

WHY BOTHER WITH ORGANIZED RELIGION?

The Views of Insiders, Marginals, and Outsiders

by

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ABSTRACT

The question of why some people become involved in religious groups while others do not has intrigued social scientists dating back to at least Durkheim, Marx, and Freud. During the growth of Sociology of Religion in the 1960s, it continued to be a focus of attention for people including Glock, Greeley, and Demerath, and remains an important question addressed today by such eminent observers as Rodney Stark. Over time, theories of deprivation and socialization have been supplemented with theories of reflection and rational choice. In the midst of all this theorizing, however, there has been a noticeable lack of concrete data coming from the people who are actually involved in religious groups – as well as those who are not. In this paper, the author attempts to address this void by drawing on the findings of a major national survey of 1,600 Canadians completed in late 2005. Individuals who are actively involved in religious groups were asked why they participate, while those who are not involved were asked why not. An in-between group comprised of people who are not involved but open to greater participation were asked what it would take for them to become more involved. Responses to these open-ended questions provide information that is important to academics and religious leaders – and intriguing to people who wonder how unique their relationship to organized religion is. The author concludes with observations on the implications of the findings for religion in Canada, the United States and elsewhere.

Introduction

The question of why people are involved in religious groups is as old as the sociology of religion. The sources issue was a central issue for observers dating back to at least Marx, Durkheim, and Freud, who spawned well-known theories focusing on deprivation and socialization. For Marx, religion had its origins in the inclination of the disadvantaged to redefine rather than change their social conditions, and functioned like a drug that dealt with symptoms rather than causes. Durkheim saw religion as having social origins, to the extent that even the alleged experience of the supernatural was, in reality, the group experiencing itself. Freud viewed religion as arising out of civilization's need to cope with nature and fate by creating friendly supernatural beings with which relationships could be formed. Once in place, such ideas about the gods were learned pretty much, he said, like the multiplication table.

These age-old explanations of religious involvement have known prominence through today, supplemented by less deterministic theories that emphasize themes such as personal reflection and personal choice. This paper briefly reviews some of those explanations and then does something a bit different: it looks at what people themselves have to say about why they are involved, not very involved, and not interested in being involved. In the process, it provides a current reading on the extent of religious participation, and provides the people we are studying with a long overdue voice in the sources discussion.

Why People Are Involved in Religious Groups

Deprivation, Socialization, and Reflection

The early theories of deprivation and socialization were echoed by key players in the emergence of the sociology of religion in the United States in the 1960s and 70s, notably Charles Glock and one of his students, Jay Demerath. In Glock's (1964) classic essay "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," he noted that deprivation of various kinds provides pools of people who tend to be drawn into political movements if they want to alter conditions and to religious groups if they are inclined to reinterpret conditions. In a widely cited article, Demerath (1969) drew attention to the fact that, for the vast majority of people who are involved in religious groups, imitation is more important a source than urgency. Andrew Greeley (1972) also emphasized the important role of socialization. Today Greeley (2006) notes that some 85% of American Catholics "who were raised Catholics are still Catholics," adding, "It is those who depart who are the exception." He maintains that the departure rate among American Catholics has not changed in the last thirty-five years.

Deprivation and socialization explanations, however, have needed to be supplemented by explanations that allow for religion to be seen as “a real” or “independent variable,” rather than as simply a derivative of something else (Christiano, Swatos, and Kivisto 2002:42). One such explanation sees religious commitment and involvement being the product at least in part of personal reflection (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1974). Clearly some people, like the reflective Psalmist (8:3-4, NRSV) of old, look to the heavens and ask, “*What are human beings that [the gods] are mindful of them?*” Max Weber (1963), for example, wrote that, religion is the product of an “inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and take up a position toward it.” Similarly, Clifford Geertz (1968) noted that some people and likely most people are unable “just to look at the stranger features of the world's landscape in dumb astonishment or bland apathy without trying to develop...some notions as to how such features might be reconciled” with ordinary experience.

Rational Choice

Socialization, deprivation, and reflection appear to be good individual predictors of religious involvement, with the latter seemingly among the determinants of different levels of religious commitment or intensity. Given that a Baptist, for example, has come from a Baptist home, deprivation and conscious decision-making related to one’s reflection on life and values may lead a person to become more involved in a Baptist congregation, or less involved. This reflective component receives some clarification from the well-known work of Rodney Stark and his associates – including William Bainbridge, Roger Finke, and Lawrence Iannaccone – that is variously referred to as a rational choice or market model.

Individuals, they maintain, make choices about religion and religious involvement just as they do in other areas of their lives. In addressing questions that only the gods can satisfy, they encounter groups that compete for market share. What people do is make a rational choice – subjective though it may be – to belong and participate based on benefits and costs. The higher the costs and the higher the material, social, and religious benefits, the more the involvement is valued. In the words of Finke and Stark (1992:238,250), “People tend to value religion according to how much it costs — and because ‘reasonable’ and ‘sociable’ religion costs little, it is not valued greatly.” Using Catholicism as an example, Finke and Stark (1992:255ff) maintain that post-Vatican II changes aimed at modernizing the Catholic Church, for example, had the effect of lowering demands and lowering value, and inadvertently contributing to declining levels of participation.

In short, people will gravitate toward religious groups that, in the context of their lives as whole, provide them with the benefits they seek at appropriate costs. In the process, the groups that tend to win out in the long run are those that demand much and offer much. Conversely, as religious bodies ask less of their members, their ability to reward them declines. So it is that the more mainline that a denomination is, the lower the value of belonging to it, resulting eventually in reduced levels of participation.

Structural and Cultural Factors

In their thorough overview of theoretical and empirical work on the sources of religious involvement, Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald Luidens (1993:10ff) have reminded us that, in addition to the “supplier” and “consumer,” institutional and individual variables, participation has been seen as influenced by contextual factors. They have pointed out that the membership decline experienced in the last half of the twentieth century by American Mainline Protestant denominations was viewed by some observers as related to cultural and structural factors. The former included increases in liberalism, pluralism, individualism, and privatism, along with growing anti-institutionalism. The latter included the decline in community, changes in family life and the role of women, and a declining tendency for people to “switch” into Mainline Protestant groups.

Contextual factors in general, including major events such as wars, recessions, and disasters, are frequently assumed to have an impact on religious participation. The precise extent and duration of such factors, however, is far from clear. For example, in the ensuing two months after the tragic events of 9/11 in 2001, some seven in ten Canadians claimed that they had become more appreciative of their families. Slightly more than two in ten said they felt a greater need for religious beliefs and some 16% said they felt a greater need to go to a place of worship. In the United States, church attendance during the two weeks after the attacks rose nationally from 42% to 47%. By early November attendance had fallen back to 42% (Bibby 2004:242,247).

Sources of Non-Involvement

The explanations as to why some people do not opt for religious involvement logically would seem to take the flip side of the involvement explanations. That is to say, the uninvolved *are not* particularly deprived, *have not* come from pro-religious homes, *do not* make a choice for faith in the course of reflecting on life and death, and *do not* find that religious involvement warrants the

costs involved. Contextual and structural factors such as education, individualism, employment outside the home, and time pressures may play roles in keeping people outside of religious groups (see, for example, Putnam 2000; Bibby 2005). Personal and societal developments, however, do not result in everyone choosing to become religiously involved.

To the extent that disengagement – also commonly referred to as “disaffiliation” or “apostasy” – takes place, it frequently is associated with relationships. Marriages and friendships, for example, which bring people into religious groups also remove people from them (see, for example, Hadaway 1989; Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993; Bibby 2004). In some instances, of course, disengagement is associated with sadness, strain, disillusionment, and hostility (see, for example, Mauss 1968, Posterski and Barker 1993, Wilson 1994, Bromley 1998).

In both Canada and the United States, the number of people who claim to have no religious affiliation is relatively low – some 16% as of the latest, 2001 Canadian census, and about 10% in the U.S., according to recent Gallup polls. What’s more, there is reason to believe that being a “Religious None” is anything but a permanent category for large numbers of people. Research in Canada, for example, has found that within ten years as many as two in three leave the “no religion” category and revert to identifying with the religious groups of their families (Bibby 2004:47-49).

It consequently is probably more accurate to think of people in both countries, not in dichotomous terms such as “churched” or “unchurched” (see, for example, Gallup’s Winseman 2005), but rather as being involved in groups to varying degrees, ranging from “highly involved” at one end of the continuum to “not involved at all” at the other end. The empirical reality is that most people in both countries both identify with groups and attend at least once in a while.

Updating the Aerial Photograph and More

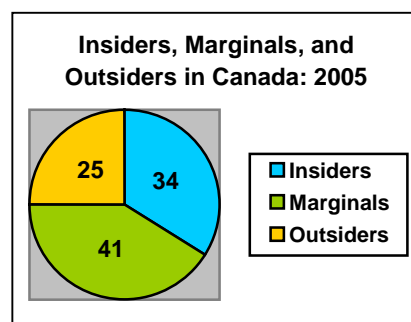
There is considerable value in the ongoing monitoring of religious participation. Such readings allow us to contribute to a resolution of the debate between proponents of secularization – who predict declining levels of involvement or – and market model proponents who anticipate that involvement levels should remain steady or increase as groups compete for market share. A second important issue that requires ongoing monitoring is the extent to which people show signs of defying intergenerational religious socialization patterns. In the last two decades, influential thinkers Robert Wuthnow (1988) and Wade Clark Roof (1999) have been

among those who have maintained that religious identification has been declining in importance as people increasingly engage in highly individualistic searches for religion and spirituality.

Such participation and switching readings through 2005 are possible in Canada as a result of the completion of my ongoing “Project Canada” national surveys that have been conducted every five years from 1975 through 2005. These surveys, carried out by mail, each have highly representative samples of approximately 1,500 cases. They provide extensive data on social trends generally and religious trends specifically, including religious involvement and religious identification (for Project Canada survey details, see Bibby 2004:249-254). The latest survey was completed in November of 2005 and has a highly representative weighted sample of 1,600 cases that permits generalizations to the national population that are accurate within approximately 2.5 percentage points 19 times in 20.

Beyond attendance trends and switching, the most recent survey provided additional data on the sources of religious involvement by identifying three categories of people: (1) those who are highly involved, (2) those who are not highly involved but are open to greater participation, and (3) those who are neither highly involved nor receptive to greater involvement – people who we might dub, respectively, as *Insiders*, *Marginals*, and *Outsiders*.

The Insiders, who comprise close to 35% of Canadians, attend services at least once a month. They were asked, “*What is the main thing your religious involvement adds to your life?*” The Marginals attend services less than once a month; they make up about 40% of the national population. However, in response to the question, “*Would you consider the possibility of being more involved in a religious group if you found it to be worthwhile for yourself or your family,*” these people indicated that they are (“Yes” or “Perhaps”). They were asked the pointed and important question: “*What kinds of things would make it worthwhile?*” The third and remaining category, the Outsiders, are those people who attend services less than monthly and said, “No,” they would not consider the possibility of greater involvement. The Outsiders make up some 25% of the population. Having indicated their lack of receptivity to involvement, they were asked, “*Is there any major reason why not?*” All three of the questions that were posed to the three categories were open-ended.



This design made it possible to get a sense of what people themselves have to say about why they are involved, somewhat involved, and not involved in religious groups. Their responses, of course, reflect their perceptions. But over against we as academics pontificating about why people participate or do not participate in religious groups, their thoughts at minimum represent data that we need to take into account as we attempt to come up with good explanations. To paraphrase sociologist Howard Becker and his observations a few decades ago about research in the area of deviant behaviour, “There is something wrong with our research if the people we are studying do not recognize themselves in the descriptions we are providing of them.” In this instance, we as academic onlookers should be able to recognize our explanations in what people are saying about their levels of religious involvement. If we can’t, we need to go back to the explanatory drawing board.

Findings

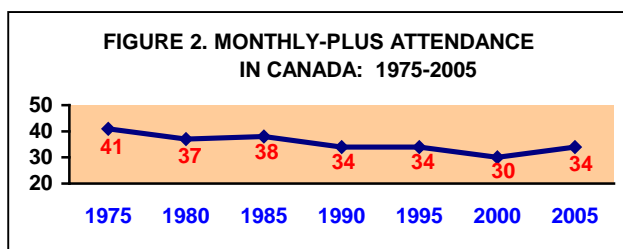
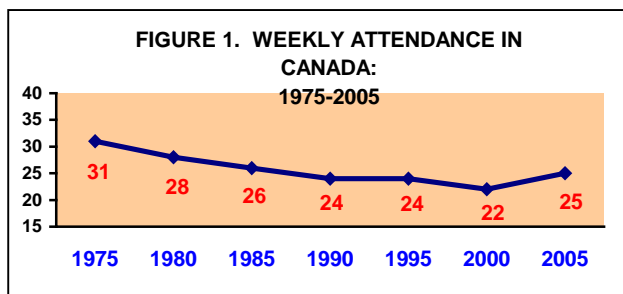
Attendance

It may come as a surprise to many Americans in particular to learn that, according to the first national survey of attendance on record in Canada – a 1945 Gallup poll – regular service attendance in the 1940s was higher in Canada (around 55-60%) than in the U.S. (about 45-50%). Things changed dramatically over the ensuing sixty years. By 2000, weekly attendance in Canada had dropped a low of around 20%, while American attendance remained about 45%.

The most recent Project Canada survey has uncovered an important finding – that for the first time since the survey series began in 1975, there actually has been an upturn in both weekly and monthly attendance of around three to four percentage points (see Figures 1 and 2) were carried out.

While the numbers may not seem large, what is significant is that the ongoing downward trend that had been predicted by proponents of secularization has at least been temporarily halted.

This reversal is consistent with what a number of pollsters have been finding in recent years (see Bibby 2006). It also is consistent with my assertion that, since approximately 2000, there are signs that organized religion is making a modest comeback in Canada (Bibby 2004).



Intergenerational Retention

As noted earlier, Andrew Greeley maintains that 85% of Americans who were raised Catholic are still Catholic, and that the pattern has not changed in the last thirty-five years. In Canada, the intergenerational retention levels for the dominant Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Conservative Protestant “families” remain around 80%, and have not changed very much in the past thirty years, despite the decline in attendance through 2000. Retention is marginally lower among Catholics and Mainline Protestants than in 1975, but primarily because of “temporary losses” to the no religion category rather than defection to other groups.

Table 1. Intergenerational Retention: 1975 and 2005

<i>Mother's Religion</i>		<i>Respondent's Religion*</i>					Varied	Totals
		RC	MLProt	CProt	Other	None		
NATIONALLY	2005	45	20	8	6	16	<1	100
RCs: Outside Quebec	2005	78%	5	2	<1	14	<1	100
	1975	82	9	<1	<1	7	<1	100
RCs: Quebec	2005	84	<1	<1	3	11	<1	100
	1975	87	<1	<1	3	9	<1	100
Main Prots	2005	4	81	5	1	9	<1	100
	1975	3	89	3	<1	4	<1	100
Cons Prots	2005	3	13	82	<1	3	<1	100
	1975	4	34	59	<1	3	<1	100
Other Faiths	2005	<1	2	3	84	11	<1	100
	1975	17	9	<1	68	6	<1	100
Nones	2005	8	2	4	9	77	<1	100
	1975	22	10	<1	<1	68	<1	100

*RC total includes Orthodox (2%); "Other" = other major world faiths; varied = additional groups.

While caution needs to be used in interpreting trends among Conservative Protestants and people of other faiths because of small sample sizes, what remains clear is that intergenerational retention is very high in both instances.

Looked at from the standpoint of the sources of current involvement, religious socialization as reflected in the identification of parents is very highly correlated with the inclination of Canadians to identify with Catholicism and Mainline Protestant groups. Some 75% of Conservative Protestants and 70% of people adhering to other faiths likewise reflect parental religious ties. All of these levels are virtually the same as they were thirty years ago. There is little support for the idea that groups draw people who have been highly autonomous religious seekers or searchers.

Table 2. Intergenerational Recruitment: 1975 and 2005

<i>Respondent's Religion</i>		<i>Mother's Religion</i>					Totals
		RC	MLProt	CProt	Other	None	
RCs: Outside Quebec	2005	91%	6	1	<1	2	100
	1975	86	7	1	3	3	100
RCs: Quebec	2005	99	<1	<1	<1	1	100
	1975	98	<1	<1	1	1	100
Main Prots	2005	5	90	4	<1	<1	100
	1975	5	87	3	1	4	100
Cons Prots	2005	6	15	74	2	3	100
	1975	4	21	75	<1	<1	100
Other Faiths	2005	13	7	<1	69	11	100
	1975	23	7	<1	71	<1	100
Nones	2005	37	18	2	4	39	100
	1975	48	20	2	4	26	100

In fact, as in 1975, a pretty rule of thumb is that people who are active in religious groups today are the same people who were active when they were growing up. In 1975, 82% of weekly attenders and 89% of monthly-plus attenders attended on those same levels as young children; the two figures for 2005 are 84% and 90% respectively. The fact that attendance during childhood is a necessary but not sufficient cause of involvement as adults is suggested by the finding that 48% of the 2005 respondents who never attend claim that, when they were growing up, they attended weekly, 58% that they went at least monthly. In 1975, the

Table 3. Current Attendance by Attendance Growing Up

Current Attendance	Attendance Growing Up				Totals
	Weekly	Monthly	Yearly	Never	
Weekly					
2005	84%	6	6	4	100
1975	82	7	10	1	100
Monthly					
2005	79	15	5	1	100
1975	74	17	9	<1	100
Yearly					
2005	63	14	21	2	100
1975	69	15	14	2	100
Never					
2005	48	10	23	19	100
1975	62	11	21	6	100

r's: 1975 = .212; 2005 = .356.

corresponding figures for “nevers” were even higher, at 62% and 73% respectively. The possibility that attendance today is more often tied to salience versus cultural expectations, the correlation between childhood and adult attendance has increased since 1975.

Why the Insiders Say They Are Involved

People who are actively involved in religious groups were hard-pressed to isolate “the main thing” their participation adds to their lives; they frequently wanted to cite a number of factors. Moreover, the single characteristics cited are often not mutually exclusive. That said, here is what we found.

- Almost six in ten Canadians who attend services at least once a month report that the primary contribution to their life that their involvement brings is *personal enrichment* in the form of traits such as peace, purpose, sustenance, growth, and hope.
- For some two in ten people, the primary contribution to their lives of their involvement is *the people* as a supportive and enjoyable community of faith.
- A further two in ten see the key addition to their life as related to *God and spirituality*, including the development of their faith.

Table 4. What Involvement Brings
(N = 420)

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

Personal enrichment		56%
Peace	17	
Purpose	11	
Sustenance	6	
Growth	6	
Hope	5	
Stability	4	
Fulfillment	3	
Guidance	2	
Other	2	
The People		22
Community, fellowship	12	
Collective worship	6	
Other	4	
God and spirituality		21
God-related	11	
Spirituality	5	
Strengthening of faith	2	
Other	3	
Nothing		1

Personal enrichment is the dominant characteristic cited by individuals in all groups – most noticeably Catholics outside Quebec and adherents to faiths other than Christianity. “The people” is of particular importance to Mainline Protestants, God and spirituality to Quebec Catholics and Conservative Protestants.

Younger and older adults are 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 34% of Canadians who attend services monthly or more, the number one “return” across all of these demographic categories is personal enrichment.

Table 5. What Involvement Brings by Religious Group, Age, and Gender

	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 Prots	49	31	19	1	100
Cons Prots	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
<i>Cong. Size</i>					
Protestant					
150 or less	48	30	22	<1	100
>150	49	30	21	<1	100
Catholic					
150 or less	59	14	24	3	100
>150	59	19	20	2	100

What the Actively Involved Are Saying About What 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 the everyday events... contentment, happiness...peace within and joy of living...social enjoyment, including recalling pleasant times from the past...I feel happier...it gives me strength everyday...peace, hope, contentment – a major time commitment, but worth it...well-being, satisfaction, peace within...love and compassion...it makes my faith is more tangible in my daily life...peace and serenity that make it easier to accept things...a desire to be a better person...a calming feeling...confidence in the future....

The People

...Companionship in my spiritual journey...help and fellowship...a sense of belonging and common experience...connection and support...friends and spiritual enrichment...our quiet gathering together for friendship...I'm 86 years old and the minister comes to my home every month...belonging...the spiritual enrichment and support of friends has immeasurable value for our whole family...a sense of a special community of people...sense of community, friendship, counsel from pastor...gives proper values and teachings to my children....

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...seeing and living with God... communion with God...enrichment of my faith...it makes me sense I am not alone from God or others...a knowledge of God, the Bible, God's service – I work at it full time...an opportunity to thank God for what I am...spiritual comfort and support...contact with the Supreme Being...the opportunity to share my spirituality in a community...really good for spirituality... gives meaning to life...it lifts my faith and confirms that a spiritual power governs the universe....

What the Marginals Say It Would Take

The 66% of Canadians who attend services less than once a month are comprised of those who attend several times a year (13%), yearly (15%), less than yearly (15%), and never (23%). They were asked if they would be receptive to greater involvement in a religious group if they found it to be worthwhile for themselves or their families.

Some 62% offered positive responses in the form of either “Yes” (19%) or “Perhaps” (43%). The remaining 38% said “No.” Receptivity is relatively high across the country, ranging from 75% among Catholics outside Quebec to 63% for Catholics in Quebec. As would be expected, the receptivity level is lowest among “Nones” – yet even here more than one in three people express openness.

- Although the Marginals attend services less than once a month, there nonetheless is a fairly strong correlation between receptivity and attendance levels – ranging from 83% for those who attend several times a year through 74% for yearly attenders and 67% for those who are in services less than once a year to 41% for those who never attend ($r = .324$).

Table 6. Receptivity to Greater Involvement by Select Variables, 2005
Among People Attending Services Less Than Monthly (N=1,047)

	NAT	RCOQ	RCQ	PROT	NONE
Totals	62%	75	63	71	37
Yearly	74	82	68	79	55
Never	41	**	**	53	31
18-34	63	72	56	89	41
35-54	64	79	63	73	36
55+	59	67	65	64	31
Women	65	77	65	72	42
Men	60	72	60	71	33
>100,000*	63	81	56	73	39
<100,000	62	66	68	70	34
Degree-plus	63	84	61	72	45
Some PS	65	87	64	74	28
HS or Less	60	57	63	69	33

*Nationally, the figures by community size are: over 400,000 61%, 100-400,000 65%, 19-99,000 62%, and under 10,000 62%.

- Receptivity by age differs little overall, although Quebec Catholics under 35 are somewhat less receptive than older adults, while younger Protestants and Nones are more receptive.
- Women tend to express more openness to greater involvement than men, particularly in the case of people with no religion.
- Community size differences are negligible nationally but, in the Catholic instance, receptivity is somewhat lower in Montreal and larger Quebec cities than in smaller cities and towns, and higher in larger cities in the rest of the country.
- Those who are open to greater involvement tend to differ little from each other by education, with the exception of receptivity being higher among Catholics outside of Quebec who have a post-secondary education, and among Nones who are university graduates – the latter pattern perhaps the opposite of what many observers would expect.

As for the tough question as to what would make greater involvement worthwhile, the Marginals did not lack for ideas – almost six in ten volunteered thoughts.

- Some 40% indicate that the key lies with *ministry* that is in touch with their personal interests and needs, including ministries that target children, young adults, and seniors. Explicit emphases on God and spirituality are important to many, as is ministry that gives attention to community and societal issues.
- Just over 20% cite the importance of *organizational* issues being resolved, notably the need for changes in style and outlook. Specific examples offered include the need to be more contemporary and inclusive, as well as exhibiting greater equality toward people generally, starting with women.
- Another 20% indicate that the key to their being more involved in religious groups is for groups to exhibit *qualities* that they value. They talk about ministries that speak directly to life and to their lives. Many are particularly wanting to sense authenticity and integrity – not surprising in light of the widespread cynicism toward government and other societal sectors in recent years, as well as the extensive publicity given to abuse and scandal in the churches, including the residential school legacy.
- A further 20% report that the main reason why they are not more involved in religious groups is because of factors in *their own lives*. They include schedule and time problems, the lack of involvement of family and friends, aging and health, and the presence of young children. A number of people suggest that, with the passage of time, needs will arise that will result in their becoming more involved again.

Table 7. What Would Make Greater Involvement Worthwhile (N=371)
Factors Cited by People Attending <Monthly Who Say They Are Receptive

Ministry Factors	39%
Personal interests & needs	17
Specific ministries	12
God and spirituality	6
Society-oriented	4
Organizational Factors	22
Changes in style and outlook	19
More contemporary	6
More inclusive	6
Greater equality	3
Other	4
Better Leadership	3
Ministry Qualities	20
Relevant, realistic	7
Genuine, authentic	6
Interesting, stimulating, lively	3
Caring	2
Other	2
Respondent Factors	19
Schedule changes	7
Involvement of family & friends	5
Getting older, children, health, etc.	4
Emerging needs	3
Total	100

Table 8. What Would Make Greater Involvement Worthwhile by Religious Group, Age, and Gender

	Ministry Factors	Org. Factors	Ministry Qualities	Respond Factors	Totals
ALL	39%	22	20	19	100
RCOQ	52	17	20	11	100
RCQ	32	28	16	24	100
ML Prots	38	20	17	25	100
None	41	25	20	14	100
18-34	37	25	19	19	100
35-54	38	20	22	20	100
55+	45	20	17	18	100
Women	33	22	24	21	100
Men	48	22	14	16	100

- Ministry factors are number one among Marginals across the country, led by Catholics outside Quebec, along with men. When all's said and done, people on the fringes of church life are looking for good ministry.
- Organizational factors are of importance to slightly more Quebec Catholics and younger adults than others. These differences may well reflect both the institutional suspicion of youth and the disenchantment many Quebecers had with the Catholic Church following the decline in the Church's authority in the aftermath of the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s.
- Ministry qualities are more salient for women than men, in large part, it would seem, because women frequently have been denied full inclusion in religious groups, and often have not been part of the decision-making that has led to the creation of congregational cultures and ministries that are significant for them.
- Quebec Catholics and Protestant Mainliners are slightly more inclined than others to acknowledge that the reason for not being more involved lies not so much with their parishes and congregations as with them, and with things taking place in their lives.

**What the Marginals Are Saying About
What Would Make Greater Involvement Worthwhile**

Ministry Factors

... It would have to add value to my life...more family things...spiritual guidance related to everyday living and practices...get to know the people in my community better...for my family's well-being...ff it was uplifting and added to life...emphasis on the love of God, caring about others, etc. rather than the pomp ceremony and ritual...if it was beneficial and educational to my family...programs for children...sermons given by a good speaker that are upbeat and good for parents and children...so my child can learn about God and the Bible and decide if they wish to continue on...I would have to feel some connection or in some way that it was making me a better person...group activities, friendship...personal fulfillment, personal growth... great kids' programs....

Organizational Factors

...Get away from the boring traditional ways and change with the times...a non-judgmental environment that emphasizes spiritual development rather than strictly enforced rules...if they had an inspirational minister...remove the "old boys' club" mentality – accept things that are different, such as gay marriage and choice decisions, and offer women a greater role..."the face" of church would have to really change... if more emphasis is placed on explaining WHY certain actions are important rather than WHAT our actions should be...if the sermons were more relevant to today's social climate...a priest that you can understand, that can speak English clearly...freedom to follow my own belief system...no talk of heaven or hell....

Ministry Qualities

...A community of faith that is genuine and caring...more up-to-date and relevant sermons, good music, and more local involvement...honesty, a group that really did practice what they preached...more age-appropriate things for teenagers and young adult groups...services that I am able to get something from...finding less hypocrisy...dealing with the real life issues of today...more involvement with the community – not just special occasion masses...a sense of integrity...try something new...music, interesting speakers on religion and topics such as new religion topics, crime, and morality....some vitality and positive energy....

Personal Factors

... I see myself attending my church again on a regular basis, but right now my life is congested and I have little time for anything else...if I had children and my partner wanted to expose them to religion, it would make my in-laws happy...I need more time...if my spouse wanted to go and we went to services to be uplifted...if someone in the family got something out of it I would support them...make it Sunday afternoon, not in the morning...if it could have a positive influence on my partner and our children...a sign from God...time and money....

Why the Outsiders Are Staying Away

Some 38% of Canadians who attend services less than once a month say they are not open to greater involvement in religious groups. As noted earlier, these Outsiders represent about 25% of the total Canadian population.

We already have observed that receptivity to greater participation characterizes pretty much a majority of people in every demographic, with the exception of Nones and people who never attend services. Non-receptivity levels also are marginally higher among Quebec Catholics under the age of 35 versus people who are older, males rather than females, and, again in Quebec, in larger cities versus smaller cities and towns. Lower levels of education are also associated with lower levels of receptivity among non-Quebec Catholics and people with no religion (see Table 6).

- What's interesting to note is that, despite indicating they are closed to greater involvement, some six in ten Outsiders continue to identify with religious groups – disproportionately Mainline Protestant and, in the case of Quebec, Catholicism.
- Most are between the ages of 35 and 54 – although the distribution closely reflects the population, where 40% of adults are 35-54, 29% under 35, and 31% 55 and over. The point here is that, contrary to widespread stereotyping, the majority of Outsiders are not young adults.
- Health and age are noteworthy factors for some: 25% rate their health as “fair” (20%) or poor (5%), while 10% are 70 or older.
- A slight majority are males.
- Some 51% say they attended services on a weekly basis when they were growing up, compared to 66% for the nation as a whole.
- Solid majorities have or had parents who identified with a religion; 71% of their partners also have a religious affiliation.

Table 9. Some Characteristics of Outsiders, 2005

*Attend Less Than Monthly,
Not Open to Involvement (N=342)*

NATIONALLY

No religion	42%
Mainline Protestant	20
RC Quebec	19
RC Outside Quebec	9
Christian unspecified	4
Other faiths	4
Conservative Protestant	2
35-54	43
55+	29
18-34	28
Men	53
Women	47
Less weekly as child	51
Partner: no religion	29
Father: no religion	20
Mother: no religion	16

Having just said “No” in response to being asked if they would consider the possibility of being more involved in a religious group if [they] found it to be worthwhile” for themselves or their families, Outsiders were asked, “*Is there any major reason why not?*” Two in three offered responses. Six themes emerged.

1. Two in ten people said they have negative views of religious groups, being particularly critical of their contribution to conflict and intolerance.
2. Another two in ten simply expressed a lack of interest associated with no particular sense of need.
3. A further two in ten indicated they do not hold religious beliefs.
4. About one in ten emphasized the fact that they do not discount the importance of spirituality or even religion, but do not see group involvement as necessary and in some cases see it as a liability.
5. Still another one in ten expressed negative views of religion, seeing it, for example, as being an illusion or being a divisive global force
6. The remaining one in ten cited other factors of a more personal nature, including the limitations of time, declining health, and advancing age.

Negative views of religious groups	21%
Source of conflict, intolerant	11
Hypocrisy	3
Lack confidence	2
Other	5
No interest in involvement	21
Have no interest	13
No sense of need	5
Not religious	2
Prefer alternatives	1
Lack of Belief	20
Personal preference	11
No group needed to be spiritual	5
Spirituality preferred over religion	3
Prefer personal to groups	3
Negative Views of Religion	10
Personal factors	6
e.g., time, health, age	
Other	4
No major reason	7
Total	100

The general conclusion of most of the people in the Outsider group is that involvement in religious groups is not a plus for Canadian society. Asked to respond to the statement, “*Our society would be better off if people attended religious services more regularly,*” only 11% of the Outsiders agreed – considerably below the 32% figure for Marginals, and the 79% endorsement level of Insiders.

What the Outsiders Are Saying About Why They Are Not Receptive to Greater Involvement

Negative Views of Religious Groups

... In the past I have encountered hypocrisy and deceit in preachers personally...most of those people are hypocrites...the clergy's marginality, discrimination, lack of open-mindedness towards women as priests, divorce and homosexuality...they are or have aligned themselves with interests that are not mine...I don't want to be brain washed by the wrong teachings... to me, organized religion is a business and run as such. For example, the Catholic Church is the richest organization in the world, but many are still starving. Where is the Christianity in that? ...too many changes taking place with just a few improvements... how can I trust a priest more than a politician?

No Interest in Involvement

...Lack of any motivation...no need...too hokey...I don't need to be involved in a religious group to find the spirituality I am looking for. I find it in friends, acquaintances, workshops, books, magazines, the Internet....

Lack of Belief

...I'm not much of a believer...I do not believe in God...I can't make myself believe; I'd feel like a fraud...I have concluded that man created God in his image and we are mammals on a planet of a minor star in a minor galaxy...there is no God...I don't have faith...it's impossible to know whether there is a God or not; I'm agnostic...I don't believe in any Gods. Science rules....

Personal Preference

...I have not discovered a religious group that answers my spiritual needs; they are all biased and confining...the absolute refusal to follow any kind of dogma...I don't think spirituality has to be connected to organized religion...total liberty to think is for me...I feel that it is difficult to render a private spirituality public and communal – bureaucracy gets in the way...we can worship at home or anywhere...I have not had much faith in religious groups. I love God and exist with my whole being and regularly study the Bible...fear of being pulled in and losing my identity in the process...I don't like rules being placed on me or my children, especially thought and belief rules....

Negative Views of Religion

... Waste of time, don't need a crutch...I wish people would just be a decent human being everyday instead of fearing some God or retribution in the future...much harm has been done over history...I think religion is a concept invented by man to control other beings and is the root of all evil – wars, famine, hatred, envy...firm belief that over the last 1000 years religious groups have had a net negative on world wide society...I am against organized religion because it is a major cause of violent conflicts in the world....

Personal Factors

... My age (87)...health reasons...too far to drive to church...no time, too busy with family...I'm 84 years old and unable to get myself to church...no major reason, I simply like focusing my energy towards my studies and my relationship....

Discussion

These findings underline the fact that there is no particular mystery as to the sources of religious identification for Canada, the United States, Europe, and other setting where the religious marketplace is characterized by long-term, well-established players. Religious identification tends to be handed down from generation to generation. Participation levels also are grounded in participation when one is younger. However, while such exposure to religious groups is typically preparatory for adult involvement, is clearly is not a sufficient cause in and of itself.

The reports of those people who are actively involved in religious groups as adults support the assertion that large numbers make choices to be involved and stay involved based on what they receive from groups. Primary among these “rewards” is the enrichment of one’s life in the form of such features as peace, purpose, sustenance, and hope. For many, involvement with the people in congregations – socially, in worship, as a source of sustenance and encouragement – is also an important reward. What makes the religious group experience unique for most is its God and spiritual dimension. To the extent it is present, it too is an important “pay-off.” It perhaps is significant that younger adults are among those who most frequently cite personal enrichment factors as “the main things” that religious involvement adds to their lives. In short, the people who are the most highly involved in groups have a clear sense that their involvement has life-enhancing consequences. Otherwise, why bother?

The “why bother” question was the one that in effect was put to the Marginals who are not highly involved in religious groups. Significantly, but hardly surprising, their sense of “what it would take” sounded much like what the people who are involved are reporting: they are looking for personal enrichment in areas where they have interest. Those areas include God and spirituality, as well as needs that relate to matters that are relational and personal. “If a church could touch my family and touch my life,” many were saying, “I would be open to greater involvement.”

About one-third of those 25% of Canadians who are neither actively involved nor open to greater participation – some 10% of the national population in all – are explicitly negative about either religion or religious groups. The remaining two-thirds are not interested due to their lack of beliefs, lack of any good reasons to be involved, a preference to go it alone, or personal considerations such as health and age. The presence and size of this Outsider category serves as a reminder that religious organizations in Canada and elsewhere do not have an unlimited market. Even in the United States, one of the most “churched” countries in the world, service attendance figures suggest the religious market has seemed to peak at just under 50% of the population from approximately the 1930s onward.

Still, some parts of this “non-receptive” segment – notably those who are not interested and those facing personal constraints – could conceivably be accessed by groups that are able to do some “interesting” things, as well as help people to remove any unnecessary barriers to participation.

Conclusion

In the early years of the new century, there are signs that organized religion in Canada is making something of a comeback. If that is the case, such an embryonic resurgence is not happening by chance. On the contrary, the deduction from these findings is that religious groups are collectively doing an improved job of addressing the personal, relational, and spiritual interests and needs of Canadians. Participation levels would be expected to ebb and flow in accordance with good ministry to affiliates.

To the extent that such improved efforts at ministry continue, the current findings suggest that a growing number of people across all religious groupings – including noteworthy numbers of people who presently say they have no religion – will continue.

When one stops to think much about it, it is highly unlikely that many people in days gone by ever embraced religion with enthusiasm simply because they were deprived or came off of some kind of socialization assembly line. Religion then, as now, was undoubtedly embraced to the extent that people found that it had a significant impact on their lives, and the lives of people closest to them. Accordingly, they wanted to be part of the groups that supported it. And when people no longer found that religion and religious groups touched their lives in positive ways, they in all likelihood, then, as now, found both to be dispensable, or at best worthy of a minor part of their attention and resources.

After all, we give our lives to those things that we judge significant. If we define religious groups as playing a significant role in our lives, we will gladly pursue involvement. Otherwise – to return to the title of this paper – why bother with organized religion?

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