

The Untold Story of the Role of Women in the Fall and Rise of Religion in Canada

by

Reginald W. Bibby
Board of Governors Research Chair
Department of Sociology
The University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge, AB Canada
bibby@uleth.ca
reginaldbibby.com

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 1990s there have been signs that organized religion in Canada is making a modest comeback after about four decades of decline in participation. Both of these “down and up” patterns have taken place during a time when growing numbers of Canadian women have become involved in the paid work force, complete with serious time pressures, particularly for those with school age children. Yet, throughout, surveys have shown that religious beliefs and the valuing of faith and spirituality have remained relatively high for both women and men, as has their identification with religious groups. This paper uses Canadian national data spanning 1975 to 2003 to explore the relationship between heightened time pressures for dual employed parents and their involvement in religious groups. Participation levels have declined. But what the findings suggest is that such parents have been and continue to be receptive to greater involvement, if that involvement is worth their time. In the last decade or so, Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics are showing signs of following the lead of evangelicals in doing a better job of ministering to such time-conscious couples, as well as teenagers and others. The result has been a modest increase in service attendance nationally. The key to the upswing continuing seems to lie with churches viewing involvement not as compliance with an attendance expectation, but as a natural response to meaningful ministry.

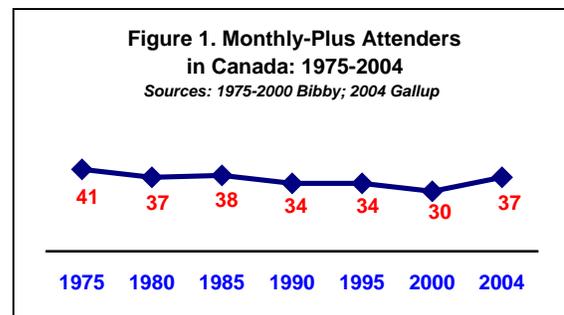
Introduction: The Fall and Rise of Religion in Canada

One of the more intriguing features of religion in the United States has been the stability of service attendance since at least the 1930s. Gallup polls spanning 1939 through 2005 show that regular attendance has remained around 45% (Gallup 2004). Such stability stands in sharp contrast to the predominant pattern in Europe of low levels of involvement becoming even lower over time. As of 2004, for example, weekly attendance stood at about 10% in Britain and the Netherlands, slightly below 10% in France and Germany, and around 5% in Sweden and Finland (Manchin 2004).

Through approximately 1990, Canada appeared to be going the route of Europe. In 1945, weekly attendance in Canada actually was slightly higher than that of the U.S. – at about 60% (CIPO 1945).¹ But by 1975 that figure had fallen to around 30%, and by 1990 to almost 20%. Classic secularization thinking appeared to apply about as well to Canada as it did to Europe. The only question many of us had as we entered the 1990s was, “How low would we go?”

What makes life interesting, of course, is experiencing the unexpected. In Canada, between approximately 1990 and now, the unexpected has been taking place. Regular attendance among teenagers had dropped from 23% in 1984 to 18% in 1992, but rebounded to 22% in 2000. Among young adults, weekly attendance that had been in ongoing decline since the 1960s levelled off the 1990s and, in the case of some groups, increased. And when people in the pews were asked for their perception of developments, they corroborated that significant numbers of their congregations experienced growth in the late 90s (Bibby 2004a:72-91).

In the early years of the new century, such cohort and congregational developments are showing signs of being reflected in overall national attendance figures. A number of recent polls have pegged the weekly-plus attendance level at around 25% (Bibby 2004b:23). A Gallup poll conducted in late 2004 found that monthly-plus attendance in Canada was 37% (Winseman 2004). What is particularly significant about the finding is that it represents the highest level of monthly plus attendance since the mid-1980s (Bibby 2004c).



¹ The release by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion reported, “Sixty-five percent of [Canadians] over 21 years of age had attended a religious service in the three week period” following Easter that year. The release further indicated that “In a recent survey in the United States, a four week period was taken, and in spite of the extra week, the U.S. Gallup Poll found only fifty-eight per cent of the population had attended a religious service.”

The Scope of the Renaissance

To date, the examination of the religion's possible comeback in Canada has been limited primarily to probing whether or not it actually is taking place, using broad national data. Attention has been given to trends among teenagers and young adults because of the implications of such trends for future levels of involvement.

Interest in the extent of religion's possible resurgence has also led to examinations of variations among religious groups (Bibby 2004a:72-91). Such queries have shown that growth rather than decline was first experienced by Conservative Protestants. In fact, the trend data show that, contrary to widespread perception, Protestant attendance as a whole between 1975 and 2000 but rather remained pretty much unchanged. The primary reason was that the growing levels of participation in Conservative Protestant groups offset the decreasing involvement levels of their Mainline Protestant counterparts. What's new among Protestants is that some of the Mainline groups – notably the United and Anglican denominations – are also beginning to show signs of revitalization.

Just as it is important to distinguish between Conservative and Mainline Protestant patterns in assessing what is taking place, so it is also extremely important to distinguish between Roman Catholics patterns in Quebec and the rest of the country. Polls carried out around 1950 suggested that monthly-plus attendance for Catholics across the country was about 90% compared to 45%

for Protestants (Gallup 1982). By 2000 the overall Catholic figure had fallen to about 35% – a figure virtually identical to that of Protestants. But the monthly-plus Catholic level had dipped to around 30% in Quebec, versus 40% in the rest of the country.

What's more, whereas recent polls are pointing to a fairly significant increase in Catholic attendance outside Quebec since 2000, the gains in Quebec – while noteworthy against the backdrop of steady decline – have been much more modest. The Quebec situation is very important to keep in mind, given that the province – which is 83% Catholic – makes up about 25% of Canada's population.²

	1975	1990	2000	2003
NATIONALLY	41%	34	30	38
Protestants	37	33	36	46
<i>Conservative</i>	55	59	61	78
<i>Mainline</i>	34	25	27	36
Catholics	56	44	36	46
<i>Outside Quebec</i>	62	48	42	57
<i>Quebec</i>	51	39	29	34
British Columbia	21	27	20	26
Prairies	36	32	31	45
Ontario	40	31	32	42
Quebec	42	33	24	29
Atlantic	68	57	48	51

Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series; 2003 - *Future Families Project*. Vanier Institute of the Family.

² While there also was a significant drop in the Atlantic region, it reflects an extremely high attendance level dropping to a level that still is the highest in the country. The region contains about 7% of the national population. As of the 2001 census, 45% of Canadians were Catholic, 23% Mainline Protestant, 8% Conservative Protestant, 2% Other Christian, 6% Other Faith, and 16% No Religion.

The Female and Family Factor

The decline of religious participation in Canada typically has been interpreted by making use of the secularization framework. Observers have assumed that as Canada has come of age – complete with growing industrialization, postindustrialization, and postmodernity – people have become more secular in their outlooks and less interested in having religion inform their lives, their institutions, or their culture (see, for example, Bibby 1987; Graham 1990; Newman 1995).

However, such a broad interpretation of the decline in religious involvement has shown little cognizance of some important social developments in the post-1950s that have had the potential to have a profound impact on religious participation. One such development has been the dramatic increase in the number of women employed outside the home – a development that, in the U.S., Robert Putnam (2000:194) has described as “the most portentous social change of the last half century.”

Women in the Labour Force

Between 1900 and 1930, the proportion of women in the Canadian labour force doubled from about 15% to 30%. That proportion doubled again between 1960 and 2000 to around 60% (Connelly 2005; Statistics Canada 2001).³ What was different about the post-1960s, however, was that employed women were just about as likely to be married as single (Lavoie and Oderkirk 2000:4). Indicative of the change, by the mid-80s 75% of couples were both employed when males were under the age of 45, compared to just under 50% in situations where the males were 45 and older (Moore 1990:162). Employed women also were increasingly likely to be mothers of young children, who often were returning to their jobs when their children were very young. By 2000, women in the paid labour force included 65% of mothers with children under six and 60% of those with children under the age of two (Statistics Canada, 2004b).

Research carried out over the past four decades has consistently pointed out that younger parents who are employed outside the home have been more inclined than others to experience strain over not having enough time. One major Canadian government survey in 1998, for example, found that time stress levels were highest for married women and men between 25 and 44 who were employed full-time with children at home. Some 38% of women and 26% of men in this group reported they were time-stressed (Statistics Canada, 1999). Longitudinal research spanning 1994 to 2001 has documented similar time-stress patterns (Statistics Canada, 2004a).

³ According to the 2001 census, 66% of women under the age of 25 with marital or common-law partners were employed, as were 75% of those in such relationships who were between the ages of 25 and 44. Those under 25 with no children had an employment rate of 79%, compared to 51% for those with one child, 40% for those with two, and 30% for those with three children (2001 Census, Statistics Canada, catalogue no, 95F0379XCB01003).

A 2003 national survey similarly found that dual employed parents were considerably more likely than other adults to feel that they never seem to have enough time and were not spending enough time with their children. Concern about inadequate time was expressed by 77% of the employed mothers, compared to 58% of the employed fathers – the latter figure the same as that of single mothers. In the case of the mothers with partners, the reason for the disparity seemed fairly obvious: many said they were not receiving enough help from the men in their lives (Bibby 2004d:54,63) – a situation which has existed for some time (see, for example, Luxton, 1980; Hochschild 1989; Marshall 1994; Fox 1997; Fast and Frederick 2000; Bowen 2004:131-132).

Indicative of the ongoing caregiver role that women play, Statistics Canada research revealed that, around 1990 for example, some 1 in 10 employed mothers with children under the age of six missed time from work each week because of family responsibilities, compared to only 1 in 50 fathers in two parent families (Ghulam 1994:145). Women with children missed an average of close to eight days of work in 1990 in order to meet family obligations, compared to an average of only one day for male parents (Akyeampong 1994).

Some Group Involvement Correlates

Such time pressures would be expected to have a serious impact on the amount of time that women – and men – could give to involvement in activities and organizations outside the home, including religious groups. People have had to be increasingly selective about how and where they spend their time.

The Canadian national General Social Survey for 1992, for example, found that the people *least likely* to participate in an area like sports were those between the ages of 19 and 34. One-third said they simply didn't have the time (Corbeil: 2000:217). When children are involved, time gets even tighter. As demographer and trend watcher David Foot (1996:190) has reminded us, "Children are great consumers of their parents' time, energy, and money. Couples raising children have less time, less energy, and less money to go out on the town than they had when they were childless." I would add that they also have less time to get involved in churches and other organizations. Putnam (2000:194) noted that the time cutbacks that of employed American women have affected the amount of their community involvement. He went so far as to ask, "Could this be the primary reason for the decline of social capital over the last generation?" and concluded it has been a factor but hardly the only one. Looking at the United States, Putnam (2000:195) made the following estimate:

Comparing two women of the same age, education, financial security and marital and parental status, full-time employment appears to cut home entertaining by roughly 10 percent and church attendance by roughly 15 percent, informal visiting with friends by 25 percent, and volunteering by more than 50 percent. Moreover, husbands of women who work full-time are, like their wives, less likely to attend church, volunteer, and entertain at home.

It also needs to be emphasized that, as the twentieth century wore down, time-conscious Canadians were not only feeling extremely busy; they also were increasingly consumer-minded. They were giving their time to those people and those organizations that they found to be significant. They also were placing a very high level on personal freedom. Pollster Michael Adams (2003:144) has corroborated our national survey findings for both adults and youth in stating recently, “My reading of Canadian values tells me that none has become more important in this country than autonomy.” Peter Newman (1995) has been even more blunt in describing the mood of the country as evolving from deference to defiance.

Given such an emerging mindset of selective consumption and personal autonomy during the last quarter of the twentieth century, religious groups that were vulnerable to losing people were groups that relied heavily on tradition and obedience for participation – where individuals “came to church” because it was something they were supposed to do. Conversely, to the extent that people found that their involvement in groups touched their lives and the lives of their families, there was good reason to believe they would make time for them. Put bluntly, groups that relied on compliance stood to lose; those that relied on responding to the interests and needs of people stood to win. In the late 80s, historian John Webster Grant (1988:241) summed up the potential problems of the Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics this way: “

...traditional churches face several disadvantages. They have customarily associated religion with obligation and duty more than with personal fulfillment, while at the same time asking so little of their members as to suggest a low evaluation of their product.

A belief that has become extremely in Canada is that large numbers of people simply lost interest in organized religion in the post-1960s. Yet, our Project Canada surveys and other researchers’ surveys dating back to the 1970s consistently have shown that most people continued to hold traditional beliefs about God, the divinity of Jesus, and life after death – that they prayed privately and claimed to have experienced God’s presence. As journalist Ron Graham (1990:123) has succinctly put it, even in Quebec, “three centuries of mysticism [did] not evaporate in three decades of materialism.” What’s more, some 90% of Canadians continued to identify with specific religious groups, with all but about 5% of these groups Christian in nature. Even more surprising, as of the mid-90s, large numbers of people who were not highly involved in groups said they were receptive to greater participation if they could find such involvement to be worthwhile for themselves or their families (Bibby 1995:123-138).

It's not that Canadians have not had resources to give; it's rather a case that they give their resources to those things that they define as significant. People who conclude that religious involvement is worth their while do not stop there; extensive research shows that they also give far more money to charities than other Canadians – beginning with their churches. What's more, they also are far more likely than other people to engage in community volunteer work. The 20% of highly religiously committed individuals in Canada are responsible for about 50% of all charitable donations and 40% of all volunteered hours (Bowen 2004:147, 181). Resources have been there. But they are carefully directed at what people see as important.

If beliefs, practices, experience, and group identification remained pervasive, then – contrary to what many observers have been saying – an ongoing “market” for organized religion continued to exist in Canada in the post-1960s. What was changing in the face of the increasing presence of women in the labour force was the tendency for more and more people to be extremely selective about where they chose to direct their resources.

It is highly significant that, rather than declining in the post-1960s, evangelical groups that gave strong emphases to themes such as youth and family ministry and lively and contemporary worship actually experienced attendance increases. They also have led the country in the money they give to their churches (Bowen 2004:175-176) Presumably large numbers of evangelicals saw involvement as worth their time.

Conversely, Mainline Protestant groups that often opted for tradition and justice emphases over flexibility and family emphases experienced

severe participation losses. Respected Canadian journalist Peter Newman (1995:27) has observed that the United Church, for example, Canada's largest Protestant denomination, emphasized gay rights and other justice issues, yet “found itself paradoxically unable to attract the young. Beyond its hard-core membership of elderly faithful,” writes Newman, “the church discovered that younger converts were less interested in political messages than spiritual enlightenment.” The denomination also didn't help itself – and countless young families – with its strange and masochistic policy of not establishing new churches in burgeoning new suburbs from the mid-60s to mid-80s (Grant 1988:229; Bibby 2004a:21).

Table 2.
**Enjoyment Received from Involvement
by Religious Group: 1985-2000**

% of Weekly Attenders Who Indicate They Receive
“A Great Deal” of Enjoyment from Their Religious Groups

	1985	1990	1995	2000
Protestants				
Conservative	77%	60	57	59
Mainline	57	51	38	42
Catholics				
Outside Quebec	32	26	23	21
Quebec	27	39	27	26

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

And Roman Catholics, frequently and perhaps typically dependent upon a past that emphasized attendance as a duty rather than a decision, involvement as an act of obedience rather as a response to significant ministry, experienced even greater attrition – particularly in Quebec. In describing the demise of Catholicism’s influence in Quebec from the 1960s-onward, Ron Graham (1990:122) has summed things up this way: “When the Church fell, the moral teachings fell, and all the exhortations...were dismissed as the repressive devices of the clergy to keep people from enjoying the fruits of North American capitalism.” A safe deduction in both the Catholic and Mainline instances is that large numbers of people saw their churches’ contributions to their lives as warranting little more than occasional visits.

Putting Some Additional Data on the Ideas

Such an argument, while – I think – fairly compelling, has not been put to an empirical test. What I want to do is to look at the relationship between dual employment, parenthood, and service attendance, taking age into account. My ongoing “Project Canada” national surveys carried out every five years from 1975 through 2000 make such an examination possible. These surveys, carried out by mail, each have highly representative samples of approximately 1,500 cases. They have been complemented by a national survey of family aspirations that was completed in 2003. This survey, also conducted by mail, has a sample of 2,093 people that is highly representative of the Canadian adult population. It provides an update of many items in the Project Canada surveys (for details, see Bibby 2004a:249-254 and Bibby 2004d:vii-viii).

I want to begin by looking at the general attendance patterns of Canadian women from 1975 through 2003 by employment status. Next, I want to examine the relative time pressures of Canadians generally and, more specifically, women and men when both are employed versus when only one is employed. Having explored the link between employment and the lack of time, I want to turn to the relationship between employment and attendance from the 1970s onward for parents of school-age children, also looking briefly at their involvement over time in voluntary associations more generally. By way of further probing the possibility that receptivity to greater involvement in religious groups may have existed “all along,” I will conclude the analysis by examining the extent to which non-involved employed parents of school-age children were acknowledging their openness to greater participation as the twentieth century wound down.

The analysis will not provide a direct test of the relationship between growing numbers of women entering the paid work force and religious attendance declining and then rebounding. But it has the potential to provide some “circumstantial evidence” of the correlation between the two variables. In practical terms, it may illustrate the need for religious groups to respond to Canadians in ways that make religious involvement worth their time.

Findings

An examination of service attendance by gender reveals that there was about a 7%-point decline in monthly attendance for both women and men between 1975 and 2000. However, during that time, there was very little difference in the attendance levels of women and men. To the extent that there were decreases or, in recent years, increases, the patterns have tended to characterize both sexes.

A comparison of women 65 and under who were employed with those not employed reveals a slight attendance decline by the 1990s among those who were employed full-time. What is striking is the very sharp decline in attendance over the period for women employed part-time, who tended to be disproportionately younger and part of younger families. In contrast, service attendance among women who were not employed remained almost unchanged during the twenty-five year period.

	1975-80	1985-90	1995-00	2003
NATIONALLY	39%	36	32	38
Women	38	38	31	39
Men	39	33	31	37
Women under 66	33	33	27	35
<i>Employed full-time</i>	28	32	25	31
<i>Employed part-time</i>	40	36	21	34
<i>Not employed</i>	37	35	34	41

*Here and in Tables 5 and 6 the average of the two adjacent survey years for 1975-2000 have been combined to provide more reliable sample sizes for the periods of time involved.

Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series; 2003 - *Future Families Project*. Vanier Institute of the Family.

Employment and Lack of Time

If the increasing presence of women in the labour force contributed to time constraints for both mothers and fathers, we would anticipate that those time pressures would have been particularly acute among parents with school-age children.

This has indeed been and continues to be the case. Employed parents with children still in school have been far more likely than Canadians as a whole to express concerns about time. Those concerns are particularly pronounced in situations where both of the parents are both employed full-time. Significantly, more women than men consistently acknowledge the problem of lack of time, regardless of whether both or employed or one is employed.

	1980	1990	2000	2003
NATIONALLY	38%	38	48	53
Both employed	52	44	52	73
<i>Women</i>	70	51	60	81
<i>Men</i>	43	39	47	65
One employed	43	41	55	59
<i>Women</i>	51	46	64	60
<i>Men</i>	38	38	48	56

*1980: "Considerably"; 1990-2003 "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Bit"

Sources: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series; 2003 - *Future Families Project*. Vanier Institute of the Family.

Lack of Time and Organizational Involvement

Such time-pressed parents understandably would be expected to be fairly demanding of any organizations, including religious groups. In an increasingly consumer-minded, post-1960s culture, participation in groups would have had to add to the lives of Canadians and be “worth their time.” One could have safely predicted that, for many people, religious group involvement would fail to pass such a pragmatic test. Congregations have been known to sometimes respond well to personal and family interests and needs; sometimes the word has not been so positive.

An examination of the attendance patterns of employed parents of school-age children reveals support for such a prediction. From 1975 through 1990 there was a steady drop-off in attendance among dual employed parents (40% to 29%). In contrast, attendance among parents where only one person was employed full-time remained steady (42% and 40%).

	1975-80	1985-90	1995-00	2003
TOTAL	42%	33	35	38
One employed	42	40	36	42
Both employed	40	29	32	34
Outside Quebec	40	35	35	44
One employed	41	42	37	45
Both employed	38	30	34	41
Quebec	46	32	32	21
One employed	49	34	35	28
Both employed	38	28	28	14

*Employment here refers to full-time employment.
Sources: Reginald W. Bibbv. Proiect Canada Survev Series:

Beginning in the mid-90s, attendance for dual employed parents with children of school age increased slightly – a trend that appears to be continuing during the first decade of the new century, and now is including one-career parents.

Outside Quebec, such patterns have been particularly pronounced. In Quebec, service attendance declines also have been greater among dual employed parents than other parents. However, what is noteworthy is that there has been no comparable increase in attendance from the 1990s onward among Quebec parents of school-age children, regardless of their employment status. One might surmise that the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec has not succeeded in providing Quebecers with ministry that people literally regard as worthy of their time – at least not yet.

The findings document the fact that the kinds of pragmatic decisions that have led many Canadians to limit the amount of their involvement in religious groups have also resulted in their limiting their investments in many other voluntary organizations. Between 1975 and 2000, dual employed parents of school age children became decreasingly involved – not only in religious groups – but also in service clubs, political groups, fraternities and sororities, farm organizations, and “residual groups” in general. Despite heavy levels of ongoing immigration, involvement in nationality groups failed to increase and remained very low. Through all this attrition, membership in religious groups still remained second only to sports and recreational groups.

Table 6.
Membership in Select Groups: Dual Employed Parents With School Age Children, 1975-2000

	1975-80	1985-90	1995-00
A sports group	30%	25	32
A religious group	33	26	22
A hobby-related club	12	14	16
A service club	26	19	15
A private club	***	15	14
A political group	13	10	8
A fraternity/sorority	17	2	6
A support group	***	***	5
A nationality group	5	6	4
A farm organization	6	4	2
Any other group	12	14	9

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

Receptivity to Worthwhile Involvement

The latest census data for 2001 show that 84% of Canadians continue to identify with a religious group. Our findings to this point suggest that, faced with time limitations, large numbers of Canadians have not so much abandoned their religious groups as they have decided – explicitly and perhaps often less explicitly – to reduce their levels of religious involvement. One way of probing such a possibility is to ask employed parents of school-age children if they would be receptive to greater involvement if they found it to be worthwhile. We did just that in our Project Canada surveys in both 1995 and 2000.

The findings border on startling. In 2000 no less than 54% of such parents who currently are attending services less than once a month indicated that they are open to greater involvement *if* they found it to be worthwhile for themselves or their families. In 1995 the figure was even higher – 59%. The slight drop in my mind is not as noteworthy as the large proportions of people who say they are receptive to involvement – more than 1 in 2 employed parents of school age children.

Table 7.
Receptivity to Greater Involvement
Parents of School Age Children Who Attend Less than Monthly

	1995	2000
TOTAL	59%	54
Both employed	60	56
One employed	58	52
<i>One or Both Employed</i>		
Men	55	55
Women	65	53
Outside Quebec	63	56
Quebec	47	49

Source: Reginald W. Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series

Gender and regional differences as of 2000 are fairly small. Men and women are equally open to greater involvement. Of considerable importance, such receptivity is expressed by approximately 1 in 2 employed parents of school age children in Quebec – with the level only marginally lower than the 56% figure in the rest of the country.

Discussion

If Canadians didn't abandon faith and their religious traditions in the post-1960s, one is left with the deduction that many – in the face of accelerated time demands became increasingly selective about where they spent their time. Those who found that time spent in their churches translated into the enriching of their lives and/or the lives of their children continued to be involved – as often was the case with large numbers of evangelicals.

But, in the face of time pressures, many Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics failed to find that kind of significance. The data show that even their most active cores were not finding their involvement to be particularly gratifying, especially Catholics. And if the cores were not reporting high levels of gratification from their involvement, little wonder that other affiliates – notably time-stressed couples who were both employed outside the home – found it increasingly expedient to cut down on how much time they gave such churches. Most of them didn't "drop out" altogether. They simply didn't show up with much regularity, in many instances restricting their visits to Easter, Christmas, and baptisms and christenings, along with weddings and funerals.

Still, large numbers didn't and haven't ruled out greater involvement. Even in Quebec, almost one in two employed parents of school age children say they are open to the possibility of becoming more involved. But they have to find that such participation enriches their lives and/or the lives of their families.

In the light of such findings, one is hard-pressed to escape the conclusion that the problems of organized religion in Canada in the post-1960s have, in large part, been tied to the fact that groups frequently did a very poor job of responding to the changing family roles and needs of Canadians. As a result, most people continued to value personal faith and retain their psychological and emotional ties with religious traditions. But sizable numbers found better things to do with their time.

The findings of a study of Mainline and Conservative Protestants carried out in the early 1990s by Donald Posterski and Irwin Barker (1993:241-251) are consistent with such an assertion. They not only found that there was nothing that active laity valued more about their congregational involvement than ministry to family and personal needs; they also found that people believed that, if such ministry was lacking, such a failure – more than any other single factor – constituted adequate groups for a person leaving a congregation.

A major study in the mid-1980s of Anglicans in Toronto, the largest Anglican diocese in the country, is also informative. The study found that 80% of people who described themselves as “inactive” Anglicans nonetheless acknowledged that being an Anglican was important to them. They had no intention of defecting. In the words of one respondent, *“Right now, I feel like a child who wants to go home, but it isn’t there any longer. But I am gutless – because I am or was a devoted Anglican, I can go nowhere else.”* When the inactives in the study were asked why they were no longer highly involved, the number one reason cited was that they preferred to give their time to other things. A damning indictment that spoke volumes about the failure of many of the parishes to have a significant impact on Anglican lives was found in the responses inactives gave when asked what it would take to bring them back. The three most commonly cited factors? First, receiving more help in living life; second, experiencing more meaningful worship services, and third, finding the investment of time to be worthwhile (Bibby 1986:98-99).

But as our findings in this paper show, there is hope in all this for Anglicans and the rest of Canada’s religious groups. Significant numbers of uninvolved people are receptive to parishes and congregations that are engaging in ministries that can touch their lives and the lives of their families. The recent increases in attendance do not appear to be an accident. In the last decade or so, many groups, following the lead of Conservative Protestants, have become far more conscious of the need to minister well to Canadians, beginning with children and teenagers, through to seniors.

Those kinds of ministries are also increasingly in touch with such prevalent realities as two people being employed outside the home, the acceleration in the number of diverse family structures, and gender equality. Large numbers of Protestant and Catholic congregations elsewhere have recognized, with sociologist Nancy Nason-Clark (1993:233), that equitable gender relations facilitate effective responses “to both the needs of the congregation and community.” Even in Quebec, Catholic Bishops have been gaining a reputation of being responsive to women’s issues (Beyer 1993:146-148).

In their recent reflections on American Catholicism, William D'Antonio and his colleagues (2001:8-16) maintain that a number of significant shifts have been taking place over the past three decades. They include shifts from compliance to conscience, from male clergy to female lay leaders, from a punitive God to a loving God, from a formal and solemn Mass to one that is participatory and uplifting, from rote rituals to personal and communal study and prayer that link faith to the real world. Such new emphases, it would seem, have the potential to be viewed as warranting people's time. Reflecting on the findings of their twelve-year examination of American Catholics, D'Antonio and his associates (2001:50) write,

Over time, the Church and the faith become central to people who experience deep gratification and affirmation from them – spiritual, intellectual, and social. It follows that Catholic teaching, especially to the young, must have these goals and must avoid negative appeals to obligation, duty or guilt.

Such an observation seems equally appropriate to Canada, and to Protestants as well as Catholics. In recent years, congregations and parishes that have been giving a higher priority to enriching people's lives, versus expecting and demanding that they involved "because they should," appear to be finding that many people – both younger and older – are responding.

Conclusion

This takes me back to where I began. The United States has known a remarkably high level of religious involvement dating back to at least the 1930s. Consequently, as Garry Wills (1978) observed about three decades ago, "There has been no revival because there is nothing to revive."

Canada has known a very different situation. Between the late 1960s and late 1990s, participation in organized religion dropped off considerably. In the language of observers such as Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (1992, 2000), the American religious market has remained healthy because enterprising religious companies have worked hard to increase their market shares when other groups have had their problems. In Canada, however, when some of the major religious companies have failed to respond to changing conditions – notably the impact of the increased presence of women in the paid labour force – other religious groups have not been able to move in and pick up the slack. Canadians have been extremely reluctant to give new entries a try. The net result is that most people who have been dissatisfied with their identification groups simply have stayed home.

What remains to be seen is whether Canada's embryonic religious renaissance is a short-term blip on the screen or will evolve into something much more major. At this point, the primary sources of the budding comeback of organized religion are not overly mysterious: the new life appears to be primarily the result of revitalized ministry efforts on the part of the country's dominant religious groups. Those ministry efforts are striking a responsive chord with growing numbers of women as well as men, younger people as well as adults.

The American experience suggests that, to the extent those efforts continue, so too will the renaissance of religion in Canada.

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