

Easter 2014

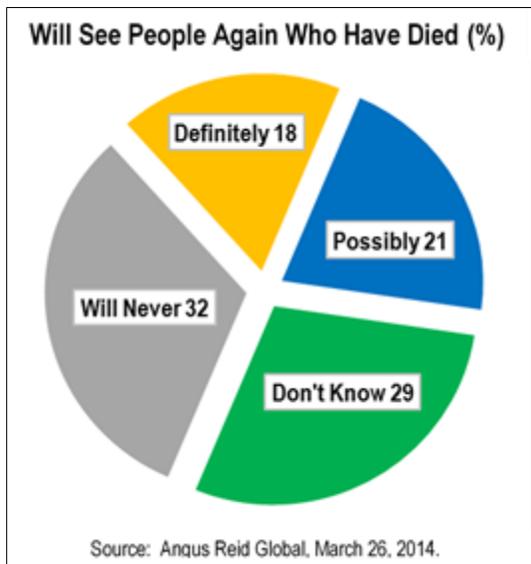
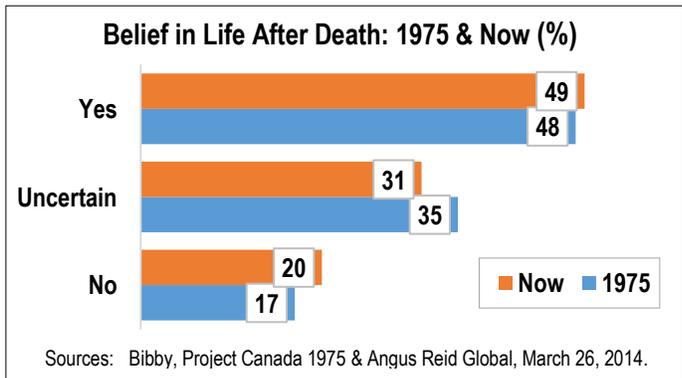
Life after Death: Intrigue, Mystery, and Contact
Canadian Reflections at Easter

Life after death continues to fascinate Canadians. Most of us aren't sure what lies ahead. But a majority of people across the country are convinced that death is not the end.

What's more, a surprisingly high number believe that they continue to interact with people who have died. And Canadians are hardly alone: such inclinations are also widespread in settings including the United States and Britain. There is a vast market for answers and explanations relating to a possible life-after.

Such are the initial findings of a new research project on life after death being carried out by University of Lethbridge sociologist Reginald Bibby in partnership with Angus Reid. The study is based on recent national surveys conducted by Angus Reid Global in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., as well as Bibby's surveys dating back to the 1970s.

- **Some 5 in 10 Canadians say they believe in life after death, with only 2 in 10 ruling out the possibility altogether.** Such intrigue is not diminishing: those levels are virtually the same as they were forty years ago.



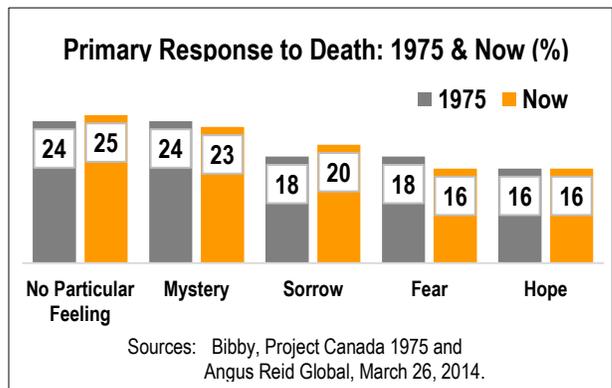
- **Most people have not given up on the possibility that they will see people again who have died.** Four in 10 Canadians think that they "definitely" or "possibly" will see them again, with the remaining 6 in 10 evenly divided between those who say they don't know and those who feel it won't happen.

➤ **What is remarkable is the extent to which Canadians believe that people who have died are interacting with us.**

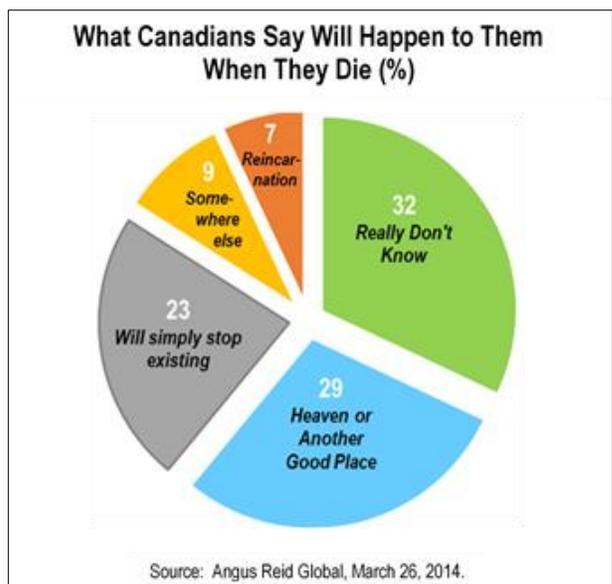
- More than **5 in 10** (53%) think that *people who have died could be aware of what is taking place in OUR lives.*
- Some **4 in 10** (42%) maintain it's *possible to communicate with people who are no longer alive.*
- And essentially **the same proportion** (37%) claim that *they themselves have felt they have been "in touch with someone who has died."*



➤ Asked, **“What would you say is your primary response to the idea of death?”** some 5 in 10 are equally divided between **“no particular feeling”** and **“mystery.”** Another 2 in 10 say **“sorrow,”** while the remaining 3 in 10 are evenly divided between **“fear”** and **“hope.”** The proportions of those five responses have not changed significantly over the past 40 years.



➤ When asked pointedly, **“What do you think will happen to you after you die?”** just under 90% of Canadians almost equally offer three responses: (1) they believe they will go to **heaven or a similar good place**, (2) will simply **stop existing**, or (3) **really don't know**. The remainder either think they **will go somewhere else**, or will **be reincarnated**.



The findings show that the reality of death is very much on the minds of Canadians.

- **What's intriguing** is the extent to which people across the country haven't given up on the possibility that life continues after death.
- **What's startling** is the extent to which Canadians believe that people who have died are continuing to follow what is taking place in their lives and – even more – continuing to be in contact.
- **What's puzzling** is that belief in life after death persists, despite a substantive decline in religious beliefs and behaviour.

REFLECTIONS

These findings underline a paradoxical reality in the Information Age: we know more than enough about just about everything in life. But we continue to know very little about life after death.

Here, we are left with far more claims and questions than explanations and answers. There is a vast market for persuasive responses. But unlike virtually every other area of interest and inquiry, the life after death market is dramatically underserved. There is an incredible lack of credible entries.

It's not just a matter of there being a paucity of information about what happens when we die. There's also little public reflection on the fact that close to half the population claim they are interacting with people who are gone.

The survey results show that such claims are not merely the musings of an eccentric minority who can simply be dismissed as “weirdos” and “wackos.” Lest anyone needs to be reminded, 5 in 10 Canadians translates into a lot of women and men across the country.

Currently, the questions of life after death and interaction with people who have died are largely ignored by academics. Even religious groups show both a reluctance and an inability to address such things. The result is that most people remain largely in the dark.

Obviously, clear-cut answers to all this are extremely elusive. Nonetheless, much more attention needs to be given to the life after death issue, beginning with far more open discussions and, yes, even more exploratory research.

The topic is far too important to be treated as taboo. And the claims are far too common to be trivialized and the claimants stigmatized. At this time in history when we have unlimited information to address unlimited questions, the death question needs to be addressed.

Reginald Bibby is a best-selling author and professor of sociology at The University of Lethbridge who has been monitoring social trends in Canada now for four decades.

The trends research is continuing in collaboration with pollster **Angus Reid Global** and **Andrew Grenville**, the Chief Research Officer for Vision Critical. The findings on life after death will be part of Bibby and Grenville's new book, *The Future of Life in Canada*, which will be released in early 2015.

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Some Variations and Additional Findings

There are only **minor regional variations** in beliefs and claims.

- **Belief in life after death** and the sense that we will **see someone again** who has died are slightly higher on the **Prairies** than elsewhere, with the latter belief also a bit higher in the **Atlantic** region.
- **“The three interaction beliefs”** – that people who have died may be **aware** of what is happening in our lives, **communication** may be possible, and one may have been **in touch** with someone who has died – tend to be marginally more prevalent in the **Atlantic** provinces and **B.C.** than elsewhere.
- The inclination to respond to death with **hope** and believe one will go to **“heaven or another good place”** are lower in **Quebec** than the rest of the country.

There are **consistent variations** in beliefs and claims by **gender, age, and education**:
beliefs and claims of contact are higher among women, older adults, and those with higher levels of education than others.

- There is little or “no difference” in the response of **hope** in the case of both **gender** and **education**.
- **Age** differences disappear in the case of **“the three interaction beliefs”**:
younger adults are just as likely as other adults to think that it is possible for people who have died to be aware of what’s happening in our lives, communicate with us, and leave us feeling that we have encountered them

Despite these relative demographic and social variations, **what stands out** is the finding that **large numbers of people in every region and gender, age, and education category** both **embrace beliefs** relating to life after death, as well as maintain that **interaction is taking place** with people who have died.

Select Regional & Social Correlates of Beliefs Relating to LAD (%)							
Believe...	LAD	Will See Again	Aware Our Lives	Possible to Communicate	Felt in Touch	Response Hope	Go Heaven/ Good Place
CANADA	48%	39	54	42	37	16	29
British Columbia	45	39	58	43	42	18	28
Alberta	54	45	49	36	29	17	34
Sask & Manitoba	54	43	53	40	32	18	38
Ontario	50	38	54	40	36	17	32
Quebec	45	30	49	46	41	10	18
Atlantic	46	47	65	48	39	21	35
Female	53	46	64	51	45	17	36
Male	44	32	43	33	29	15	22
18-34	44	32	54	44	33	10	25
35-54	48	37	54	45	40	14	30
55+	53	46	53	38	37	23	32
Degree-Plus	39	28	47	33	28	13	24
Some PS	47	37	49	38	35	14	26
HS or Less	54	46	60	50	44	18	34

Source: Angus Reid Global, March 26, 2014.

Religion obviously is one major entry in the market for answers relating to LAD.

- **Religious involvement** – measured by service attendance – is positively associated with **belief in life after death** and **seeing people who have died once again**, along with going to **“heaven or another good place,”** and, especially, **hope**. That said, beliefs about life after death and seeing people again **are also fairly common among less frequent attenders** as well, and even held by some 1 in 4 Canadians who never attend services.
- **“The three interaction beliefs”** relating to **awareness, communication**, and one being **in touch** vary considerably by religious involvement.

There are **consistent variations** in beliefs and claims by **religious group identification**.

- **Believe in life after death** and **seeing a person again**, along with **hope** and going to **heaven or a good equivalent**, is highest among **Conservative** (evangelical) **Protestants**, followed by **Mainline Protestants** and **Catholics outside Quebec**.
- **“The three interaction beliefs”** – **awareness, communication**, and being **in touch** – are fairly common among people in all groups, led by Catholics and Mainline Protestants. Even sizable numbers of Canadians who say they have no religion endorse these interaction indicators.

Select Religion Correlates of Beliefs Relating to LAD (%)							
Believe...	LAD	Will See Again	Aware Our Lives	Possible to Communicate	Felt in Touch	Response Hope	Go heaven/ Good Place
CANADA	48%	39	54	42	37	16	29
Weekly	79	70	61	38	41	48	69
Monthly	80	61	74	50	37	29	59
Yearly	60	45	65	51	41	19	39
Less yearly	54	39	59	47	44	11	27
Never	26	23	41	36	30	5	10
Family's Religious Background							
RCs Outside Quebec	50	49	60	46	39	19	39
RCs Quebec	47	31	53	48	42	8	17
Mainline Protestants	62	47	60	39	40	21	40
Conservative Prots	76	55	51	29	29	42	61
Other Faiths	29	26	47	40	35	13	14
None	22	18	42	36	27	3	5

Source: Angus Reid Global, March 26, 2014.

Again, while **variations exist by religious involvement and identification**, it is clear that **“the market” for answers and explanations relating to life after death and interaction with those who have died go well beyond the religiously devout**.

It also is apparent that religious groups – despite their historical interest and presumed expertise with the topic – vary considerably in both their inclination and ability to respond to the vast market that is at hand.