

Fragmented but Not Forgotten Gods:
*Religion in the Lives of Young People
in Quebec and the Rest of Canada*

by

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion
Montreal – November 2009

*The author wishes to express his gratitude to the Louisville Institute and
the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research for funding
that helped to make the surveys on which this paper is based possible.*

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author draws on the findings of a major new Canadian national youth survey of more than 5,000 teenagers to examine the extent to which religion and spirituality persist in the lives of young people in Quebec and the rest of the country. The sample includes an unprecedented comparative sub-sample of 500 Aboriginals who reside on reserves across the country. The findings point to the growing polarization of young people when it comes both to participation in organized religion and the embracing of traditional beliefs. Across much of the country, a significant core of teenagers continues to exhibit fairly conventional forms of religious interest and commitment. However, particularly in the case of Quebec and Aboriginal teens, there is a strong tendency for teens to detach themselves from Christianity, and to opt, respectively, for no religion and Aboriginal spirituality. Nevertheless, what persists is the tendency to adopt belief and practice fragments in keeping with intensive individualism in Quebec, and an effort to synthesize traditions in the case of Aboriginals. Overall, the dominant pattern is clear: the Gods continue to be a part of teenage lives – but in more fragmented form than ever. An intriguing exception to the fragmentation rule? Teenagers who have come to Canada from other parts of the globe. The author concludes with a discussion of what the findings mean for an understanding of religion beyond the specifics of the Canadian situation.

Introduction

There is considerable ambiguity as to the state of religion in Canada today.

To view religion across the country is, in some ways, like viewing devastation after some tragedy has hit. It is 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 higher than that of the United States (CIPO 1945). Attendance was also relatively high in Ontario and the west, as well as the north. To varying degrees, religious groups, led by Protestants and Catholics, had a significant place in Canadian life and Canadian lives.

Now, some 50 years later, that secularization blaze has destroyed much of religion's presence and influence (Bibby 2002, 2006). The Atlantic area that once was a stronghold of Catholicism and Protestantism has seen its collective devotion significantly reduced by scandal and modernization. In Quebec, the Quiet Revolution of the early 60s was accompanied by a "quieter religious revolution" that has resulted in the decimation of religious participation and authority. In Ontario, the west, and the north, the fire of secularization has torched Mainline Protestantism in particular.

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 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, aging congregations and youthful congregations, disbelief and belief, the discarding and the embracing of religious rituals surrounding marriage, birth, and death.

The variations are there for the viewing. What is far less clear are the patterns that together point to a discernible overall picture of religion in Canada. This paper is intended to contribute to a clarifying of both the patterns and the overall situation.

Theoretical Considerations

Before we wade into the empirical details, there is considerable value in backing up and reflecting on the possibilities as to what is taking place, so that we have a framework for trying to make sense of specifics. On the basis of what has been observed in other times and other places, theorists have developed two dominant interpretations of the role of religion in highly developed societies that may be of help in understanding what is taking place in Canada.

The first is the theory of secularization that goes back as far as Auguste Comte, and includes such prominent people as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. According to this well-known thesis, religion inevitably loses influence as societies become more and more advanced. Whereas, in earlier times, religion had authority in the realms of private and public life, it gradually comes to play a highly specialized and limited role. It no longer speaks to key societal spheres such as education, politics, economics, and family life. This loss of influence or secularization is highly pervasive, felt at the individual, organizational, and societal levels (Dobbelaere 1981, 2002).

The second prominent interpretation of the role of religion in advanced societies is relatively new, and takes the form of a market model. According to its best-known proponent, Rodney Stark, and his associates, secularization does not signal the end of religion. On the contrary, because individuals continue to have needs, which, in Stark's phrase, "only the gods can address," there will always be a market for religion. If some groups fail and no longer respond to the demands of the market, they will disappear. But religion itself will prevail. The question is not, "Will religion survive?" Rather the question is, "What religious groups or "religious companies" will survive – moving in and claiming the available "market shares" (see, for example, Stark and Bainbridge 1985, Finke and Stark 1992, Stark and Finke 2000).

When one reads the available data on Canada, the decline in religion's social and personal significance since the 1950s seems to lend fairly obvious support to the secularization thesis. One only has to focus on Quebec, for example, to see what appears to be a fairly recent and seemingly classic illustration of secularization. Prior to 1960, many social institutions and organizations were fused with the Roman Catholic Church. Weekly mass attendance was estimated by Gallup to have been over 80%. By the late 1970s, such organizational power had been transferred to the state; by the early 1980s, mass attendance had fallen to under 40% and would continue to drop through the end of the century (Bibby 1987:16ff; 2002:81).

However, there are signs that religion remains alive in Quebec and elsewhere. The embers may only be smouldering. But the fire has not gone out.

An Updated Reading

Religious trends, of course, require ongoing readings of what is happening. Our latest national survey of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 offers such an update.

By way of background, since the mid-1970s, I have been carrying out a series of national surveys from the University of Lethbridge that have provided considerable data on social trends, including religion. The surveys have consisted of seven “Project Canada” surveys of adults conducted every five years from 1975 through 2005, and four complementary “Project Teen Canada” surveys completed in 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2008.

With respect to religion, the surveys have generated comprehensive information on attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour. The adult samples have averaged about 1,500 people who are 18 and over, and have been highly representative of the adult population. The youth samples have been comprised of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 who are still in high schools/secondary schools or their equivalents (e.g., CEGEPs in Quebec). These highly representative samples have been comprised of an average of about 3,800 cases.

The most recent youth survey, Project Teen Canada 2008, was carried out between approximately March 15 and June 15 of 2008, with some sample holes filled in the fall. The methodology used in the 1984, 1992, and 2000 Project Teen Canada surveys was replicated. A total of 4,746 teenagers participated. In the late fall and early part of 2009, a special sub-sample of 818 teens enrolled in Aboriginal-run schools was added, bringing the total sample to 5,564 young people from 248 schools. The total sample has been weighted down to 4,600 to avoid the use of large weight factors, the Aboriginal sub-sample to 500 cases. (The weighting also reflected adjustments because of an oversampling of Alberta related to funding; for full methodological details, see Bibby 2009:214ff). In their weighted forms, the samples are highly representative of Canadian teens and Aboriginals living on reserves, and are accurate within approximately 3 percentage points and 5 percentage points respectively, either way, 19 times in 20.

Together the adult and youth surveys offer considerable information on the religious situation in Canada.

What I want to do in this brief paper is look at some of the findings for teens with respect to (1) their relationship to **organized religion**, using measures of identification and service attendance, (2) **beliefs and practices**, as measured by some core beliefs and prayer, and (3) **receptivity to religion**, as seen in the expression of spiritual needs, desire for future rites of passage, and explicit openness to greater involvement.

Findings

The country's latest cohort of teenagers obviously is not emerging out of a cultural and religious vacuum. Most of their parents are Boomers and Post-Boomers, born from 1946 onward. Those parents have been much less involved with religious groups than their parents and grandparents before them (Bibby 2009:165). Religion for the majority has been something consumed in à la carte fashion. The majority have held a belief here and there, attended the occasional service, prayed privately once in a while. At the same time, when pushed, many if not most have acknowledged that they have "spiritual needs," whatever that means.

One would expect that their children and grandchildren would tend to follow in their selective consumption footsteps.

Organized Religion

Identification. Between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of Canadians who told the census taker they had no religion rose from 7% to 16%. The figure for Baby Boomer and Post-Boomer adults was 18%, compared to just over 9% for Pre-Boomers. By the next census in 2011, the national figure may reach 20%.

Reflecting such intergenerational patterns, no less than 32% of teenagers, 15-to-19, in our sample indicate that they have no religion. That is up considerably from 12% in 1984. What's intriguing here is that the 32% figure is well above the 20% figure that their parents reported to Statistics Canada when they – versus their offspring – were asked to identify the religion of their teenage sons and daughters.

It's not that religious groups lack teenage affiliates – young people who, according to their parents, are in the groups' "pools." The problem is that when they are allowed to speak for themselves, many teens do not personally identify with their parents' groups.

- The decline in identification has been particularly pronounced among Catholics in Quebec (21% to 9%), and Protestants nationally (35% to 13%).
- But the situation is not bleak for every group. Reflecting recent immigration patterns, the proportion of young people who identify with Other Faiths, for example, has jumped from 3% in 1984 to a current level of 16%.

**Table 1. 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

- A number of Christian groups, led by Roman Catholics, have also benefited from recent immigration patterns. Something of a global “circulation of the saints” has been taking place – resulting in new people and greater racial and cultural diversity (Bramadat and Seljak 2008:4-5).
- In the case of the Roman Catholic Church outside Quebec, immigration has contributed to identification levels for teenagers remaining fairly stable since the early 90s.

The inclination for teens to indicate they have “no religion” increased from 12% to 32% between 1984 and 2008, and is currently about double the level for adults as a whole. Levels of non-affiliation are highest in the North and British Columbia. In Quebec, the increase has been dramatic – from 8% to 37% in less than three decades. Quebec and the Atlantic region stand out as being characterizing by particularly high intergenerational increases – from 6% to 37% and 8% to 31% respectively. Teens in Saskatchewan and Ontario are *the least* likely to say do not have any religion. Yet even in these two instances, the “no religion” level is up significantly since the 1980s.

	Teens		Adults*
	1984	2008	
NATIONAL	12%	32	16
North	--	51	23
British Columbia	31	44	36
Alberta	13	38	23
Quebec	8	37	6
Manitoba	9	34	19
Atlantic	5	31	8
Saskatchewan	10	26	16
Ontario	12	23	16

*Adult source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

As for the religious backgrounds of teens with no religion, 57% say they have parents who likewise have no religious affiliation. Some 28% come from Catholic homes, 8% from Protestant families, and 7% have parents who identify with Other Faiths – more than half Buddhism.

What is almost breathtaking are the declines in identification experienced by Catholics in Quebec (21% to 9%), along with the United (10% to 1%) and Anglican churches (8% to 2%). These are ominous signs. Given that the primary source of new members are members’ offspring, groups that fail to retain good numbers of their children have bleak futures.

We need to be clear in understanding that it is not that Quebec Catholics and the two large Protestant denominations lack for young people whose parents identify with the groups. The 2001 census reveals that as many as 24% of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 come from Quebec Catholic homes, 8% from United Church families, and 5% have Anglican parents. That translates into a lot of teens. The problem is that, in Quebec, only 9% of teens identify with Catholicism, while a meagre 1% to 2% identify with the two dominant Protestant denominations.

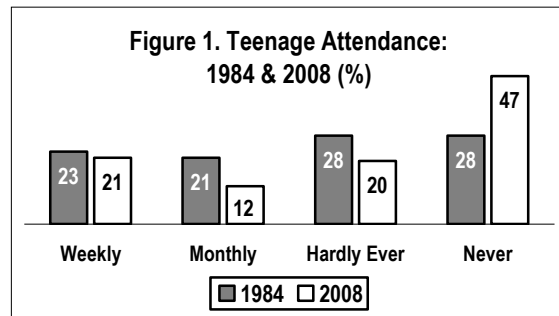
Simply put, for now, at least, these three major religious players have lost huge numbers of their young people.

In the case of Aboriginals, almost 5 in 10 who live on reserves cite “Aboriginal spirituality” as their religious preference, while about 1 in 10 see their religion as being Catholic. For those who live off-reserve, approximately 25% view Aboriginal spirituality as their religion, while only a slightly lower proportion – 22% – view themselves as Catholic. The no religion level is similar to the national average for teens living on reserves, but higher for young Aboriginals who attend off-reserve schools (38%).

Table 3. Religious Identification (%)
“What is your general religious preference?”

	NAT	ABON	ABOFF
Aboriginal spirituality	2	48	25
Catholic	34	12	22
Protestant	13	4	8
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	3	2	2
Other	16	5	5
None	32	29	38
Total	100	100	100

Attendance. While 7 in 10 teens identify with religious groups, only about 2 in 10 *attend services* weekly or more, slightly over 3 in 10 monthly or more. Some 14% say they belong to a *religious youth group* – essentially the same as the 12% levels reported in 1992 and 2000.



- *Weekly attendance* is currently about where it has been since at least the 1980s, while *monthly-plus attendance* has changed little since the early 1990s.
- However, there has been a significant increase since the 80s in the proportion of teenagers who *never attend services* – from 28% in 1984 to a current level of 47%.

Table 4. Service Attendance of Teens by Group: 1984-2008
 % Attending Monthly or More

	1984	1992	2000	2008
NATIONALLY	44%	32	33	33
Roman Catholic	56	39	37	37
Outside Quebec	62	49	50	47
Quebec	47	25	20	16
Protestant	44	47	60	68
Conservative	68	76	78	91
Baptist	55	74	67	88
Pentecostal	75	74	83	84
Mainline	35	38	42	44
Anglican	30	14	32	33
United	38	13	35	37
Lutheran, Pres	37	49	66	64
ORTHODOX	**	**	**	43
CHRISTIAN <i>unspecified</i>	**	**	65	69
Other Faiths	40	32	40	46
Buddhism	**	23	18	19
Judaism	**	20	23	41
Islam	**	53	50	56
Aboriginal Spirituality	**	22	23	25
Hinduism	**	**	63	61
Sikhism	**	**	**	82
None	7	5	7	7

**N's insufficient to permit accurate and stable percentaging.

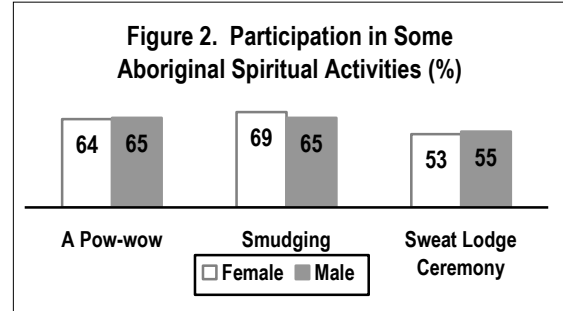
What is apparent in these findings is the growing polarization of teenagers who are actively involved in religious groups and those who are not. While the weekly and monthly “market shares” have remained fairly steady for some time, occasional attendance has been increasingly giving way to no attendance.

At the same time, those teens who do continue to identify with religious groups, if anything, are increasingly more likely to be actively involved than their counterparts of recent years.

As would be expected, they also are more likely than non-active affiliates to be enjoying their groups. That's hardly surprising: teens – and adults – who participate in religious groups need to find significance in their involvement. Coercion, after all, can only hold up for so long.

Some 25% of female and male Aboriginals who live on reserves say that they attend religious services at least once a month.

- Beyond conventional services, about 65% report that they have participated in a pow-wow – a social gathering honouring Aboriginal culture.
- About the same proportion claim they have participated in a smudging – a purification ceremony using smudge sticks that produce a type of incense.
- And over one-half have been part of a ceremonial sauna known as a sweat lodge ceremony.
- About 2 in 4 who live on reserves say that they *value both* Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity.
- Around 1 in 4 say they *value the former but not the latter*, 1 in 20 say they *value Christianity but not Aboriginal spirituality*.
- Most of the remaining 20% or so say they *do not highly value either*.
- Females (84%) are somewhat more inclined than males (77%) to value both or either.



Value...	ALL	Females	Males
Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity	47	53	39
Aboriginal spirituality but not Christianity	29	28	31
Christianity but not Aboriginal spirituality	5	3	7
Neither	18	16	21
Other	1	<1	2

Overall, these findings indicate that perhaps as many as 1 in 3 teens across the country are involved in religious groups, with large numbers finding their participation to be gratifying. On the surface, things have not changed much with respect to the size of the religiously active core.

However, things *have* changed: there are perhaps 2 in 3 teenagers – led by those in Quebec – who have little to do with organized religion. The proportion of such young people has almost doubled since the early 1980s. These teens might be missing out on something. But if so, most have little or no idea what they are missing.

Beliefs and Practices

Beliefs. Young people have hardly abandoned the supernatural realm. In fact, a good case can be made for the fact that youth culture for some time has given considerable play to the fictional. In part responding to the interest of children and youth, in part creating that fascination, the media in particular have played up such things as animals that talk, friendly dinosaurs, ghosts and the demonic, life on other planets, and interaction with imaginary people, creatures, and settings through a seemingly endless number of computer and video games.

That said, generally-speaking, God and other supernatural ideas including belief in life after death, miraculous healing, precognition, astrology, ESP, and psychic powers have all been slipping in the polls. Explicit atheism has risen from 6% to 16% since 1984 (Bibby 2009:168).

Practices. One basic measure of religious practice that is found in many traditions is private prayer.

The surveys reveal that in 1984, 77% of teens said they were praying privately at least occasionally. By 2000, that figure had slipped to 62%. As of 2008, it has fallen further to 56%. Here again, growing polarization is readily evident among the country's young people.

The Role of Groups. To the extent that Canadian young people identify with religious groups, solid majorities continue to hold age-old beliefs relating to themes such as life after death and the existence of God. They also are inclined to pray privately. This is particularly true of Conservative Protestants, Catholics outside Quebec, and Orthodox Christians, along with Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs.

However, belief and prayer are also characteristic of a majority of Catholic youth in Quebec, as well as Mainline Protestants and Aboriginals – especially those living on reserves. A solid majority of Jews and Buddhists express beliefs, but only about half say they engage in private prayer. As would be expected, belief and practice levels are considerable lower for teens with no religion. Still, they are far from negligible.

Table 10. Spiritual Needs, Rites of Passage, and Receptivity to Greater Involvement: Teens by Group, 2008

	Have Spiritual Needs	Want Relig Wedding	Open to Greater Involvet
NATIONALLY	54%	84	38
Roman Catholic	62	93	44
Outside Quebec	67	95	55
Quebec	50	88	30
Protestant	77	97	46
Conservative	89	99	35
<i>Baptist</i>	74	93	**
<i>Pentecostal</i>	91	96	**
Mainline	66	96	47

Figure 3. Pray Privately: 1984-2008 (%)

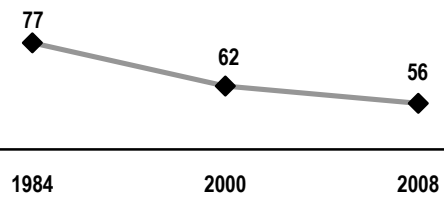


Table 7. Select Beliefs & Prayer: Teens by Group, 2008

	LAD	GOD	PRAYER
NATIONALLY	75%	68	56
Roman Catholic	85	80	69
Outside Quebec	84	85	73
Quebec	85	69	59
Protestant	88	91	82
Conservative	92	98	95
<i>Baptist</i>	93	95	89
<i>Pentecostal</i>	92	96	96
Mainline	84	85	68
<i>Anglican</i>	83	75	60
<i>United</i>	79	83	73
<i>Lutheran, Pres</i>	93	94	76
ORTHODOX	85	88	70
CHRISTIAN <i>unspecified</i>	89	96	88
Other Faiths	80	84	71
Buddhism	75	64	49
Judaism	72	76	45
Islam	85	96	86
Aboriginal spirituality	85	78	66
<i>On reserve*</i>	82	78**	62
<i>Off reserve*</i>	75	64	51
Hinduism	81	84	88
Sikhism	78	95	87
None	57	34	24
<i>Outside Quebec</i>	57	37	26
<i>Quebec</i>	58	25	18

* Includes all Aboriginals. ** "God or a Creator"

We asked teens who are attending Aboriginal schools about some additional beliefs that are associated with Aboriginal spirituality. Such beliefs are endorsed by a majority of Aboriginal young people.

- We found that 85% believe that “*all things have a spirit,*” with just under 80% agreeing that “*all forms of life are connected to each other.*”
- Close to 8 in 10 maintain that with the *importance of gathering for traditional ceremonies,* while 7 in 10 agree that “*prayers of thanks*” should be offered daily “*to the Creator.*”
- Just over 6 in 10 say that *the Medicine wheel* helps to understand their lives.

All living things have a spirit	85%
It’s important for us to gather for traditional ceremonies	82
All forms of life are connected to each other	77
Prayers of thanks should be made to the Creator every day	68
The Medicine Wheel helps me understand my life	64

These findings, as with those relating to religious identification and attendance, point to a drop-off in belief in practice among young people, particularly among young Quebec Catholics. Yet, the findings also reveal the persistence of pockets of religious commitment.

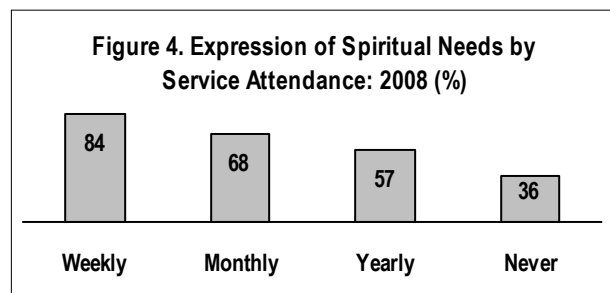
Receptivity to Religion

Beyond the current situation, an important question is whether or not Canadian young people are open to the possibility of greater involvement in the country’s religious groups – versus having closed the door on organized religion.

Expression of spiritual needs. For starters, do teenagers these days even feel that they have spiritual needs? Despite the common tendency for many observers to sharply differentiate between spirituality and religion, the fact of the matter is that, historically, a central feature of religion has been its effort to address spirituality. Therefore, the prevalence of such needs is a very important issue.

The latest survey has found that 54% of teenagers acknowledge that they themselves have spiritual needs – very similar to the 58% figure in 1992. Such an expression is predictably higher among weekly (84%) and monthly (68%) service attenders. But it also is something acknowledged by more than one in two teens who rarely attend a service (57%) and some one in three who never attend (36%).

Such an admission suggests that a sizable “market” for spirituality continues to exist among Canada’s youth.



Desire for rites of passage. In the past, large numbers of Canadians have looked to religious groups to carry out key rites of passage relating to marriage, birth, and death. Such events have provided groups with important opportunities to connect with their affiliates. The quest for rites of passage results in the rather extraordinary situation of “the sheep looking for the shepherd – where people who seemingly have been “lost” to groups literally show up on their own. Other organizations and companies should be so lucky.

Table 10. Spiritual Needs, Rites of Passage, and Receptivity to Greater Involvement: Teens by Group, 2008

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Conservative	89	99	35
<i>Baptist</i>	74	93	**

The surveys show that the percentages of teenagers who indicate they “anticipate” having religious marriage, funeral, and birth-related ceremonies performed have fallen somewhat in recent decades. Nonetheless, the numbers easily exceed the current 33% national monthly attendance figure.

- Some 85% say they expect to have a religious *wedding ceremony* conducted.
- About the same proportion anticipate calling on a religious figure when a *funeral* is needed.
- And around 65% say they expect to have a *birth-related ceremony*, such as a baptism or christening, carried out.

Significantly, a solid majority of young people who identify with any religious group are envisioning have such religious ceremonies conducted in the future. What’s more, the demand for all three rites remains very high for Quebec Catholics – despite their very low church-going level.

Even among teens who say they have no religion, the market for passage rites remains appreciable: 70% say they are expecting to have a “religious” wedding; that national figure includes 73% of young people outside Quebec who maintain they have no religion, as well as 61% who live in Quebec.

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ORTHODOX	69	95	56
CHRISTIAN <i>unspecified</i>	83	96	39
Other Faiths	65	85	51
Buddhism	67	74	56
Judaism	48	95	47
Islam	67	88	54
Aboriginal Spirituality	78	74	49
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<i>Off reserve</i>	58	80	36
Hinduism	70	96	30
Sikhism	61	88	**
None	30	70	28
<i>Outside Quebec</i>	31	73	34
<i>Quebec</i>	26	61	12

* Includes all Aborigines.
 **N's insufficient to permit accurate and stable percentaging.

Table 9. Desire for Religious Rites

Openness to greater involvement. Given that increasing number of adults and teenagers are not involved in organized religion, we have been attempting to probe whether or a measure of receptivity to greater involvement exists. In both 2000 and 2008, we asked teens to respond to the statement, *“I’d be open to more involvement with religious groups if I found it to be worthwhile.”* In 2000, 37% of those who were attending services less than once a month agreed. Incidentally, in 2005, the comparable figure for adults attending less than once a month was 62% (Bibby 2006:202).

We put the same item to our youth sample again in 2008. This time around, *the figure for those attending less than once a month* has come in at an almost identical 38% – just over one in three young people.

- The levels are around 50% for Catholics outside Quebec, along with Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Aboriginals living on reserves.
- In Quebec, where involvement appears to be precariously low, 30% of young Catholics who attend services less than once a month say they are open to greater involvement. Among Quebec youth who say they have no religion, the figure is a very low, 12%.

These findings suggest there is openness to greater participation in organized religion on the part of a significant number of uninvolved youth – even in Quebec. That said, it also is clear that there are some teenagers who are not prepared to give religion the time of day.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is clear from the survey findings that, at this point in Canadian history, young people are highly polarized when it comes both to participation in organized religion and the embracing of traditional beliefs. A noteworthy core – perhaps about 1 in 3 – continue to exhibit fairly conventional forms of religious interest. Much higher numbers indicate they believe in God or a higher power, along with life after death, and further endorse themes including rewards after death, miraculous healing, and contact with the spirit world. They also pray privately at least on occasion.

Those things said, it also is apparent that teenagers are becoming increasingly polarized when it comes to religion. Following in the footsteps of many of their Boomer grandparents and Boomer and Post-Boomer parents, a growing core never attend services, indicate that they do not have any religious affiliation, are agnostic or atheist, and never pray.

But just when we think the polarization is fairly distinct, that the “ambivalent religious middle” is increasingly becoming a thing of the past, and that the future will see something of a great divide between religious and non-religious Canadians, the solidarity of those who appear to be abandoning religion seems to crack.

- A sizable number of young people who seemingly have said goodbye to organized religion and the gods seem to keep the option open of resurfacing.
- Noteworthy numbers say they have spiritual needs.
- Very large numbers indicate they want the gods brought in on pivotal life passage events.
- And when they are asked the pointed question about their receptivity to possible involvement that touches their lives in significant ways, a surprisingly high proportion suggest their doors have not been permanently shut.

There are relatively few exceptions to the receptivity pattern. Even in Quebec and among teens who appear to have opted for “no religion,” many young people appear to be willing – indeed, are wanting – to keep their options.

This brings us back to Rodney Stark. Maybe he is right – that there is always a market for religion, because, as he puts it, people continue to “have needs that only the gods can satisfy.” He may be in interesting company. St. Augustine, no less, uttered the famous words to the effect that “Our souls are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” These days, the likes of academic and journalist, Ron Rolheiser (1999:3), has written that all of us have “a fundamental dis-ease” that leaves us “forever restless, dissatisfied, frustrated, and aching.”

But the survey findings, in concert with the findings for Boomers and Post-Boomers, make it very clear that today’s “emerging millennials” who embrace religion or are drawn to it have to be convinced that such involvement is worthwhile. It has to have an impact on their lives. Otherwise, why would they bother?

What remains to be seen is how the country’s religious groups, old and new, will respond. That may well be the key variable that will determine whether or not the current polarization will persist.

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