



Atheism in Canada by Reginald W. Bibby

Atheists Remain a Small Minority in Canada *Vast Majority of People Believe, Identify, Attend Services*

The recent popularity of books on atheism might lead some people to think that Canadians increasingly are abandoning the idea of God. But a major new study has found that atheists are a rare species in Canada. What's more, most Canadians continue to have a religion and attend services at least occasionally.

These are the conclusions of an updated analysis of religious trends in Canada carried out by well-known sociologist Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. In his summary report carrying the title, *Nevers, Nones, and Nots*, Bibby reports that only 7% of Canadians are self-proclaimed atheists, essentially unchanged from 1975. Some 85% of people across the country continue to indicate they have a religion, and 77% say they attend services anywhere from every week to once in a while.

Not Attending or Not Identifying Does Not Signal Atheism

The study shows that belief in God persists, even when people don't attend services or claim to have a religion. Bibby sums things up this way: "Nevers and Nones are seldom Nots." In fact, only 4% of Canadians meet the three criteria of being (1) atheists who also (2) never attend religious services and (3) have no religion.

Further, relatively few atheists are found in any social and demographic category. Variations within categories also are minor. For example, people who don't believe in God do not tend to be any younger or older than the rest of the population. They also are no more likely to be university graduates or to have limited levels of education. However, atheists are marginally more prevalent among males (10%) than females (4%). They also are slightly more likely to live in B.C. (11%) than in other regions of the country (7%).

Atheists Not Closed to Ultimate Justice, Spirituality

Even though they do not believe in God, Canadian atheists do not discount the ideal of some kind of ultimate justice existing: 85% agree that, "in the case of some deplorable acts, no human form of justice enough" (the national level is 91%). One in 4 atheists acknowledge that they have spiritual needs – although they are inclined to conceptualize spirituality in highly personal and subjective ways.

Surprising Views of Organized Religion

Canadians who don't believe in God are not necessarily antagonistic toward organized religion. Some 46% agree that "religious groups still have a role to play in Canadian lives." In addition, approximately one in five (19%) say that they themselves are open to greater involvement in religious groups if they could find it to be worthwhile for themselves or their families.

Conclusion

These findings indicate that atheism continues to characterize a relatively small number of Canadians in every part of the country. Such people are not necessarily negative toward organized religion, and one-quarter admit to having spiritual needs.

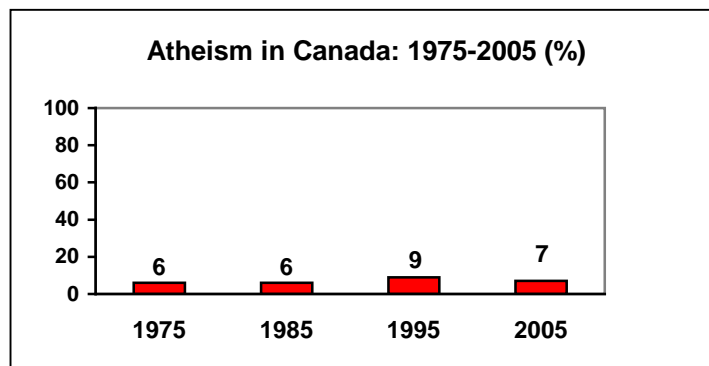
Best-selling books by the likes of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens notwithstanding, Canadians remain remarkably pro-God and pro-organized religion. Doubts? Yes. Reservations? Of course. Rejection of either? No.

Illustrative graphics

Sources:

Reginald W. Bibby,
Nevers, Nones, and Nots.
Latent Life in Unexpected Places.
(2007).

Full report available at
reginaldbibby.com.



Note:

Nevers = never attend

Nones = say have no religion

Nots = do not believe in God
or a higher power

Nevers, Nones, and Nots by Region: 2005

	Nevers	Nones	Nots	ALL 3
NATIONALLY	23%	15	7	4
Region				
British Columbia	38	34	11	8
Alberta	27	18	8	5
Ontario	21	12	7	3
Quebec	21	14	8	3
Atlantic	16	5	4	1
Sask-Manitoba	13	8	4	2

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Reginald Bibby holds the Board of Governors Research Chair in Sociology at the University of Lethbridge. He has been monitoring Canadian social trends since the mid-1970s, making his findings available through a large number of media and personal appearances and ten best-selling books. His most recent book, *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*, was released in October of 2006. Detail on Bibby and his work can be found at "reginaldbibby.com".