

University of Lethbridge

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Religious Service Attendance Trends

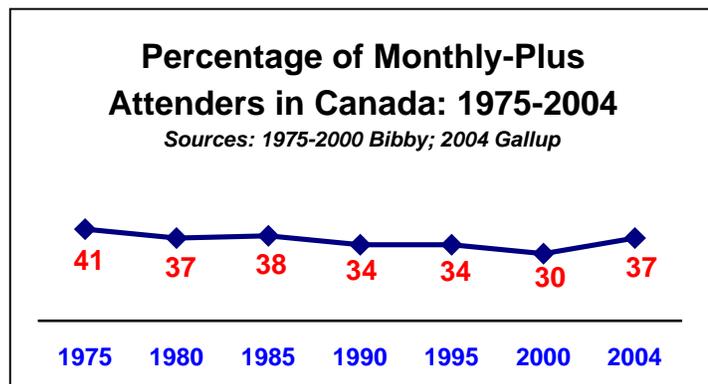
by Reginald W. Bibby

New Gallup Poll Show Religious Attendance on the Upswing

A newly released Gallup Poll is providing impressive support for the argument that organized religion is making a comeback in Canada. A poll of 1,005 Canadians completed in September of 2004 and released in November has found that 37% of Canadians are now attending religious services at least once a month.

What is noteworthy about the finding is that the 37% figure is the highest in Canada since the early 1980s. It represents a significant jump from the 30% level our Project Canada national survey found in 2000.

Such evidence of an attendance rebound is consistent with my somewhat radical assertions in both *Restless Gods* (2002) and *Restless Churches* (2004). As some readers know well, I have been maintaining that organized religion is showing signs of making a comeback in Canada.



The people who were predicting that secularization would slay organized religion in Canada appear to have been looking at Europe when they perhaps should have been looking at the United States. Similar Gallup surveys also conducted earlier this year show that Great Britain has a monthly-plus attendance level of 24%, compared to 56% in the U.S. Given the influence of American culture and American religious resources on Canada, it would be logical to expect we could be coming in somewhere in the middle. And that appears to be precisely what is happening.

Two years ago when *Restless Gods* came out, the evidence for a renaissance of religion in Canada was sketchy. Surveys such as Gallup's give us reason to believe that something very significant could be taking place in Canada. Still, some caution is needed: we won't know for probably ten or twenty years as to whether we are looking at a minor blip or something much more profound. But at minimum the data suggest that organized religion's losing streak is finally over and the wins are starting to come – at least for now.

Why the embryonic renaissance of religion? It seems to me that religious groups are finally doing a better job of responding to the needs and interests of Canadians, who by and large continue to identify with the groups of their parents and grandparents. It is sort of like what our analyzes of the renaissance of the Canadian Football League have been finding. The interest was there all along. The CFL finally got its act together and found out there were people who cared. Religious groups are finally doing a better job of responding to the spiritual, personal, and relational needs of their people. And as they do, they are finding that, lo and behold, many people are surprisingly receptive to greater involvement.