruled in.⁸

The Tension of Coexistence

Social scientists have long documented various patterns of interaction. Almost a century ago, two very influential sociologists at the University of Chicago, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, drew attention to what they called “the four

great types of interaction” – competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation.⁹

They maintained that as groups relate to each other, the dominant forms of interaction pass through these four stages. Those stages have been readily evident in Canada.

Construction of the Mosaic

One of the hallmarks of Canada has been the historical effort to create and sustain a flourishing nation built on diversity.

In the beginning, the country’s central cultural-group dilemma was how to create one nation comprised of descendants from Britain and France.¹⁰ A subplot was how to incorporate increasing numbers of people arriving from other parts of the world. The Aboriginal host population that was forced to share the land with all these uninvited newcomers initially was not given a major part in the unfolding national drama.

One by one, the country’s diverse parts – like varied mosaic tiles – have been assembled in the mosaic art piece.

Quebec. As late as the 1950s, Anglophones and Francophones existed as “two solitudes” occupying separate geographical and cultural turfs. They shared no common vision and no consciousness of kind – two traits that are indispensable to the existence of group life.¹¹

Therefore one of the first major tasks in nation-building began to take place as the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism released its seven-volume report between 1965 and 1972. That task was resolving the fundamental question of how Quebec and the rest of Canada could exist as a nation.¹²

The Commission reported that Canada was in the throes of a major crisis that called for convincing Quebecers that they could experience equality and mutual respect with the rest of the country. Francophones in that province were experiencing considerable linguistic, economic, and occupational inequities in both the public and private sectors.¹³

As a consequence of “The B & B Report,” it was decreed that Canada had two founding peoples – the British and the French. The Official Languages Act of 1969 declared that Canadians were free to live out life in either of the two official languages – English or French. Federal and provincial initiatives were escalated to transform life in Quebec.

Such efforts hardly put an end to division between Quebec and the rest of the country. But they were an important start in breaking down the two solitudes.

Ethnicity and Race. Ethnicity was once a very divisive variable. In large part it was related to the widespread belief in British cultural superiority. It also was the consequence of nationalistic rivalries in Europe that were further fuelled by two major World Wars prior to 1950. Some Canadians felt sufficiently stigmatized that they changed first names and surnames in Anglo directions, such as “Martinuk” becoming “Martin” and “Jozefa” becoming “Jo.”

For some time now, tensions between ethnic groups have subsided, first in the form of accommodation stimulated by official multiculturalism, and in recent decades taking the form of considerable assimilation.

Racial divisions persisted much longer. Tolerance that would contribute to full participation in Canadian life – rather than acceptance – seems to have been the short-term goal of Canada’s multiculturalism policy.

Racial discrimination has had a long history in Canada. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries English-speaking Canadians, as with many people throughout the Western world, shared the belief that Anglo-Saxons represented the forefront of biological evolution. The most desirable immigrants were British and American, followed by Western and northern Europeans, then other Europeans. Near the bottom of the pecking order were the pacifist religious sects – Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobors. Last were Blacks and Asians.¹⁴

The result was that people in the latter categories experienced severe discrimination in gaining entrance to Canada and finding jobs and equitable pay. In some jurisdictions, they were not allowed to join unions, be elected to public office, or vote. World War II saw some 22,000 Japanese Canadians removed from the Pacific coast and relocated to the B.C. interior and other provinces. As for Jews, historian Howard Palmer summed up a national tragedy with this poignant line: “Canada closed its doors to Jewish immigrants at the time when they desperately needed refuge from Nazi persecution in Europe.”¹⁵

In the last three decades or so, partly as a result of multiculturalism ideals and initiatives, racial barriers have been coming down. One tangible indicator is the large increase in the acceptance and incidence of interracial marriages.

The marginalizing of Aboriginals that was so obvious in the B & B’s statement about the country’s “founding peoples” has by now been widely recognized. There have been lots of apologies, lots of programs, and considerable amounts of money invested in improving the lives of First Nations peoples. Their long-standing experiences with severe poverty, poor health, inadequate education, and a wide range of additional severe personal and social problems – notably crime, violence, alcoholism, drug abuse and suicide – no longer are escaping national notice.¹⁶

What still is required are effective responses that can elevate life for larger numbers of Aboriginals. There seems to be a particular lack of clarity with respect to what it is that the majority of First Nations peoples want – beyond the meeting of vital immediate needs. What is their vision or visions? Life on reserves? Life off reserves? Involvement in the broader regional, national, and global economies?

But the desire for positive coexistence clearly is in place.

Gender. Adjustments also needed to be made to ensure that women could participate fully in Canadian life. Competition and conflict stages have been apparent.

Between the 1860s and 1960s, women contributed generously to Canada's social life. For their efforts they were rewarded by being treated first as noncitizens and later as second-class citizens.¹⁷

At different points in time women were not allowed to retain property or control their own finances. They couldn't vote in any province before 1916 or vote federally until 1918. It took until 1929 for women to be declared "persons" and therefore eligible as full citizens to hold any public office. Quebec, nonetheless, withheld the provincial vote from women until 1940. Comparatively, women received voting privileges in the United States in 1920, in Britain in 1928, and in Japan in 1945.¹⁸ It took until 1957 for a woman (Ellen Fairclough) to be appointed to the federal cabinet and 1989 for a woman to become the head of a major national party (the NDP's Audrey McLaughlin). In 1993, Kim Campbell became the first female Prime Minister – albeit on an interim basis; due to summer and election timing, she never sat in Parliament as PM.

Occupationally, women were expected to marry and stay home, with employment for women restricted primarily to those who were single or financially disadvantaged. They typically were hired last, fired first, and paid less.¹⁹ Education for women was geared primarily to preparing them for marriage and family life, and did little to contribute to vocational flexibility. By 1960, only about one in four university students were women, with most enrolled in nursing, home economics, and education programs.²⁰

Women also were excluded from a variety of roles in organizations, and even from the organizations themselves. So-called "women's tasks" and even blatant "No Women" signs summed up the common organizational story.

In response to significant lobbying by women's groups, a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was established in 1967. In late 1970 its findings were tabled in the House of Commons. Issues included equal pay for work of equal value, family law, educational opportunities, access to managerial positions, birth control, maternity leave, and daycare.

Today considerable progress toward gender equality has been made. There also has been a significant shift in public attitudes. As early as the mid-1980s, sociologist Monica Boyd could write, "Although vestiges of traditional attitudes persist, Canadians are becoming more egalitarian in their attitudes and opinions about women and women's issues."²¹ Our Project Canada surveys show that the equality of women is now a given for the vast majority of people across the country. What is at issue is the extent of its realization.

Some Other Mosaic Pieces. As attention has been drawn to other people who are facing barriers to full participation in Canadian life, the mood and inclination of governments and the public have moved towards inclusion.

For example, legislation and tangible initiatives have been put in place to respond to the needs of Canadians with varied disabilities. Children who have learning difficulties, individuals with physical limitations – including people who are blind, deaf, and disabled – have been identified as requiring assistance that will enable them to share in life as fully as possible.

Age discrimination has been given increasing attention in recent years. One specific issue that has been addressed is mandatory retirement. The practice has been eliminated in many jurisdictions and job situations. More and more Canadians have the option of continuing to be employed as long as they literally are willing and able to hold down jobs. As more and more people remain productively employed past sixty-five, the new retirement norm may become seventy – maybe even seventy-five.

Despite the fears of some observers that people working past sixty-five would work past their prime productive years and block the occupational gates for younger people, the early data suggest that there are few downsides to opting for a system of voluntary retirement.

Those who opt for retirement frequently are the least productive or least enthralled with their jobs. They are happy to move on. Those who stay longer seldom continue to work beyond the age of 70. With mortality apparent, many express the desire to do other things while they can.

A Mosaic With Limits?

Resistance to people participating fully in Canadian society because of their race or ethnicity, their gender, disabilities, or age have all been seen as discrimination. The reason is that such characteristics are variables over which individuals have no control. As such, discrimination has been a justice issue that has called for corrective responses.

However, this is not to say that, in the minds of the populace, everything goes.

Sexual orientation, for example, is an issue that has often received a fairly negative response from a large number of people. As gays and lesbians have attempted to pursue careers, employment, parenthood, positions of ministry, and marriage, they have known considerable support, but also considerable opposition.

At this point in Canadian history, a number of adjustments – legal and otherwise – have been made to bring about a measure of accommodation. But full assimilation into Canadian life in the sense of full integration and acceptance is still very much the proverbial “work in progress.” This tile still doesn’t quite fit in.

One of the major reasons for the resistance, of course, is that many Canadians do not view homosexuality as *an involuntary attribute* like race or gender, but rather as *a voluntary moral decision*. One is obliged to accept attributes. But one is not obliged to accept moral choices.

Consequently, it's predictable that some of the most vociferous opposition to gay equality has come from the primary "morality makers" – religious groups.

As such, the pitch of the debate has often escalated, emotions have run high, and the mood has not always been particularly civil or compassionate. After all, for many, this is not just a debate about lifestyles. It is a debate about what is and what is not of God.

The debate has underlined the difficulty that any society has in sustaining unity while at the same time satisfying highly diverse segments of the population.

The goal expressed by Pierre Trudeau – "of a land of people with many differences but a single desire to live in harmony"²² – is severely tested when the players involved are identified, not by their ethnicity or gender or age, but by their religion.

When a specific issue arises that involves highly divergent moral interpretations – in this case homosexuality – clearly the only resolution lies with accommodation. In the case of gay marriage, for example, federal legislation was passed that made it legal. However, religious communities are not obliged to carry out gay marriage ceremonies.

The bigger question goes beyond specific moral issues such as same-sex marriage or abortion. In a Canada that is characterized by growing polarization along religious lines, the question is how to achieve harmony between those who are religious and those who are not.

But things get even more complicated when religious groups assert teachings that fly in the face of pervasive norms and even laws. When the numbers of people involved with those groups are relatively small – such as has been the case with groups like Doukobors or Jehovah's Witnesses – they can be labelled deviant, dismissed as "sects" and "cults," and have minimal impact on society as a whole.

However, when their numbers are sizable, such as is the case with Muslims in Canada, the potential for conflict with everyone else – including conflict with those of other religious persuasions – is very high.

So it is that the range and the elasticity of Canada's mosaic is being severely tested in the case of religion.

- One issue is polarization involving those who are religious and those who are not.
- A second critical issue is the polarization between some groups – notably Muslims but also other groups that sometimes take on culture, such as evangelicals – and everyone else.

It all adds up to tension within the hallowed mosaic.

The tension can also be expected to be accompanied by a fair amount of passion. On the religious side of things, when one believes that he or she has “seen” or “heard” the gods, such a sense of revelation carries with it a measure of authority and urgency.

Conversely, the non-religious onlooker can respond to faith claims with scepticism, cynicism, and derision.

When the person with faith – complete with conviction, earnestness, and a missionary spirit – meets the person with no faith, the end result is seldom conversion. It may be martyrdom. Conversely, the person with no faith who belittles and ridicules the person with faith runs the risk of finding that such a devotee does not necessarily subscribe to the guideline of “turning the other cheek.”

Religious polarization may well test Canada's mosaic limits.

A Canadian Reading

In early 2009, ads approved by the Toronto Transit Commission ran on buses and trains declaring, “*There's Probably No God.*” The ads were sponsored by the Freethought Association of Canada, and had debuted in Britain a few months before. The lead ad line was followed with a second in smaller print: “*Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life.*”



About two weeks earlier, in the wake of the British campaign, the United Church of Canada had got into the act with a national print and online ad campaign of its own that included a prominent ad in the *Globe and Mail*. The original atheist ad lines were cited, with two new lines added, resulting in a choice-like format: “*There’s Probably A God*” followed by the same, “*Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life*” second line. People were invited to “Join the discussion at wondercafe.ca,” a United Church website.



The denomination’s moderator at the time, David Giuliano, explained that the ad was “directed not at ourselves, but rather at people who might be questioning the reality of God. Our intention,” he said, “is to invite people who are questioning to join us in conversation about their beliefs. Hence the tagline, ‘Join the discussion at wondercafe.ca.’”²³

Keith Howard, the executive director of the campaign known as *Emerging Spirit*, commented, “God has been co-opted by many causes, from football to starting wars, and I think it is time we had a really good discussion about what we mean by God, what God’s priorities might be and how that impacts how we live our lives.”²⁴

For his part, Freethought Association president Justin Trottier said that he welcomed what he called the “cheeky” United Church counter-ads, adding, “That’s what this is all about: dialogue.”²⁵

The “war of ads” was greeted with enthusiasm by the media and given extensive exposure across the country. The dialogue between spokespeople for the two sides was friendly, positive, and polite. Appearing together on the CTV national news, for example, Howard and Trottier were both buoyant and congenial. It seemed apparent that theists and atheists could easily co-exist – even become the closest of friends.

Not everyone was enthralled. In Calgary, colourful and controversial Roman Catholic Bishop Fred Henry commented, “If the benchmark is that [ads] should be non-offensive, I’m offended.” He suggested the ideal date to launch such a campaign would be April Fool’s Day.²⁶ Don Hutchinson of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada said that the posting of such ads meant “religion is welcome in the public square, and this is really good news.”²⁷

If such a public display of pleasantries between religious and non-religious people could be normative, we could be optimistic about the accommodation of religion and non-religion in Canada. We would be looking at mutual respect, courtesy, and calm. Atheists could be part of broader interfaith...err, intersomething dialogue.

As one of my favourite comedians used to put it, “If life were only like that.”

The ping-pong game was evident in the eastern U.S. as Christmas approached in 2010. A billboard outside the Lincoln tunnel sponsored by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights read, “You Know It’s Real: This Season Celebrate Jesus.” An American Atheists-sponsored billboard on the New Jersey side of the tunnel read, “You know it’s a myth. This season, celebrate reason!”²⁸ Hmmm.

In January of 2011, a second atheist-promoted ad began to be distributed across Canada. This time the slogan read, “Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence.” This ad was obviously more provocative, in that it went on to explicitly list “ALLAH, BIGFOOT, UFOs, HOMEOPATHY, ZEUS, PSYCHICS, CHRIST.” A longer version contained a far more detailed list of claimants.



Justin Trottier, now the national executive director of the sponsoring Centre for Inquiry, commented that the ads were not designed to offend religious Canadians but rather to “generate debate” about so-called extraordinary claims.

Trottier added, “We are not here to mock people who believe in these claims.”²⁹ The website for the Canadian branch of the Centre for Inquiry notes that the Centre “promotes and advances reason, science, secularism, and freedom of inquiry in all areas of human endeavour.”³⁰

Needless to say, one could anticipate that some of the responses would be a shade less cordial and light-hearted than the Trottier-Howard exchanges.

A Lutheran theologian based at the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, Ted Peters, has noted, “It used to be that atheists didn’t bother anybody. They simply stayed home from church on Sunday and avoided praying. The social impact was minimal. But now,” he says, a new breed of atheists is zealously crusading to liberate the world from the chains of religion.³¹ John Allemang of the *Globe and Mail* recently summed things up this way: “Proponents of atheism have found their comfort zone in the modern Western world, where penalties for infidelity are few but the residual sense of outrage is still strong enough to propel their attacks on a no-longer vengeful God to the top of the bestseller lists.”³²

The “new atheists” are passionate. And they are being widely read, seen, and heard.

Latent and Overt Conflict

The incident is well-known. In the spring of 2010, American commentator and author Ann Coulter, well-known for her conservative and controversial opinions, was scheduled to speak at three Canadian universities – Western, Ottawa, and Calgary. However, the Ottawa presentation was cancelled by organizers who felt there was a risk of physical violence.

Coulter is well-known for inflammatory comments against Muslims, liberals, and gays. Prior to her arrival in Ottawa, she had been warned by the university’s academic vice-president, “Promoting hatred against any identifiable group would not only be considered inappropriate, but could in fact lead to criminal charges.”³³

OK. If we are going to go after everyone who appears to be promoting hatred or hostility toward *any* identifiable group, fair enough. But we don't.

Listen to these diatribes...

- Author A has described the Roman Catholic Church as a “profiteering, woman-fearing, guilt-gorging, truth-hating, child-raping institution.”³⁴
- Author B has written that “all religious belief is sinister and infantile,” and that “religion multiplies suspicion and hatred.” He goes so far as to say that “religion poisons everything.”³⁵ Further, in 2006 he told a Toronto audience that he is in favour of decriminalizing hate speech – that free speech must include hate speech.³⁶
- *The Sunday Times* in London reported that these same two authors were part of a movement to see Pope Benedict XVI arrested for international crimes against humanity when he arrived in England for a September 2010 visit. Author A denied that he wanted to slap the cuffs on the pontiff personally, but credited the idea of the arrest to his “fellow deity slayer,” Author B.³⁷

Now, I'm not particularly thin-skinned, but the things these two authors have said about religion generally and the Catholic Church specifically are a tad hateful. A cursory peek at what someone like Sam Harris has to say about religion shows their animosity is far from unique.

Note that both of these authors have been treated as superstar celebrities in Canada – a notch above rock stars. The media have enthusiastically promoted their ideas. They are invited to our campuses. They are asked to speak to our organizations. Even debate former Prime Ministers. They are, of course, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

The fact that few people seem to either notice or care about what they have to say about religion – and usually Christianity more specifically – points to the reality of religious polarization in Canada. If either Dawkins or Hitchens said such things about just about any other category – Aboriginals, Asians, gays, or women – or were as direct in demeaning Jews, Muslims or, heaven forbid, atheists, there would be a major uproar.

But there is scarcely a detectable whimper. Even the religiously devout in Canada are incredibly blasé. Connie denBok, a United Church minister in Toronto, has summed things up this way: “There is a pathological politeness among Canadian church people,” who tend to keep silent in the face of attacks against belief in God.³⁸ I would add, “as well as attacks on themselves.”


Such hostile critiques, rather than immediately making people wince – like a distasteful racist or sexist joke at a banquet – seem to be welcomed by a sizable number of people who are not religious and are not sympathetic with organized religion.

The very different responses to Ann Coulter and the two celebrity atheists are not aberrations. They are consistent with our survey findings.

What Canadians Have to Say

The idea that racial and cultural diversity is good for Canada is scarcely in doubt at this point in our history. Large majorities of people who both value and do not value religion endorse the idea. The principle of diversity being a virtue is not in doubt.

Table 4.1. Views of Diversity by Religion
“Racial and cultural diversity is a good thing for Canada” (Agree)

		ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFICATION		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Adults	94%	85	79	81	86	83	78
Teens	94%	81	76	80	79	82	72


Source: Project Canada 2005.

What’s more, if we ask people if they are willing to at least tolerate how others choose to live their lives, almost everyone indicates that they are. Canadians may not be excited about what other people do and think. But at least they are willing to be accommodating, in the Park and Burgess sense.

So far so good. Things just might work.

However, when we pin people down on specifics, we find that a few cracks begin to appear in the mosaic.

Table 4.2. Tolerance: Adults
“Generally-speaking, I am willing to at least tolerate how people choose to live their lives”

	ATTENDANCE	IDENTIFICATION		BELIEF	
	Weekly Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
94%	95 94	94	97	95	98


Source: Project Canada 2005.

Religion’s Contribution. In asking Canadians for their assessment of religion’s impact in Canada and in the world as a whole, we would expect that their responses would vary by their religious inclinations. No surprise there.

However, what is interesting to note is the magnitude of the differences.

- Just over 6 in 10 teenagers feel that *“organized religion’s overall impact on life in Canada is positive.”* They are not quite as upbeat when they look elsewhere: some 5 in 10 offer a positive assessment of religion’s influence on the *rest of the world.*
- The assessments of religion both nationally and globally differ fairly dramatically by all three religiosity measures. In the case of belief, for example, only about 3 in 10 teens who are atheists feel religion is having a positive impact in Canada, with the figure dipping to 2 in 10 for what’s happening globally.

Table 4.3. Attitudes Toward Religion: Teenagers

		ATTENDANCE		I.D.		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Organized religion’s overall impact on life in Canada is positive	63%	82	48	71	45	78	29
Organized religion’s overall impact on the world as a whole is positive	48	69	35	56	30	65	21

Sources: Project Teen Canada 2008.

In the case of adults, on the surface it appears that Canadians are pretty much split 50-50 on whether or not the decline in religious participation has had a negative impact on the quality of life in the country. They also seem to be almost equally divided on whether or not our society would be better off if people attended services more often.

Table 4.4. Attitudes Toward Religion: Adults

	ATTENDANCE			I.D.		BELIEF	
	Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist	
The decline in participation in org. religion has had a significant negative impact on life in Canada	50	81	30	57	15	58	17
Our society would be better off if people attended religious services more often	44	86	12	51	4	65	5

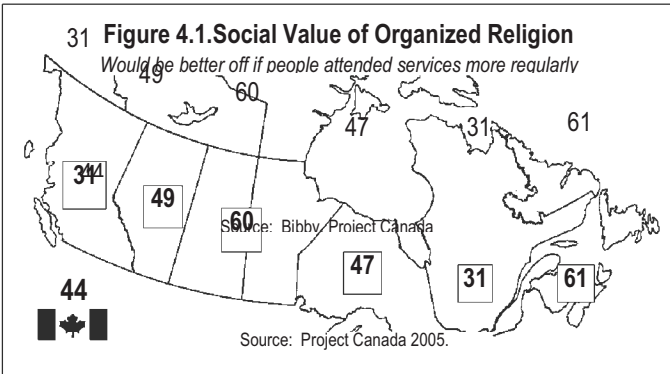
Sources: Project Canada 2005.

It's almost as if the attitude of many never attenders is that something has been lost, but what's done is done. The past is the past. There's no turning back. There may even be a feeling that it's simply too late, summed up by the line in the old love song: *"It makes no difference now."*

- A closer look by religiosity reveals that adults who are religious are much more likely than others to think the participation decline has had a negative effect on Canada.
- What perhaps is surprising is that 30% of those who never attend services share the perception of life being adversely affected by the attendance drop.

It is worth noting that, while some people who are not religious think the decline in participation has been detrimental, very few of them maintain that we'd be better off as a society if people attended services more often.

They include only 12% of people in the "never attend" category – far below the 30% who think our quality of life has suffered.




Religion's Place. Canadians who are religious and those who are not differ considerably in their perceptions as to the appropriate place of religion in life, especially by attendance. When asked to respond to the question, “Ministers should stick to religion and not concern themselves with social, economic, and political issues,” only about 2 to in 10 weekly attenders agree, versus 6 in 10 people who never attend services.

People also differ a great deal in their perceptions of the power that religious groups have in Canadian life. Some 6 in 10 of those who are not religious by any of our three measures think groups have “too much power.” In contrast, only 1 in 10 weekly attenders and about 2 in 10 people who identify with a tradition or believe in God hold such a view.

Confidence in Groups. Predictably, Canadians also differ considerably by involvement in the confidence they express toward religious group leaders. Seven in 10 weekly attenders indicate they have high levels of confidence, with that level dropping to 1 in 10 for adults and 2 in 10 for teens who never attend services. Differences are smaller by belief and identification.

Table 4.5. Attitudes Toward Leaders & Power by Religiosity

		ATTEND		I.D.		BELIEF	
		Week	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
ADULTS							
Ministers should stick to religion and not concern themselves with social, economic, and political issues	47%	23	61	45	61	35	69
Religious groups have too much power in our nation's affairs	29	10	55	23	59	19	68
Have “great deal” or “quite a bit” of confidence in religious orgs	34	70	9	38	6	52	8
TEENS: confidence religious orgs	39	75	19	50	16	65	10

Sources: Project Canada 2005 & Project Teen Canada 2008.

In recent decades, considerable attention has been drawn to the issue of clergy abuse, particularly involving Roman Catholic clergy.³⁹

Just before Easter in 2010, the criticisms of the Catholic Church escalated on what seemed to be a world-wide level. The furor began with a report in the *New York Times* on March 12th headlined, “Abuse scandal in Germany edges closer to Pope.” The story linked the 1980 reassignment of a priest accused of molesting boys to the current Pope when he was in charge of the Munich archdiocese – an accusation denied by the archdiocese.

The story was given extensive news coverage. Moreover, it was seized on by anti-religion commentators such as Christopher Hitchens. He wrote a column for *Slate* in which he accused the Pope of “obstructing justice on a global scale” and said his “whole career has the stench of evil.” Respected Catholic commentator John Allen called for “true friends of the Pope” to press for full disclosure.

On March 24, the *New York Times* published a second article, accusing top Vatican officials – including the future Pope – of not defrocking a priest in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee who had molested as many as 200 deaf boys.

Understandably, the report created another global media firestorm. Additional stories, such as an Associated Press release linking the Pope to a mid-80s abuse case in the Diocese of Oakland, further fuelled the furor.⁴⁰

Some of the responses emanating from Rome and elsewhere did little to contribute to calm. In a Good Friday homily, the Pope’s personal preacher likened the tide of allegations about cover-ups to the “more shameful aspects of anti-Semitism.”⁴¹ The same day, Quebec City Archbishop Marc Ouellet, primate of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, accused media members of having “ulterior motives” in linking the Pope to the scandals.⁴²

Not everyone was defensive. That same Good Friday, the head of German’s Catholic bishops issued a statement, denouncing past failures in the Church’s handling of abuse cases.⁴³ Thomas Reese, a priest and Vatican expert based at Washington’s Georgetown University, commented, “You know, you wish that people in the Vatican had at least some idea of how what they say will be perceived by an audience outside of the Vatican clergy.”⁴⁴

On April 8th, eight days after Easter, the Vatican posted a new guide on its website that for the first time made public an explicit policy regarding reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities. Canadian bishops have been obligated to report child sexual abuse since 1992, when the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops published the booklet, *From Pain to Hope*. The booklet states, “Everyone has a duty to report sexual abuse.”⁴⁵

However, the very next day, the *Globe and Mail* released a story accusing the Vatican and Canadian Catholic officials of trying to keep secret a sex scandal in the mid-90s involving a priest in the Ottawa area.⁴⁶ The writer of the story, Tu Thanh Ha, noted that the situation was in direct conflict with the Church’s sexual abuse policy.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement the same day, saying it was unable to comment on correspondence dating back to 1993. It did, however, reaffirm its policy of disclosure, adding that it remains “even more determined than ever to provide children with a safe environment.”⁴⁷

When Pope Benedict made his fall 2010 four-day visit to England and Scotland amidst highly-publicized opposition and speculation that he would be greeted with considerable hostility and even violence, the trip went off without serious incident.⁴⁸ Protesters were readily outnumbered by supporters, and the visit was declared “an overwhelming success” by the government’s organizer. Catholic officials not only were pleased, but were speaking of the possibility of a “Benedict bounce” – a subsequent positive effect on the Church.⁴⁹

In view of the extensive attention that has been given to scandals that in Canada included the 1989 disclosure of the Mount Cashel orphanage travesties and the negative information about residential schools that has involved the indictment of a number of Protestant groups as well as Catholics, the obvious question is what impact has all this had on Canadians’ confidence in religious groups?

The initial answer is: a lot. While confidence in Canadian religious leaders slipped somewhat from the mid-1970s to the mid-80s, it dropped significantly specifically between 1985 and 1990.

However, despite the ongoing publicity given to scandals of various kinds, confidence in religious leaders has remained about the same since 1990.



What about participation? Are people staying away as a result of their waning confidence?" The short answer appears to be: "Not much."

An analysis of attendance patterns between the crucial 1985-90 period when confidence in leaders crashed reveals a surprising result: attendance levels remained remarkably stable, even in the Atlantic region. Many Canadians, led by Catholics, were upset with their leaders and, to varying degrees were disillusioned and demoralized.

Table 4.6. Confidence & Attendance: 1985-90*

	1985		1990	
	Confid	Attend	Confid	Attend
Canada	51%	26	37	23
BC	40	19	30	22
Prairies	51	23	33	22
Ontario	46	23	32	21
Quebec	54	27	48	23
Atlantic	74	42	40	41

*Confidence: "A Great Deal" or "Quite A Bit"; Attendance: Weekly
 Sources: Project Canada 1985 and Project Canada 1990.

But there were no signs that they were making a massive move toward church exits. The modest attendance decreases in no way matched the confidence level declines.

Despite all that happened, the prevalent thinking seemed to have been, “Some of the leaders have been messing up badly. But my faith and church are still important to me.”⁵⁰

The situation in the United States may be informative. By the mid-1990s, Catholic obedience to the Church’s weekly mass attendance requirement had faded to Protestant levels of about 45%.⁵¹ But in 2002-03, when attention peaked regarding sexual abuse in the Church, Gallup found that by February of 2003, Catholic attendance dipped to the lowest level the pollster had ever found.

However, in assessing the situation as of April 2009, the Gallup organization reported that Catholic attendance was essentially unchanged from 1995. “That’s an extremely important finding,” the pollster noted, “given the upheaval caused by the sexual abuse scandals.” While polling in 2002 and 2003 documented a decline, “attendance rebounded by the end of 2003 and has since remained on par with its pre-scandal level of about 45%.”⁵²

Table 4.7. U.S. Attendance: 1955-2005

Have attended a service “in the last seven days”

	Catholics	Protestants	
1955	75%	42	
1975	54	40	
1985	50	40	
1995	46	43	
2005	45	45	
			Dec 2001 46%
			Dec 2002 41
			Feb 2003 35
			Nov 2003 45

Sources: The Gallup Poll, January 6, 2004 & April 9, 2009.

The resiliency and outlook were verbalized recently by *Toronto Star* Sunday columnist Angelo Persichilli:

*I am a Catholic. Even though, I must confess, I’m not a good one. ...Pedophilia is a crime, and those responsible for that crime must be punished. But at the same time, I cannot approve of the politically motivated posturing over these crimes and the denigration of the entire institution of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church will eradicate pedophiles from its ranks. ...And today, I’ll go to mass.*⁵³

Comfort Levels. A standard item that I have used since the inception of the Project Canada surveys asks people how comfortable they think they would feel around a wide range of individuals.⁵⁴ They have been asked to put themselves in a situation where they encounter a person, and the only thing they know about the individual is a trait such as their race, religion, sexual orientation, or the fact they are an ex-convict or a person with AIDS. The question that has been put to them is, “*What do you think your immediate reaction would be?*” with the response options “*At Ease,*” “*A Bit Uneasy,*” or “*Very Uneasy.*”

- The most recent survey Project Canada survey found that some 85% of Canadians admitted they would feel uneasy around an *ex-convict*, with the figure coming in at approximately 50% for a person with *AIDS* and 25% for a *homosexual* – whether male or female. Anticipated uneasiness was consistently higher in each instance for religious people.
- In the case of the unknown individual being a *born-again Christian*, some 30% expressed uneasiness – with the levels around 50% for those who were not religious, and 20% for those religious by our three measures. The finding is reminiscent of the results of a U.S. national survey in 2007 where 44% of Americans reported that “Christians get on my nerves.”⁵⁵
- Around 20% of Canadians said they would feel uneasy in the presence of a *Muslim*, 5% if the person was a *Jew*. In both cases, differences by religiousness were small.

Table 4.8. Rapport and Religiosity

“Please put yourself in the situation of just having met a person and the ONLY thing you know about them is ONE of the following. What do you think your IMMEDIATE reaction would be?”

% Indicating Would Feel “A Bit Uneasy” or “Very Uneasy”

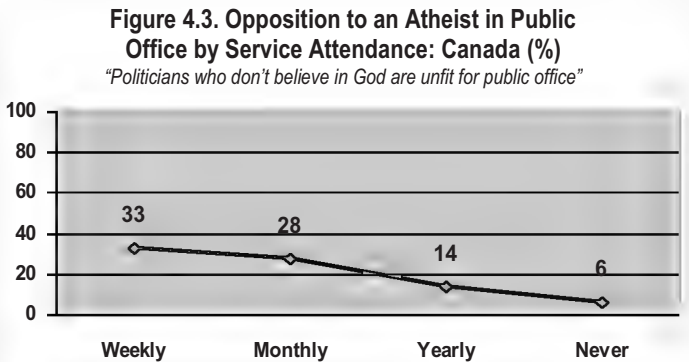
	86% ✚	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIF		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
An ex-convict	86%	86	82	87	82	86	81
A person with AIDS	49	52	42	53	30	52	37
A male homosexual	27	43	20	30	11	34	18
A born-again Christian	31	21	44	28	50	22	54
A Muslim	18	18	21	19	13	17	18
A Jew	5	4	6	5	4	5	8

Shading: difference of 10 percentage points or more

Source: Project Canada 2005.

Obviously, things don't just run one-way. In 2006, a national poll carried out as part of the global World Values Survey asked Canadians how they felt about an atheist holding public office. The wording was harsh: "*Politicians who don't believe in God are unfit for public office.*"

One in 4 (24%) people agreed, including 33% of weekly attenders and 6% of those who never attend services. The level was the same as it was in 2000.




Source: Canadian component of World Values Survey, 2006, 2006.

Comparable data for earlier times are difficult to locate. But there is little doubt views toward atheists holding down public positions of various kinds have softened with time. For example, our 1985 Project Canada survey found that 57% of Canadians felt atheists should be allowed to *publish* their views, but only 14% thought they should be allowed to *teach* their views. Homosexuals, incidentally, did not fare much better, at 54% and 14% respectively. Today, of course, such overt opposition would be a violation of human rights.

Speaking of homosexuals, as we have just seen, the majority of people who are religious, along with even larger majorities of people who are not religious, claim they would feel comfortable in their presence. A majority of Canadians, religious and otherwise, also say homosexuals are entitled to the same rights as everyone else.

That said, only a minority of weekly attenders say they approve of or even accept the idea of same-sex marriage. Attitudes are somewhat softer by identification and belief.

Table 4.9. Homosexuality and Religiosity: Adults & Teens



AGREE		ATTENDANCE		IDENTIF		BELIEF		
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist	
HOMOSEXUALS ARE ENTITLED TO THE SAME RIGHTS AS OTHER CANADIANS								
	81%	63	90	78	95	73	93	
SAME-SEX MARRIAGE								
Approve & accept	48	17	69	42	80	32	70	
Disapprove but accept	22	21	16	24	13	24	16	
Disapprove & do not accept	30	62	15	34	7	44	14	
TEENAGERS								
SAME-SEX MARRIAGE								
Approve & accept	47	23	57	40	62	29	61	
Disapprove but accept	26	26	25	28	22	28	21	
Disapprove & do not accept	27	51	18	32	16	43	18	

Sources: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008.

The posture on same-sex marriage among teenagers is fairly similar to adults – with the exception of weekly attenders being slightly more positive, and non-religious youth being somewhat more negative. The latter finding may be a tip-off on the fact that sizable numbers of non-religious teens have been recent arrivals in the “never, none, and not” categories of attendance, identification, and belief.

Significantly, teens with immigrant roots are more inclined than others to experience and endorse conventional family and sexual expressions.⁵⁶ As Valpy and Friesen recently noted, “On matters such as homosexuality, the role of women, sex education and religious instruction, immigrant religious groups are embracing debates that pit them against the majority public opinion.” They suggest that the result could be growing division, where “faith groups may find more common ground with one another than with secular institutions.” They add, there is a “growth of a kind of militant secularism among non-believers...that treats the religious as unenlightened or backward.”⁵⁷

***Canadian Youth Provide Some Preliminary Data
on Where Polarization is Most Acute.***

- Belief that religion's impact on the world is positive is highest among Conservative Protestants, Orthodox Christians, unspecified "Christians," Catholics outside Quebec, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.
- Conservative Protestant and Muslim teens are far less likely than others to approve of same-sex marriage.
- A slight majority of teens endorse the idea that all world religions are equally valid, led by Hindus and Buddhists. Conservative Protestants are disinclined to hold such a view.

**Teenage Polarization in the Mosaic
Religion & Morality**

	Religion's World Impact Is Positive	Approve of/ Accept Same- Sex Marriage	All World Religions Equally Valid
NATIONALLY	48%	73	60
Roman Catholicism	55	75	68
Outside Quebec	63	72	68
Quebec	37	79	68
Protestantism	62	51	40
Conservative	70	31	22
Mainline	50	75	61
Orthodox	67	54	68
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	72	52	41
Other World Faiths	57	67	67
Hinduism	72	72	89
Islam	64	45	59
Sikhism	63	61	70
Judaism	49	87	57
Buddhism	44	83	78
Aboriginal Spirituality	35	92	57
No Religion	30	84	60

The Global Situation

When we look at religious pluralism in worldwide context, some basic general patterns seem apparent in the midst of considerable complexity.

- Global data on religious identification, attendance, belief, and salience point to the fact that some countries such as Nigeria and Pakistan know the dominance of Islam and Christianity, and have very high levels of religiousness. In such settings, religion knows a *monopoly*.
- Countries including Canada and the United States know higher levels of *religious diversity*, as well as lower levels of practice and belief.
- In still other settings, such as Britain, Sweden, and France, religious identification, practices, and belief slip further. In these countries, indifference to religion and/or secularization is extensive, to the extent that, for purposes of categorization, we might think of them as being characterized by *secular monopolies*.
- Generally speaking, as countries move from religious monopolies to polarization to secular monopolies, the personal importance of religion decreases.

Table 4.10. Identification, Belief & Salience: Select Countries

	ID	Salience	Ctn	Muslim	Other	Indigenous
Religious Monopoly						
Pakistan	99%	92	<5	95	<5	<5
Philippines	99	96	90	5	<5	5
Nigeria	99	96	40	50	<5	10
Polarization						
United States	84	65	80	<5	<5	<5
Spain	84	49	80	<5	<5	<5
CANADA	84	42	80	<5	<5	<5
Secular Monopoly						
United Kingdom	77	27	70	<5	<5	<5
Sweden	75	17	70	<5	<5	<5
France	57	30	50	5	<5	<5

Sources: ID and salience, see Table 9.1; breakdowns derived from Factbook, CIA 2010.

As would be expected, in those settings where religious monopolies exist, people are more likely than their counterparts in other countries to feel that “most faiths” make a positive contribution to their societies.

That said, the differences in views concerning the positive contribution of religions tend to be fairly small between countries characterized by religious and non-religious polarization and those where secularity is dominant.

Relative to people in other countries, Canadians are positive about what religious groups bring to national life – not quite as positive as people in the U.S. or India or Africa, but not as negative as many people in a number of European settings.

What stands out about people in countries characterized by religious monopolies is not just their views about religion’s contribution, but also their views about truth versus relativity.

Table 4.11. Saliency and Positive View of Religion’s Role: Select Countries

Most Faiths Make a Positive Contribution to Society
(Scale of 5-1, Agree to Disagree)

	Saliency Contribution	
Religious Monopoly		
Senegal	98%	4.5
Pakistan	98	3.6
Ethiopia	91	4.2
Malaysia	95	4.2
India	79	4.1
Polarization		
South Africa	82	4.3
Italy	72	3.6
United States	67	3.9
Israel	50	2.8
CANADA	45	3.6
Germany	44	3.3
Belgium	37	3.3
Netherlands	33	2.9
Secular Monopoly		
United Kingdom	29	3.5
France	25	3.3
Norway	20	3.0

Sources: Computed from Gallup Coexist Index 2009:11-15.

- In settings characterized by a *religious monopoly*, the inclination is for people to see “one true religion” existing.
- As countries experience greater *religious diversity*, including having greater proportions of people with no religion – such as in Canada – the populace has a greater inclination to think of there being “many true religions.”
- In settings where *secular monopolies* exist, such as Sweden, there is a decrease in the belief in any one true religion, and a tendency either to relativize or dismiss religious truth altogether.

Table 4.12. Views of Religious Truth by Polarization

	One True Religion	Many True Religions	No True Religions	Totals
Religious Monopoly				
Pakistan	91%	9	0	100
Philippines	74	18	8	100
Nigeria	71	28	1	100
Polarization				
Spain	38	38	24	100
United States	22	73	5	100
CANADA	17	69	14	100
Secular Monopoly				
United Kingdom	13	68	19	100
Sweden	10	67	23	100
France	9	70	21	100

Source: Computed from Gallup International Millennium Survey 2001 as found in Smith 2009:278-279.

Again I would emphasize that I am talking about general patterns and broad strokes. When one is trying to synthesize global patterns, variations and exceptions seem to be everywhere.

Against the framework I have just offered, it is intriguing to examine some views that people in North American, Europe, and Asia have, for example, of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The data were collected by the Pew Global Attitudes Project and released in 2005.

- In countries where Islamic *monopolies* exist, attitudes toward Muslims predictably are positive. Those sentiments are somewhat more restrained toward Christians, with the exception of Lebanon. Attitudes toward Jews are extremely negative. In India, the dominance of Hinduism is associated with fairly positive opinions of Christians, somewhat less positive views of Muslims, and very negative attitudes toward Jews.
- In European and North American settings characterized by *polarization*, including Canada, there is a tendency for positive views of all three groups to be quite a bit higher than elsewhere.
- In those countries where *secular monopolies exist*, following years of Christian dominance, something of a “shadow effect” seems to contribute to very positive attitudes not only toward Christians, but also toward Jews and Muslims as well. In China, where all three groups have known a limited presence historically, favourable attitudes are low in each instance.

Table 4.13. Views of Christians, Jews, and Muslims: Select Countries

% Indicating They Have “Very” or “Somewhat” Favourable Opinions of Each Group

	Christians	Jews	Muslims
Religious Monopoly			
Indonesia	58	13	99
Jordan	58	0	99
Morocco	33	8	97
Pakistan	22	5	94
Lebanon	91	0	92
Turkey	21	18	83
India	61	28	46
Polarization			
United States	87	77	57
Poland	86	54	46
Germany	83	67	40
CANADA	83	78	60
Netherlands	83	85	45
Spain	80	58	46
Secular Monopoly			
Russia	92	63	55
United Kingdom	85	78	72
France	84	82	64
China	26	28	20

Source: Computed from Pew Global Attitudes Project 2005.

In commenting on their findings, the Pew Research Center notes that in most of Europe and North America, “pluralities judge some religions as more prone to violence than others, and those that do, mostly have Islam in mind,” while in “predominantly Muslim countries...most have Judaism in mind.”⁵⁸ But what is particularly noteworthy is that unfavourable attitudes tend to be lower in countries that do not have religious monopolies.

These findings suggest an important possible correlate of polarization: the accommodation necessary for co-existence is extended to diverse religious groups.

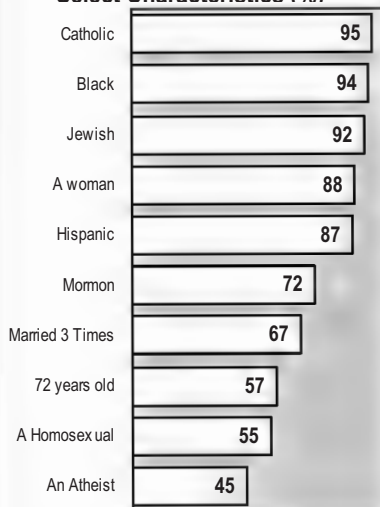
Atheists. What about the case with people who are not religious, such as atheists?

Somewhat surprisingly, atheists have not fared very well in a polarized setting such as the United States. Since 1958, Gallup has been asking Americans if they would be willing to vote for a well-qualified person for president who happened to be an atheist.⁵⁹

In 1958, 18% said they would. Twenty years later in 1978, the figure had increased to 40%. But Gallup's probe three decades later in 2007 found the figure had only increased to 45%.⁶⁰

In fact, Gallup reported that being an atheist was the most detrimental trait for a possible 2008 candidate – well ahead of religion, race, gender, marital status, age, and sexual orientation (so much for the 72-year-old's anonymity!).

Figure 4.4. Willingness to Vote for a U.S. Presidential Candidate by Select Characteristics (%)

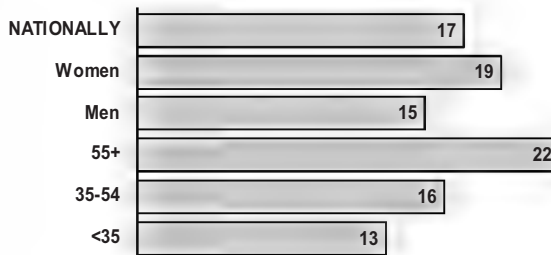


Source: Jones, Gallup, 2007.

Canadians do not seem to have anywhere near the same trepidation as Americans about atheists in a political office.

- In the 2006 World Values survey just noted, only 17% were opposed to atheists in office.
- Differences between women and men were fairly small.
- Opposition was higher for people 55 and older than others; that said, close to 80% of Canadians in that older age group were *not* opposed to atheists occupying public offices.

Figure 4.5. Opposition to an Atheist in Public Office by Gender & Age: Canada (%)



Source: Computed from World Values Survey 2005 Official Data File.
Data span 2005-2007; Canadian survey year is 2006.

When we look at attitudes around the world toward an atheist in public office, we once again see that acceptance of different worldviews – in this case atheism – increases as we move from settings where a religious monopoly exists to places where polarization is more typical.

As would be expected, in countries where secular monopolies exist, there is very little consternation about atheists holding public office. If anything, what would be more interesting to know is the extent to which people in such places are open to *religious* people holding office.

There is an opportunity to take just such a look. The same World Values Survey also asked respondents to respond to the item, “*It would be better if there were more people with strong religious beliefs in public office.*”

- Predictably, agreement is highest where religious monopolies exist, such as Iran.
- Yet, people in such countries sometimes are not quite as convinced – notably India and Iraq.
- In far more polarized settings, the pro-religious sentiment is much lower – 42% in the United States and only 23% here in Canada.
- However, the levels of agreement drop to just 12% in Finland, 6% in Norway, and 5% in Sweden.
- People in these latter three Scandinavian countries are not telling the pollsters that religious types are unfit for public office. But they are saying that their presence would not necessarily elevate life for everyone.

Table 4.14. Views of Atheists, Religious People in Public Office, and Atheist Populations: Select Countries (%'s)

	Atheists Unfit	Religious: % Pop Better Off	% Pop Atheists
Religion Monopoly			
Iraq	87	52	3
Iran	75	68	<1
Malaysia	64	58	2
Thailand	64	57	<1
Zambia	55	60	<1
Morocco	53	61	<1
Ethiopia	49	47	<1
India	49	38	2
Turkey	48	48	2
Polarization			
South Africa	49	59	1
Brazil	49	48	1
Ukraine	44	42	3
United States	32	42	4
Argentina	29	26	2
Mexico	26	37	3
Chile	26	36	3
CANADA	18	23	6
Viet Nam	18	25	24
Poland	17	29	1
Australia	13	14	10
Italy	12	18	3
Korea, Republic of	12	18	29
Germany	11	21	19
Spain	11	13	7
New Zealand	8	16	7
Secular Monopoly			
Finland	10	12	3
Sweden	3	5	17
Norway	4	6	7

Source: World Values Survey, 2005. Atheists in public office item: "Politicians who don't believe in God are unfit for public office." - % in table disagreeing.

Assessment

There is little doubt that Canadians are divided when it comes to their views of religion's impact on the country and the world. Confidence in leaders and comfort levels with individuals also vary considerably. Conversely, the perceptions that religious Canadians have of people like homosexuals and atheists are not always positive.

Media readings of public opinion show that there currently is a fairly high level of tension between at least some segments of the population and others. If people who are not religious were once feeling the wrath of those who valued religion, these days the situation has swung 180 degrees. Led by their "stars," atheists have never had such a collectively high profile. The aggressiveness of their attack on religion is as disconcerting in a pluralistic Canada as any attack on the non-religious in recent memory.

My cursory math at the extensive number of reader responses to the "future of religion" series in the *Globe and Mail* in December of 2010 led me to conclude that more than 95% were negative about religion, with comments frequently and even typically hostile and, yes, commonly hateful. An exaggeration?

Charles Lewis of the *National Post* wrote a blog in early December of 2010 on the heels of the Christopher Hitchens-Tony Blair debate in Toronto entitled, "Dear atheists: most of us don't care what you think."⁶¹ In it, he pulled no punches in pointing out that Blair essentially was "wasting a lot of words on a pompous ass whose main intellectual arsenal is sneering and using sarcasm" in joining Dawkins and others in being "out to prove how stupid religious people are." The debate between atheists and the religious, wrote Lewis, has no end in sight, and "seems to sell tickets." For certain types of intellectuals "it is like watching boxing without the blood." He concluded the piece by saying that the debate is useless "for one simple reason: most atheists do not have a clue what religion is about. Real faith is like real love. Faith is not up for debate."

Not the kind of passivity that riles Connie denBok.

Two weeks later, Lewis informed readers that nothing he ever has written in his three decades as a journalist “came close to the kind of negative reaction that this piece called forth.” He added, “Most of the 800 or so responses on the blog were either incredulous or hostile.”

In a response to Lewis, the Communications Officer for the Canadian Secular Alliance, Gary Reid had this to say: “Love may not be debateable, but it is also acknowledged to be blind. If Hitchens says or implies that people of faith are stupid, then he is wrong to do so and Mr. Lewis is justified in being offended. They may simply be blind.”⁶²

Such is the mood of the times.

Into the late December 2010 fray waded Irshad Manji, the articulate and outspoken, self-described borderline Muslim. She proposed, “in this, the season of giving,” that “we give novelty a chance” by moving the debate “beyond the stale polemics that insult everybody’s intelligence. She challenged atheists to make the effort to “honour” her thoughts as “a person of faith” and to allow her to reciprocate and engage in “a robust and respectful conversation.”⁶³

Hopefully we will find that the Canadian mosaic can handle such “robust and respectful” dialogue.

For all the consternation about conflict between those who are religious and those who are not, our survey findings actually point to a surprisingly positive conclusion.

Despite the variations in religiousness and non-religiousness, co-existence and acceptance – officially at least – seem to be the prevalent norms.⁶⁴

The all-Canadian approach to dealing with diversity, whereby we at least tolerate differences even when we do not necessarily approve of things different, is widespread.

In the immediate future, religious polarization appears to be something that can be subsumed under our pluralism umbrella. In fact, somewhat ironically, there is reason to believe that the religious polarization we are experiencing actually may be “a pluralism plus.” The very fact that Canada is characterized by neither a religious monopoly

nor a secular monopoly may be contributing to an enhanced capacity to handle religious and non-religious diversity in a way that is fairly unique in the world.

Balance may be best.

There is also hope that on a worldwide basis, religion can bring people together, rather than drive them apart.

In recent years, one of the more articulate, influential, and strident spokespersons for religion's potential to contribute to good has been the renowned religion scholar Karen Armstrong. A former nun and self-proclaimed "freelance monotheist," she has maintained that Christianity, Islam, and Judaism share a common basic bottom line that can be summed up in the proverbial Golden Rule – treating others the way we would want them to treat us. With the help of the TED Foundation, she unveiled a "Charter of Compassion" in November of 2009 that attempts to inspire "worldwide community-based acts of compassion."⁶⁵ As to what will evoke such compassion, she said in a March 2009 interview with journalist Bill Moyer, "Basically a sense of urgent need."⁶⁶

Another high-profile advocate of religion's potential to bring the world together is former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He has established a faith foundation that is working to bring about greater respect and understanding between world faiths. In a November 2010 interview with the *Globe and Mail*'s John Geiger, Blair had this to say: "I think the place of faith in the era of globalization is the single biggest issue of the 21st century. In terms of how we minimize the prospects of conflict and maximize the prospects of peace, the place of religion is essential." Blair added, "I think religious could be a civilizing force."⁶⁷

In Canada, the reality of growing religious polarization raises significant questions beyond sheer co-existence. What are the implications for individual Canadian lives and for Canadian life as a whole? As Valpy and Friesen have put it, the shift raises "profound questions about our social values."⁶⁸

To those important questions we now want to turn.

5 Polarization & Personal Well-Being

*"The mind is the source of happiness and unhappiness."
—Buddha*

THE debate is age-old. Does religion contribute to the elevation of life, or do individuals and societies function equally well – or even better – without it?

Virtually everyone has an opinion. Some of the wise men of old, such as Marx and Freud, felt that religion was an illusion that helped people cope with life and death. But it needed to be replaced with real-life solutions – such as altering social conditions in the case of Marx, and rational responses to the quest for happiness and desire for immortality in the case of Freud. People who have valued religious faith have been just as vocal in asserting that religion and spirituality have the potential to elevate life for individuals and collectivities – families, communities, nations, and the world.

These days the old questions about religion and well-being continue to be raised. Only the faces have changed.

So it is that critics such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris emphatically have decried what religion does to individuals and societies. Dawkins has written that faith isn't "just harmless nonsense" but can be lethal nonsense.¹ Hitchens is similarly hostile in asserting that all religious belief is sinister and infantile, going so far as to say that "religion poisons everything."² And Harris has declared that "religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict" and that "our enemy is nothing other than faith itself."³

Pretty strong claims.

Not to be outdone, people who are pro-faith are not exactly speechless. For decades, prominent American evangelist Billy Graham emphasized that if people wanted to experience true and lasting peace and joy, they needed “to find Christ.” The former head of the Anglican Church of Canada, Michael Peers, said in a 1996 interview during his time as Primate, “I think that if we were not around, the level of meanness would go way, way up.”⁵ The Archbishop for the Toronto Roman Catholic Archdiocese, Thomas Collins, told worshippers in his 2010 Easter homily, “It is the experience of the risen Lord down through the ages that has made the Church a beacon in a world of darkness, and does so to this day”⁶

If this were a public forum and at this point we moved away from the panelists and asked the audience to wade in, I suspect that the line-ups at the microphones would be huge.

Those speaking invariably would appeal primarily to personal experience, history, the biographies of others in making their cases for and against religion contributing to well-being.

Beyond personal and subjective observations, it is extremely important that we also have some solid research findings that help us to understand some of the correlates of polarization.

What I want to do is to draw on our extensive Project Canada national surveys of adults and teenagers to offer a uniquely Canadian reading on things that can contribute to the debate.

Those surveys provide us with the opportunity of hearing from more than 20,000 people, both older and younger, who have been conversing with us dating back to the mid-70s.

Of particular importance, the extensive information our participants have provided makes it possible for us to look at their thoughts, values, beliefs, and experiences from the standpoint of whether or not they personally value religion.

It also allows us to explore the important question of the impact of religious polarization on Canadians and Canada.

Obviously, the question of religion's impact on life and lives is a very broad one. What I want to do is focus on *four fairly basic areas* that I think provide a good introduction to a conversation about religion's possible influence.

I have no doubt that these findings and thoughts will be greeted with intense and passionate responses. I also have no doubt that readers will readily cite other important areas of life where religion's role needs to be explored. Hopefully, future research will be undertaken in response to the latter call.

The four areas? *Personal life, spirituality, interpersonal life, and life after death.*

The Universal Goal

The reality hardly requires research: everyone wants to be happy. The question, of course, is how to find happiness.

Sources of Happiness

Ask ten people and the ten answers will invariably revolve around sources such as relationships, family, money, health, careers, and leisure activities. One or two might mention religion. Those of us who like to try to synthesize things might maintain that it comes down to social, economic, physical, achievement, and spiritual factors, and the relative importance we place on each.

While all of us are walking data and, as such, are entitled to our own personal take on what brings us happiness, there have always been people who packaged themselves as enlightened experts who (a) know what happiness is and (b) know how it can be attained.

Religious and spiritual gurus have been and continue to be among the most prominent of such self-appointed and self-anointed experts. But in recent decades they have been joined by a surprising number of academics who include psychologists, economists, and jurists. Their specialty? "Happiness Research."

Chris Barrington-Leigh, an economist at the University of British Columbia, notes that the research dates back to the 1970s and an interest in understanding the relationship between national wealth and individual happiness. In a recent interview with the *National Post*, he pointed out that the purpose of the research is to “learn everything we can and pursue policies” that maximize life. “Measuring progress solely by growth in GDP,” he says, “is an outmoded idea because we have better ways to measure our social objectives.”

Barrington-Leigh suggests that the primary sources of happiness for Canadians include social factors – notably interaction with family, friends, and institutions.⁷

Some of the more popular recent works in the burgeoning field include *Stumbling on Happiness* (2006) by Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert, *The Politics of Happiness* by former Harvard President and law professor Derek Bok, *Happiness Around the World: The Paradox of Happy Peasants and Miserable Millionaires* (2010) by University of Maryland professor Carol Graham, and *The Happiness Equation* (2010) by Singapore economist Nattavudh Powdthavee.⁸

All four books document the precarious relationship between money and other alleged paths to happiness. To varying degrees, the authors explore policy implications.

Much publicity has been given to the fact that a commission appointed by French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, issued a report in late 2009, calling for new statistical tools to be developed to measure quality of life, including subjective and objective well-being.⁹ The report came about as a result of a growing sense that there are other elements to happiness than a country’s gross domestic product.¹⁰ In 2010 the British government followed suit, with Prime Minister David Cameron announcing the country will start measuring people’s psychological and environmental well-being.¹¹ Pressure is being placed on other countries, including Canada, to introduce similar measures.

Religion and Happiness

People of faith obviously feel that personal happiness – and, for that matter, marital happiness, and family and relational happiness more generally – is enhanced by religion, even if many increasingly distance themselves from that overt term. To varying degrees, religions call on people to give of themselves. There are costs involved that are sometimes substantial.

But in the end, one of the most basic rewards that religions promise is happiness. Apart from beliefs, a key component often appears to be social networks within congregations – an idea substantiated in an article by Robert Putnam and colleague Chaeyoon Lim published in late 2010 in the prestigious *American Sociological Review*.¹²

That said, religion obviously is not without competitors for attaining happiness. In the spring of 2010, for example, Pat O'Brien, the president of Humanist Canada at the time, stated on the association's website, "We want people to know that belief in god is not necessary to live a full, moral, and happy life." O'Brien's thinking is obviously widespread. It is a viewpoint that is endorsed not only by large numbers of people who are not religious but also by many who are.

In the minds of some individuals, religion plays a unique role in the realization of happiness. For others, it is one pathway, but not the only one.

For a third category of observers, religion is not a source of personal happiness but in fact may contribute to strain and pain. An example that could be cited would be the guilt-ridden young woman I have mentioned in the past who exclaimed to a counsellor, "My problems began the day I became a Christian."¹³

In a fourth category are people who see religion as an illusory source of happiness. They would include individuals like Marx, who concedes that religion, like a drug, soothes symptoms but doesn't deal with underlying causes.

A Canadian Reading

The recent controversies involving the efforts of academics and politicians to measure happiness remind us that it is an extremely elusive concept to tap. What is particularly problematic is the common finding that a precarious relationship exists between objective and subjective indicators. People who should be unhappy often are happy; people who should be happy are not necessarily happy.

Much of the problem lies with the complexity of how people arrive at a state of happiness. To date, at least, objective measures are not exactly known, in methodological parlance, for high levels of either validity or reliability – tapping the concept and doing so with precision. *Globe and Mail* writer Sarah Hampson has aptly described such attempts as similar to “performing surgery with a shovel.”¹⁴

This side of simply acknowledging that the measures are “tapping” different things, one – in the end – has to go with the subjective measures, and allow for all kinds of relativity with respect to how people get there.

Ultimately, one is happy because one *thinks* she or he is happy – not because the individual meets some kind of external criteria. We have to go with what people say. Far be it from me as a researcher to inform people who tell me they are “Very happy” with life or “Not very happy” with their marriages that my objective measures tell me the opposite!

That’s my way of saying that personal happiness and personal well-being are best determined by asking people for their own personal assessments in environments in which they can be as honest with themselves and me as possible. The objective correlates raise other questions.

We have done that in our national surveys, asking adults to complete questionnaires where and when they are comfortable. Teenagers have filled out questionnaires in classroom settings, with every effort made to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Outlook. Some 93% of Canadians maintain that they are “very happy” or “pretty happy.” And while everyone knows that marriages and comparable relationships are not always perfect, people are remarkably positive about their experiences at any single point in time when they are in them. About 9 in 10 further say that they are highly satisfied with the quality of their lives.

In view of those very high levels reported, we would not expect there would be much difference between people who place a high level of importance on religion and those who do not. That’s the case.

- The differences between people who *attend* weekly and those who never attend are very small.
- The same is true when we compare people who *identify* with a group and those who do not.
- The happiness and satisfaction levels of *theists and atheists* are also virtually the same.

Table 5.1. Outlook by Religiosity: Adults

	93%	ATTENDANCE		I.D.		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Happiness: “Very” or “Pretty”	93%	96	91	93	91	95	92
Marriage/Relationship “Very” / “Pretty” Happy”	95	97	94	96	93	95	93
Quality of your life: “Very” / “Fairly Satisfied”	89	91	89	89	90	90	90

Source: Project Canada 2005 National Survey.

There clearly are any number of variables or characteristics that can influence the outcomes by attendance, identification, and belief. We might, for example, anticipate variations with each category by such things as age, gender, education, and income – and we could readily control for any of them.

What I am saying is that, regardless of such variations, collectively, taken as aggregates, there are no noteworthy differences between people who are religious – using these three measures – and those who are not.

Self-Esteem. It is treated as virtually self-evident that good self-esteem – positive self-worth – is a fundamental component of positive and productive living.

It therefore would be expected that religions that believe in optimum living for individuals would also give considerable attention to instilling good self-esteem.

To be sure, religions such as Christianity do so, but not without introducing a measure of tension. On the one hand, Christianity teaches individuals that they should love themselves precisely because they have worth, having been created by God and being loved by God. At the same time, it calls for individuals to downplay an emphasis on themselves in favour of God and others.

If this were a phone-in show, you and I can imagine that this topic would also generate more than a few calls and considerable emotion.

There are some Canadians who would claim that religion has made a significant contribution to their sense of worth. There are others who would say just the opposite – undoubtedly pointing to the experiences they and others have had with condemnation, guilt, and maybe even abuse.

Regardless of the role religions play, Canadian culture more generally officially places considerable value on cultivating positive self-esteem. It is viewed as an important and essential component of healthy living. Parents and schools, programs and activities are all expected to play roles in instilling and sustaining good self-esteem in children. In the case of adults, it is taken for granted that healthy relationships and environments contribute to positive self-esteem.

So what is the relationship between religion and self-worth?

The Project Teen Canada surveys have been exploring self-esteem for some time. The latest – the 2008 survey – included a number of items probing how teenagers view themselves. Three statements were aimed at examining (1) virtuousness, (2) competence, and (3) appearance – all three key components of one's self-image:

1. I am a good person.
2. I can do most things very well.
3. I am good looking.

Overall, the good news in the findings is that the vast majority of Canadian young people express highly positive views of themselves. Differences between females and males tend to be fairly small.¹⁵

With respect to religion, here as with outlook, differences tend to be very small by attendance, identification, and belief.

- Teenagers who are weekly service attenders and those who never attend look much the same.
- There are slight differences between teens who identify with a religion and those who do not, as well as modest differences between theist and atheist youth.

But in general, religious young people and other young people exhibit very similar self-image response levels.

Table 5.2. Self-Image by Religiosity: Teenagers

	94%	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
I am a good person	94%	95	94	95	94	95	91
I can do most things very well	80	80	78	81	77	82	76
I am good-looking	77	79	76	78	74	79	73

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Personal Concerns. We all are well aware of the fact that we can be very happy with life overall, but that is not to say for a moment that we do not have concerns. Some, of course, are more readily resolved than others.

In the case of adults, the Project Canada surveys over time have documented what we all know well – that their primary concerns tend to pertain to time, finances, and health.¹⁶ In the case of teens, the youth surveys have found that, for some time, the no. 1 personal concern has been the pressure to do well at school, followed by what they are going to do when they finish school. Money and time are also among their foremost concerns.¹⁷

Two problems that appear to be relatively common are loneliness and depression. They also are issues that religion presumably might be able to address, given the emphasis that many faiths give to the importance of community, as well as hope in the face of perplexion and despair.


An examination of loneliness and depression by religiosity among both adults and younger people offers some insightful findings.

- First, concern about both loneliness and depression is considerably higher among teenagers than adults. This, in the age of Facebook, where the percentage of teens claiming they have four or more close friends has skyrocketed from 49% in 1984 to 72% in 2008.¹⁸ Back in those distant 80s before the Internet was born, 35% of young people said they were troubled by loneliness. A cause for pause is that the figure today, in the midst of social networking and friends that allegedly number in the hundreds, is 33%. Something's not quite right.
- Second, there are very few appreciable differences in loneliness and depression by religiosity – as measured by attendance, identification, and belief – in the case of either adults or teenagers.

What is somewhat disconcerting is that a noteworthy number of teens and adults are experiencing loneliness and depression, with or without religion.

Table 5.3. Personal Concerns by Religiosity: Adults and Teens

Concerned "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit" About...

		ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
ADULTS							
Loneliness	20%	19	20	20	20	20	16
Depression	18	11	17	18	16	16	21
TEENAGERS							
Loneliness	33%	34	32	32	31	33	31
Depression	35	35	36	34	36	37	37

Source: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008 national surveys.

A Preliminary Bottom Line. These findings are consistent in pointing to no significant differences between Canadians who are religious and those who are not when it comes to personal well-being.

Such “no difference” findings do not mean that religion is not a significant source of well-being for some people. Faith is unquestionably an important source of happiness and positive self-esteem for many.

For example, the Project Canada 2005 survey asked the 1 in 3 Canadians who attend services at least once a month, “*What is the main thing your religious involvement adds to your life?*” Responses were open-ended.

Personal enrichment was the dominant characteristic cited by individuals in all groups – most noticeably Catholics outside Quebec and adherents to faiths other than Christianity. *People* are of particular importance to Mainline Protestants, *God and spirituality* to Quebec Catholics and Conservative Protestants. Incidentally, in the U.S., Gallup has found Protestants are inclined to cite people factors, Catholics to cite faith factors.¹⁹

Table 5.4. What Involvement Brings by Group, Age, and Gender

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

	Personal Enrichment	The People	God & Spirituality	Nothing	Total
ALL	56%	22	21	1	100
RCOQ	63	16	21	<1	100
RCQ	48	21	26	5	100
ML Protestants	49	31	19	1	100
Cons Protestants	52	23	25	<1	100
Other Faiths	70	23	7	<1	100
18-34	59	27	14	<1	100
35-54	49	22	28	1	100
55+	59	19	21	1	100
Women	55	24	20	1	100
Men	57	20	22	1	100

Source: Project Canada 2005 and Bibby 2006b.

Younger and older adults were somewhat more likely than middle-aged adults to cite the importance of personal enrichment, and slightly less inclined to mention God and spirituality. Differences by gender are minor, as are variations by congregational size.

In short, for the 1 in 3 Canadians who attend services monthly or more, the number one “return” across all of these demographic categories is personal enrichment.

**What the Actively Involved Say
Their Involvement Adds to Their Lives**

Personal Enrichment

...A sense of purpose and strengthening and hope...a place to regroup my inner-self and handle everyday events...contentment, happiness, strength...peace and serenity that make life easier...

The People

...Companionship in my spiritual journey...help and fellowship...a sense of belonging and common experience...connection and support...friends and spiritual enrichment...I'm 86 years old and the minister comes to my home every month...belonging...a sense of a special community of people...

God & Spirituality

... A connection to God...a place to be safe and grow...it strengthens my spirit which in turn strengthens my relationship with God...an opportunity to collect my thoughts and give thanks for everything I have....it sustains my relationship with God... spiritual comfort and support...

Source: Derived from Bibby 2006b.

That said, religion is not a unique source of personal well-being. Our findings indicate that Canadians who never attend services are just as likely to report high levels of personal well-being.

What is centrally important in all this is that frequent attenders and never attenders find different means of reaching the same personal well-being ends.

Canadian Youth and Variations in Personal Well-being

- The self-report that one is either "very happy" or "pretty happy" differs little by religious group, and by having "no religion."
- The inclination to report that depression is something that concerns one "a great deal" or "quite a bit" is slightly lower for Protestants and Jews than other teens.
- Depression is slightly higher for "Christian unspecified," Sikh, Buddhist, and teens who value Aboriginal spirituality than it is for others.

Polarization in the Mosaic Happiness and Depression

	Happy	Depression A Concern
NATIONALLY	90%	35
Roman Catholic	92	34
Outside Quebec	93	34
Quebec	92	32
Protestant	93	26
Conservative	95	25
Mainline	89	27
Orthodox	95	31
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	89	45
Other Faiths	89	38
Judaism	93	22
Sikhism	93	47
Buddhism	89	44
Hinduism	89	30
Islam	87	39
Aboriginal Spirituality	85	46
No Religion	88	36

The Global Situation

Large numbers of people in many countries around the world acknowledge that their lives are enhanced by religion.

They range from almost everyone in religious monopolies such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran through 65% majorities in the Ukraine and Canada, to 35% minorities in Britain, Japan, and Sweden.

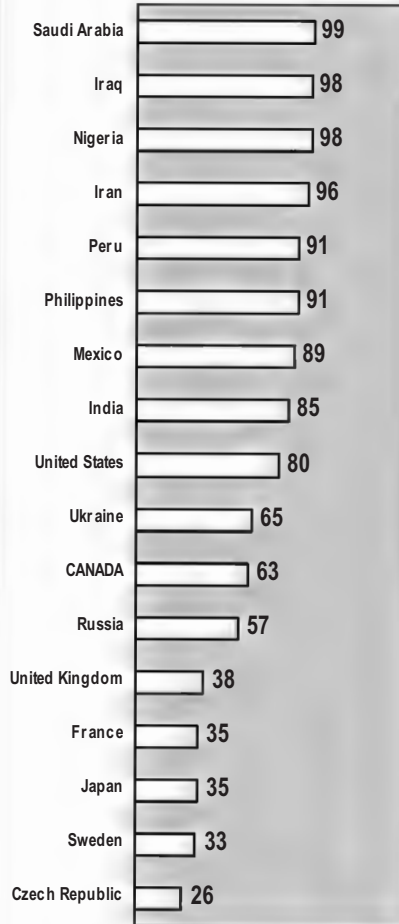
In a release in late October of 2010, the Gallup organization reported that its analysis of more than 500,000 interviews with Americans over the previous two years had found that those who are the most religious also have the highest levels of well-being.

Religiosity was based on both salience and attendance measures, with well-being probed using subjective and objective indicators.

Gallup reported that the relationship held after controlling for numerous demographic variables.²⁰

Figure 5.1. Life Enhanced by Religion: Select Countries

% Indicating Receive Comfort and Strength from Religion



Source: World Values Survey 2000.

However, while the relationships were consistent, the strength of the associations was very small. Similar to the situation in Canada, Americans who are not religious are clearly just about as likely to exhibit high levels of well-being as those who are religious.

When we look at the religion and well-being relationship worldwide, a different pattern is readily evident. To the extent that countries tend to know a relatively high level of affluence, their citizens express high levels of personal satisfaction.

The satisfaction level of Canadians is among the highest in the world.

Such a pattern for *subjective* measures of well-being is also apparent when we look at *objective* measures of standard of living via the United Nations Human Development Index.

- The dominant pattern is *an inverse relationship* between the national levels of personal religious importance and place on the HD index.
- At the extremes, 96% of Nigerians say religion is personally important to them; yet the country ranks 158th in its standard of living.
- Conversely, Norway ranks 1st according to the HD index, yet only 20% of its people say religion is important to them.

Table 5.5. Salience & Satisfaction with One's Life: Select Countries

<i>[r = -.613]</i>	Salience	Satisfaction*
Senegal	98%	26
Pakistan	98	28
Ethiopia	91	37
Malaysia	95	36
South Africa	82	36
India**	79	41
Italy	72	48
United States	67	65
Argentina	66	59
Poland	62	39
Israel	50	68
Spain	49	66
CANADA	45	71
Germany	44	48
Russia	34	23
France	30	57
United Kingdom	27	59
Sweden	17	72

*Percent rating personal life 7-plus on scale of 0 to 10

**BOLD: a G-20 country.

Sources: Salience - Gallup WorldView 2010; Satisfaction - Pew Global Attitudes Project, July 24,

In a stimulating synthesis of findings on happiness worldwide, Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of New Mexico, has offered a number of summary points that help to clarify the context in which religion may be at work:

1. Almost all humans are happy almost all the time. That's been the case throughout history.
2. Major life events – such as winning the lottery or the death of a spouse – only affect happiness for six months to a year.
3. Many alleged factors such as age, sex, race, income, education, and national residence have little effect on happiness. Some key exceptions are hunger, health, and oppression. Yet, once minimum standards are met in each case, further increases – greater affluence, for example – do not appreciably increase happiness.
4. For people who experience very low levels of subjective well-being (e.g., major depression), the most potent anti-depressants are not social or economic but pharmaceutical. The effects of such drugs are stronger than increases in wealth or any other changes in conditions.²¹

Table 5.6. Saliency & Quality of Life: Select Countries

UN Human Development Index
2009 Rankings

[<i>r</i> = .765]	Saliency	Rank
Thailand	97%	87
Nigeria	96	158
Philippines	94	105
Saudi Arabia	94	59
United Arab Emirates	92	35
Pakistan	92	141
India	90	134
Brazil	87	75
South Africa	85	129
Iran	83	88
Mexico	73	53
Italy	72	18
Poland	69	41
United States	65	13
Ireland	54	5
Israel	51	27
Spain	49	15
Korea, Republic of	43	26
CANADA	42	4
Switzerland	41	9
Germany	40	22
Iceland	38	3
Cuba	34	51
Russia	34	71
Netherlands	33	6
Australia	32	2
New Zealand	32	20
France	30	8
Finland	29	12
United Kingdom	27	21
Japan	24	10
Hong Kong	24	24
Norway	20	1
Sweden	17	7
China	***	77

Sources: Saliency - Gallup WorldView 2010;
HDI: UN Human Development Report, 2009.

Given that happiness knows something of “a set-point,” Miller concludes by pointing out that the consumption of products and services marketed as happiness boosters is usually futile. Increasing GNP per capita also will not have positive effects on well-being once a minimum standing of living is in place. And runaway consumerism not only fails to make us happier but can impose high environmental costs on everyone else.

One practical implication: “Every hundred dollars that we spend on ourselves will have no detectable effect on our happiness; but the same money, if given to hungry, ill, oppressed developing-world people, would dramatically increase their happiness.” Miller adds, “The utilitarian argument for the rich giving more of their money to the poor is now scientifically irrefutable.”²²

So it is that recent research carried out by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, for example, has confirmed the findings of a variety of academic studies showing that, in more affluent countries, happiness seems to rise up to a point, but not beyond it. Researchers refer to the pattern as the “Easterlin paradox,” named after Richard Easterlin, a University of Southern California economist. He concluded that gains in material well-being have little impact on satisfaction with life once a certain level has been achieved.²³

Those things said, it also is clear that in many parts of the developing world – notably many countries in Africa – that happiness threshold has not been reached. In such places, people predictably indicate that they are not satisfied with their lives, even though their religiosity levels may be high.

One area, however, where religion is associated with a difference worldwide is suicide.

- Both females and males who live in countries characterized by high levels of service attendance are less likely than other individuals to commit suicide.
- The differences are particularly pronounced in the case of countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, Brazil, and Iran, versus China, Korea, and Japan.

Gallup, in a recent release, has noted the same pattern in looking at 67 countries. The pollster also reported that the relationship tends to hold *within* countries.

Gallup's conclusion? Religion may be a factor in reducing suicides that is at least as important as economics.²⁴

Table 5.7. Religiosity and Suicide Rates: Select Countries

[A-SF $r = -.461$ [A-SM $r = -.433$]	Attend- ance	Suicide Rates	
		Females	Males
Thailand	80%	3.8	12.0
India	73	9.1	12.2
El Salvador	68	3.7	10.2
Philippines	64	1.7	2.5
Poland	62	4.4	26.8
Mexico	60	1.3	6.8
Ireland	56	3.8	17.4
Dominican Republic	53	0.6	2.6
Italy	49	2.8	9.9
Brazil	49	1.9	7.3
Iran	45	0.1	0.3
United States	43	4.5	17.7
Israel	39	3.3	8.7
Spain	39	3.8	12.0
Japan	38	13.7	35.8
Korea, Republic of	35	14.1	29.6
Germany	30	6.0	17.9
Greece	29	1.2	5.9
New Zealand	27	6.3	18.9
CANADA	26	5.4	17.3
Netherlands	26	5.0	11.6
Ukraine	23	7.0	40.9
Australia	23	4.4	16.7
France	20	9.0	25.5
Cuba	20	4.9	19.6
United Kingdom	20	2.8	10.1
Hong Kong	19	11.5	19.3
Sweden	17	8.3	18.1
Finland	12	9.0	28.9
Czech Republic	15	4.3	22.7
Russia	15	9.5	53.9
China	9	14.8	13.0

Sources: Attendance – Gallup WorldView 2010; Suicide rates: per 100,000 population, World Health Organization, 2009.

Assessment

These findings indicate that, according to these measures of personal well-being – outlook, self-esteem, and concerns – there are few differences overall between Canadians who are religious and those who are not. The patterns in Canada are consistent with patterns worldwide.

This does not mean that religion is not an important source of personal well-being for some people. Of course it is. Even in poorer countries it may function to help people deal with economic deprivation.²⁵

However, it does mean that, particularly in more advantaged situations – such as Canada – people who are not religious are just about as likely to find personal well-being through other sources.

This initial reading points to the fact that life could be significantly diminished for individuals who find personal well-being with the assistance of religion.

But to the extent that alternatives to religion exist, especially in highly developed countries including Canada, it is possible that personal well-being will not necessarily be negatively affected by increasing religious polarization.

There might be some good reasons why people seem to be able to find happiness both with and without religion. John Helliwell, a renowned economics professor emeritus at UBC, has been studying personal happiness for some time and continues to do so. He is a member of Canada's National Statistics Council and has provided counsel on Britain's new initiative to survey well-being.²⁶ In October of 2010, he visited Harvard and summarized happiness research, giving attention to its social contexts.²⁷

Helliwell maintains that while happiness research is in its infancy, three major findings will ultimately emerge.

1. *The positive trumps the negative*: positive outlooks and positive activities lead to good health and longer lives. Two strangers who wave to each other in traffic go home happier than two people who give each other the finger.

2. *Community trumps materialism*: relationships enhance life more than the pursuit of things. Research shows a 1% improvement in a worker-boss relationship improves happiness as much as a 30% increase in salary.
3. *Generosity trumps selfishness*: people who give away more are happier than those who give away less – regardless of income. Those who did favours for others in the last year felt happier than those who received favours.

If Helliwell is right regarding the three leading determinants of happiness, one can see where religion might sometimes contribute to each of the three sources. But it also is clear that other factors contribute as well.

Religion can be one source of happiness. But it is not the only one.

Some people might be surprised by these findings. What may surprise many more are the findings concerning polarization's impact on the widespread pursuit of spiritual fulfillment.