

The Religious Situation in Canada

A Major Restructuring of Religion is Taking Place *The Message is Going National This Week*

Contrary to widespread belief, religion in Canada continues to have a solid and durable following. But the dominant players are changing and potential new partnerships are on the horizon.

Such is the message that is being delivered this week to evangelical and Catholic leaders by prominent sociologist and religious trends analyst Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. His observations are based primarily on his latest, 2011 book, *Beyond the Gods & Back*.

An interview with Bibby is being simulcast to some 7,000 predominantly evangelical leaders in 22 cities from British Columbia to Newfoundland this coming Friday. The interview is part of an annual two-day Global Leadership Summit being sponsored by the British Columbia-based, Leadership Centre Willow Creek Canada. Three days later, Bibby will be presenting the message in Toronto to Ontario's Assembly of Catholic Bishops.

- Bibby says the research documents **a highly polarized religious situation** in Canada
- A solid core of about 3 in 10 Canadians continue to value faith while some 4 in 10 do not
- The remaining 3 in 10 constitute something of an "ambivalent middle" - typically identifying with groups but practicing religion à la carte
- Nonetheless, many are open to expressions of faith that touch their lives

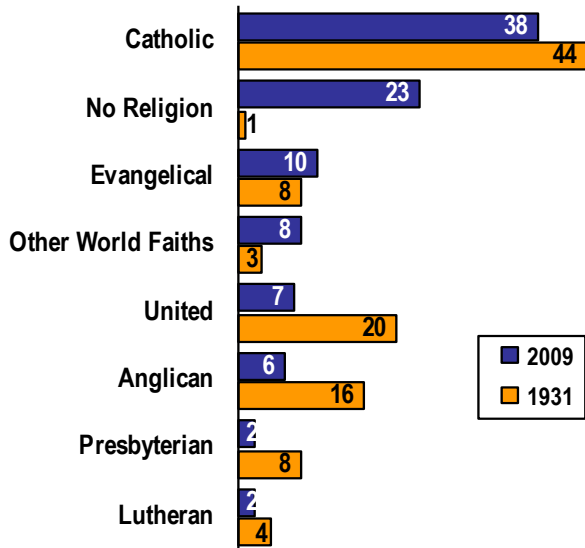
But Bibby emphasizes that the fact Canada has not been overwhelmed by secularization does not mean for one moment that things have remained the same.

- A major restructuring of religion is seeing **Catholics and evangelicals** emerging as the two major players, with other faiths led by **Islam** also showing signs of significant life.
- Even in **Quebec**, the Catholic attendance slide finally has levelled off since 2005.
- However, the once-dominant **Mainline Protestant denominations** – the United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches – are slipping toward Canada's religious sidelines. Their numbers are dropping and their resources are shrinking.
- The most important source of such numerical trends, notes Bibby, is **immigration**. Catholics, Pentecostals, and Muslims are experiencing unprecedented global growth, and that growth will continue to be felt in Canada for some time.

Bibby says that the situation has at least three major implications for religious groups: (1) there is a need for a mindset change: things are anything but over; (2) the presence of significant numbers of people who are ambivalent but receptive to faith calls for far better ministry; and (3) the time has come for like-minded groups, led by evangelicals and Catholics, to explore ways of working more closely with each other.

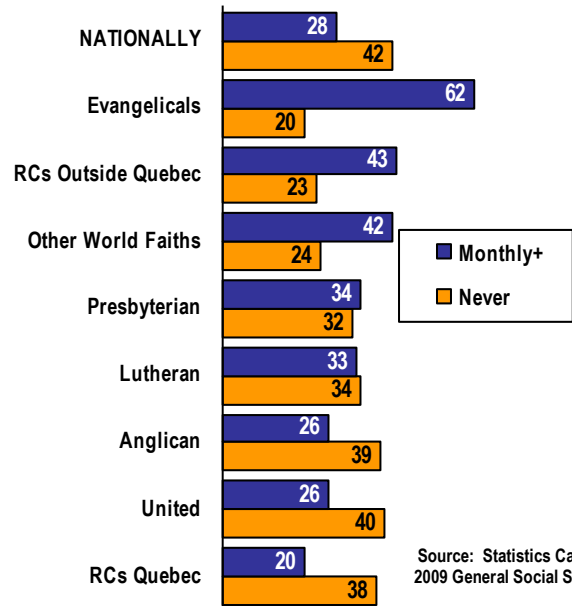
What remains to be seen, Bibby concludes, is how the country's "emerging and submerging" religious groups will respond "to all this."

Religious Identification in Canada: 1931-2009



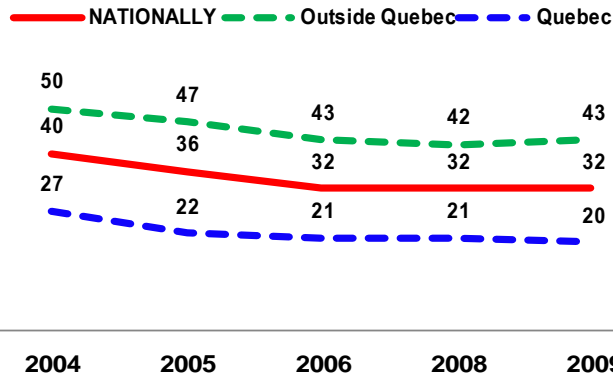
Source: Reginald Bibby, Computed from Statistics Canada, 1931 Census and 2009 General Social Survey.

Service Attendance by Group: 2009



Source: Statistics Canada, 2009 General Social Survey.

Roman Catholic Monthly-Plus Attendance, 2004-09: Nationally, Outside Quebec, and in Quebec (%)



Source: Statistics Canada, 2004-2009 General Social Surveys.

World Religion Increases: Next 24 Hours

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

Source: Barrett et al. 2001:4.
In Bibby, *Beyond the Gods & Back*, 2011:204.

Reginald Bibby has been monitoring Canadian social and religious trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through twelve best-selling books. His most recent book is *Beyond the Gods & Back: Religion's Demise & and Rise and Why It Matters* (details concerning Bibby and his work are available at www.reginaldbibby.com). Information concerning the Willow Creek Leadership Summit is available at www.growingleadership.com/summit/index.asp.

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