

Religion and Spirituality in Canada

Religion and Spirituality Remain Pervasive *Latest National Survey Findings*

With the decline in church attendance over the past fifty years, many observers have assumed that it's just a matter of time before religious and spiritual matters are relegated to Canadian history. It seems those experts have failed to tell Canadians. This Easter weekend, the 12 million Canadians who will probably attend services will be close the number of watched the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. And lots of others will be pursuing spiritual interests in other ways.

National research findings through 2010 analyzed by prominent sociologist and religious trends analyst Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge show that, since the 1970s, the proportion of Canadians who never attend services has doubled from about 20% to 40%. However, in the last decade, the proportion of people who worship at least once a month has remained steady at around 30%. The remaining 30% of Canadians are sort of like "the politically undecided": they haven't dropped out and occasionally drop in.

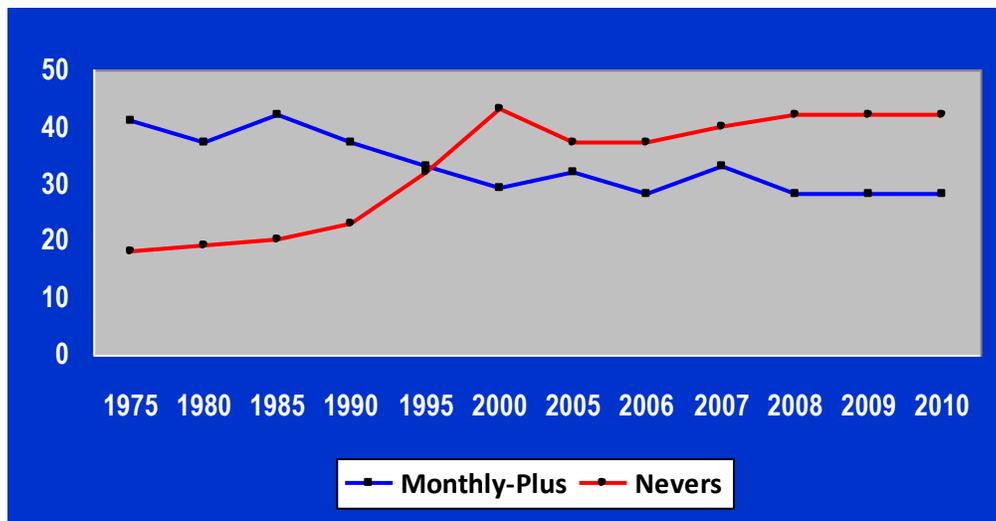
But what is particularly striking about a new snapshot provided by Statistics Canada's most recent, 2010 General Social Survey of more than 15,000 people is the actual importance that Canadians place on religion and spirituality.

- No less than 2 in 3 people across the country say that **their *religious or spiritual beliefs are important*** to the way they live their lives.
- What's more, 1 in 2 report that that they engage in ***personal religious or spiritual practices*** at least once a month.
- The fact that ***many Canadians do not give up on spirituality even when they do not embrace organized religion*** is suggested by some stark findings: almost one-half (42%) of those who never attend services say their religious or spiritual beliefs are important to how they live life, and about one-quarter (27%) report that they engage in related practices every month or more.
- The importance of religion and spirituality is ***somewhat higher*** in the ***Atlantic and Prairie regions***, along with ***Ontario***; it also tends to be higher among ***women than men***. Canadians show a greater inclination to embrace religion and spirituality ***as they get older***. Yet, **despite these variations, majorities of people in every demographic and social category acknowledge the important of their religious or spiritual beliefs in the way they live their lives.**

Bibby concludes that it's not just a case of Canadians opting for spirituality over organized religion. "Obviously some are. But our research has found that as many as 6 in 10 people who seldom attend services are open to greater involvement. However, they also tell us that they need to find that groups address their central spiritual, personal, and relational needs – beginning with good ministry to their children." Until that happens, the gulf between spiritual/religious interests and involvement will persist, with large numbers of Canadians continuing to define themselves as "spiritual but not religious."

Service Attendance: 1975-2010

Monthly-Plus and Never



SOURCES: Reginald W. Bibby, *Project Canada Survey Series, 1975-80*,
General Social Surveys, Statistics Canada, 1985-2010.

Service Attendance and Importance & Frequency of Religious and Spiritual Practices by Region, Age, and Gender (%)

	Religious Service Attendance <i>Monthly-Plus</i>	Importance of Religion or Spirituality To My Everyday Life <i>Very or Somewhat</i>	Engage in Personal Religion or Spiritual Practices <i>Monthly-Plus</i>
NATIONALLY	28	65	50
BC	25	62	46
Prairies	33	71	55
Ontario	31	68	53
Quebec	19	54	43
Atlantic	32	70	53
55+	37	78	61
35-54	25	66	50
18-34	22	53	41
Female	31	71	58
Male	25	58	42

Source: Computed from the GSS 2010 by Reginald W. Bibby.

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).

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