



Good Without God, But Better With God?

by Reginald W. Bibby

Canadians Who Believe in God More Likely Than Non-Believers to Endorse Interpersonal Values *The Rejection of God and Groups May Carry a Significant Social Cost*

A new examination of Canadians who believe in God and those who do not has found that believers are more likely to place high value on traits such as kindness, politeness, and generosity. The old question, "*Do people need God to be good?*" may well have a more complex answer: "*People who don't believe in God can be good. But people who believe in God are more likely to value being good, enhancing the chances that they will be good.*"

The analysis was carried out by sociologist and pollster Reginald Bibby of the University of Lethbridge. It is based on the examination of material in his national survey of 1,600 Canadians that was completed in late 2005.

Bibby reports that Canadians who believe in God are consistently more likely than atheists to highly value a range of characteristics that includes courtesy, concern for others, forgiveness, and patience. God-believers are also more inclined than those who don't believe in God to place high value on friendship, family life, and being loved.

The variations are not the result of age, as both atheists and theists are fairly evenly present in all age groups. The primary reason for the values differences, Bibby suggests, is fairly simple.

- People get their values from groups.
- And people who believe in God are far more likely than atheists to be part of groups that work hard to instill values about being good to other people, and having good relationships.
- That's not to say that God-believers always translate their values into action.
- But they at least are inclined to hold the values.
- Atheists, on the other hand, do not have as many explicit support groups that are committed to intentionally promoting positive interpersonal life.

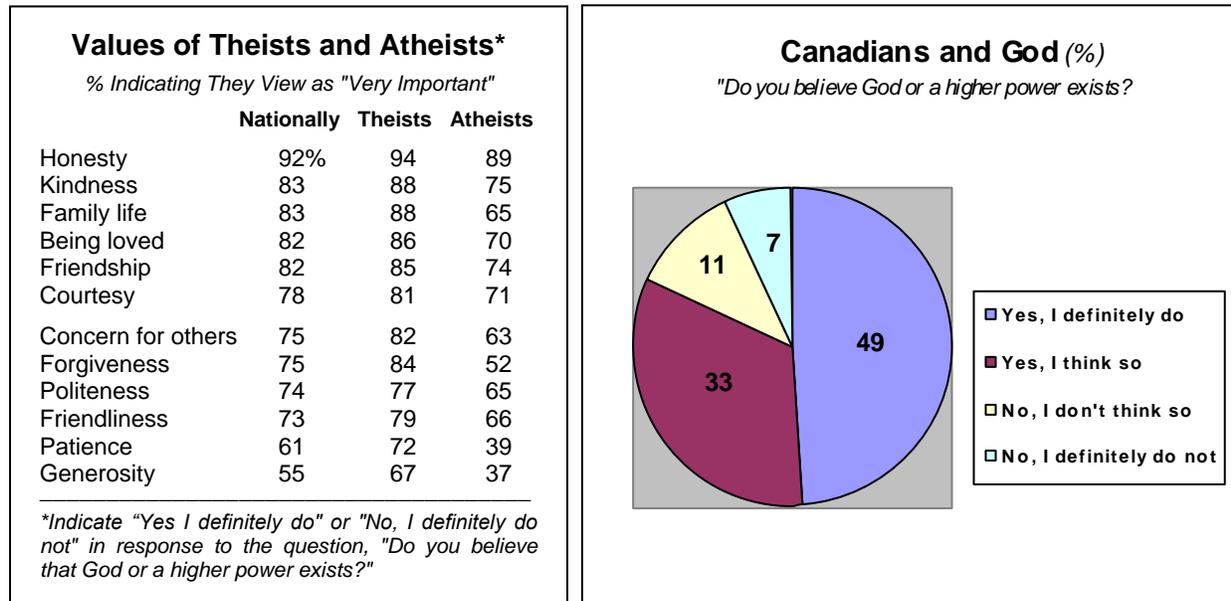
Bibby recognizes that there obviously are times when religious beliefs and religious groups do not contribute to the social good. However, if they were to disappear tomorrow, we would have to find functional equivalents in Canadian society that are equally effective in promoting good interpersonal traits.

God and religion are hardly the only sources of such traits. But they are among the most important sources. It is not at all clear that comparable equivalents currently exist that could fill the void. Schools, families, governments, and media would invariably be called on. However, there is little reason to believe that they have either the inclination or the ability to come through.

These findings, says Bibby, point to a stark conclusion: "To the extent that Canadians say good-bye to God, we may find that we pay a significant social price."

Tables

Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, *Project Canada Survey Series*.



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 is *The Boomer Factor: What Canada's Most Famous Generation is Leaving Behind*. Details on Bibby and his work can be found at "reginaldbibby.com".

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