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Polarization & Spirituality

"Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside of us. The opposite is not a person who rejects the idea of God. It is to have no energy, to have lost all zest for living."

—Ron Rolheiser



ONE of the anomalous features of life in an era of post-religious dominance in Canada has been the privileged status of spirituality.

While religion has been scorned and stigmatized and rejected by many, spirituality has known something of celebrity status. Until fairly recently, it seems, spirituality was strongly associated with religion – something like a family member. But in recent decades in particular, it seems to have moved out of the house. It's as if it had been something like Cinderella, and finally has been freed from the grasp of the evil stepmother. These days, the past has been largely forgotten, and Cinderella is able to flourish on her own.

Spirituality has received fairly remarkable treatment.

- It is assumed to be something that exists apart from religion, as in the comment, "I am spiritual but not religious." In fact, the phrase has spawned the acronym, SBNR, complete with a large number of websites (e.g., SBNR.org) and Facebook and Twitter entries.
- It typically is viewed as superior to religion. "I'm spiritual but not religious" is often said and heard as a triumphant declaration – greeted on the talk-show circuit with a positive nod from the host and even a polite ovation.
- It doesn't carry any of the negative baggage of religion. When one says, "I'm spiritual," the slate is clean. People who say, "I'm Catholic," or "I'm Muslim," or "I'm born again," hardly receive the same response.

Some pro-religious individuals who link spirituality to religion decry the growing lack of religion in people's lives, and fear for a future of unmet spiritual needs.

Others who place importance on spirituality have no concerns about Cinderella out there on her own.

Without totally ruining the end of the story, let's just say at this point that the research likes the chances of the emancipated Princess doing quite well. Here's why.

The Autonomy of Spirituality

What do Mother Teresa, Janis Joplin, and Princess Diana have in common? In his best-selling book, *The Holy Longing*,¹ Ron Rolheiser says they all were spiritual; more precisely, all three had spiritualities.

He argues that the term “spirituality” is badly understood today. It's not about certain activities like going to church, praying, or engaging in a spiritual quest. Rather, all of us are born with a restlessness that is like a fire. “We have to do something about the fire that burns within us,” he writes. “What we do with that fire, how we channel it, is our spirituality.”²

The dominant choices the three women made were obviously very different, with life-giving versus destructive consequences. But, he explains, how they willed to direct their energies were their spiritualities.³

While Rolheiser attempts to clarify what spirituality “really” is, the use of the term in everyday life is pretty much up for grabs. One seemingly can be spiritual in ways limited only by one's imagination.

Few other concepts get such a definitional exemption. A tree is a tree; a puck is a puck; but spirituality – well, in our culture, it's whatever a person says it is.

The result is that we have spiritualities of every shape and form. The SBNR.org's “About Us” statement declares that it “is dedicated to serving the millions of people worldwide who walk a spiritual path outside traditional religion.” Not linked to “any one spiritual tradition or religion,” it offers to “honor your personal journey and offer inspiration, education and entertainment to aid your experience of being human. Site visitors are invited to “Enjoy what you like and what intrigues you.”⁴

Spirituality seemingly is in the eye of the beholder.

When we have asked Canadians, “What do you mean by spirituality?” about the best our coders have been able to do is classify the responses into “conventional” and “less conventional” categories, and then add subcategories. The first refers to expressions of spirituality that have fairly traditional religious connotations. The second refers to – well, essentially everything else. What stands out about the “less conventional” responses is how subjective and individualistic they tend to be. One searches largely in vain for threads of commonality.

<p>Table 6.1. What Canadians Mean by “Spirituality”</p> <p>Conventional (52%) “...living in fellowship with Christ...believing in God and the Bible...that God is there for us, hears our prayers and answers them... need God’s spirit to guide, protect and support me in good times and bad...building a personal relation with Jesus Christ...nourishing our souls so we can be closer to God...”</p> <p>Less Conventional (48%) “...a matter relating to our inner-self or soul...peace of mind...a feeling of oneness with the earth and with all that is within me...the existence of an immortal soul that has to be cared for...positive thinking and excitement...appreciation of the beauty of nature...the love of family and friends...inner awareness...”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Source: Adapted from Bibby, <i>The Boomer Factor</i>, 2006: 186.</small></p>

If we were to group 100 people at a conference into tables of five and ask them to discuss their views of spirituality, I think we would quickly discover that about all they have in common is the word. Incidentally, my research does not indicate that things are changing very much on the clarity front. The responses to the “what do you mean by spirituality” question are about as diverse today as they were a decade ago.

Charles Taylor cautions that while the expressions are highly varied, many young people today are “following their own spiritual instincts” in looking for a direct experience of the sacred. He writes that the search “often springs from a profound dissatisfaction with a life encased entirely in the immanent order,” where people sense “that this life is empty, flat, devoid of higher purpose.”⁵

Perhaps. But the diversity of what is available in what Wade Clark Roof calls “a spiritual marketplace”⁶ makes one wonder where the cutting points are between meaning and marketing, searching and selling.

The choices seem unlimited – and are growing. A cursory look at book offerings, websites, and conferences provides a sense of the varied “takes” on spirituality.

- The conventionally religious can find titles such as Henri Nouwen’s *Reaching Out*, Phyllis Tickle’s *Spiritual Practices*, William Young’s novel *The Shack*, or Brian McLaren’s *Naked Spirituality*, as well as titles offering Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, and Sikh takes on spirituality.⁷
- For those who want something a bit different, there are books including *The Secret*, *Aboriginal Spirituality and Biblical Theology*, *Celtic Spirituality*, *Mormon Spirituality*, and *Wiccan Spirituality*.⁸
- But we are just getting started. There also are books available that bear such titles as *God Without God*, *The Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*, *Spirituality Without God*, *The Christian Atheist*, and *The Homemade Atheist* with the subtitle, *A Former Evangelical Woman’s Freethought Journey to Happiness*.⁹
- Websites offer articles such as, “How to be a spiritual atheist,” informing readers that “atheists don’t have to be separated from spirituality.” Tangible instructions follow.¹⁰
- The web postings on the home page of the Centre of Naturalism in the fall of 2010 included a summary of a talk given to the Humanist Association of Massachusetts earlier in the decade entitled, “Spirituality Without Faith.”¹¹ The presenter raised the question, “To what extent can secular humanists be spiritual?” and proceeds to say that “just as we can be good without God, we can have spirituality without spirits.”
- The Christian Cultural Center of Montreal sponsored a recent one-day conference that carried the title, “The spiritual quest: with or without God.” It highlighted different roads to spirituality, and explored the possibility that “the spiritual dimension in human beings” can be developed “without reference to a divine being.”¹²

- A Jewish website, www.aish.com, recently featured a thought-provoking article entitled, “Spirituality Without God,” by Sara Yoheved Rigler. “The advantages of spirituality without God are obvious,” she wrote. “One can choose one’s own direction, methods, and goals without the intrusions of the Divine. The ‘inner voice,’ which functions as the CEO of most New Age enterprises, rarely tells one what one doesn’t want to hear.” She reminds readers that a faith like Judaism speaks of a God who not only creates and sustains the universe but also issues orders about things like stealing and adultery. “Little wonder,” she says, “that most people resist such encroachments on their personal lives.”¹³
- Sam Harris, the well-known, best-selling atheist author with a background in neuroscience and philosophy, displays what John Allemang has called “a mystic streak that allows a little too much room for spiritual fuzziness.”¹⁴ By his own admission, Harris finds inspiration in Eastern religions and acknowledged in a 2010 *Newsweek* interview that his next project is a spiritual guide, explaining “how we can live moral and spiritual lives without religion.”¹⁵

These days, the relationship between religion and spirituality is anything but clear-cut. That reality has been underlined by the results of our research in Canada.

A Canadian Reading

Across the country, some 7 in 10 adults and more than 5 in 10 teens explicitly indicate that they have spiritual needs.

- While the inclination is higher among Canadians who are religious according to our attendance, identification, and belief measures, sizable numbers of other people also say they have spiritual needs.
- Among adults, the latter include 1 in 2 individuals who never attend services and/or do not identify with a religious group, as well as 1 in 4 atheists.
- In the case of teenagers, the figures are lower, but still appreciable: some 1 in 3 who never attend services and/or say they have no religion, as well as about 1 in 7 atheist youth indicate that they have spiritual needs.
- Adult and young females are consistently more likely than males to express spiritual needs – but just slightly.

Table 6.2. Spiritual Needs and Religiosity by Gender

"I myself have spiritual needs"

	72% CANADA	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
ADULTS	72%	94	51	76	47	91	27
Females	78	96	61	81	60	92	23
Males	66	92	42	71	36	90	28
TEENAGERS	54	84	36	66	30	82	14
Females	57	88	40	69	31	84	15
Males	51	80	32	63	29	80	13

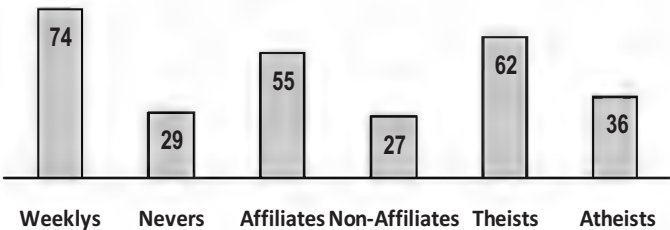
A common response of those who value faith is to see such findings as signalling both need and opportunity. Canadians, in numbers that readily exceed those who are actively involved in religious groups have spiritual needs. As a result, they, as religious groups, are positioned to respond.

However, here the caution flag needs to go up.

What large numbers of Canadians have in mind when they think of spirituality is not necessarily what the groups have in mind – and have to offer. It might be a situation that is analogous to people acknowledging that they have an appetite for food. But the kinds of food they have in mind are not necessarily what the specialty restaurants are offering.

Figure 6.1. Spirituality Types by Religiosity

% Exhibiting Conventional Spirituality



The Alberta Case Example. In an effort to gain improved clarity on spiritual conceptions and spiritual needs, I carried out a brief Internet survey of 550 people in Alberta in the spring of 2010. The sample is highly representative, socially and demographically, and of sufficient size to permit generalizations to the provincial population with a high level of accuracy.¹⁶

For those readers not familiar with Alberta, it is worth noting that the province includes two cities (Calgary and Edmonton) with populations of more than 1 million people each. In addition, the province is characterized by considerable migration and immigration.

Consequently, the population is highly diverse with respect to community size, racial diversity, and provinces and countries of origin.

The spirituality survey provides some important findings that offer insights well beyond the province.

- More than 8 in 10 people say they have spiritual needs.
- However, rather than being in the market for religious groups or other groups that can respond, 86% of those with such needs say they are being met, at least for the most part.
- Some 95% of those who attend services weekly report that their spiritual needs are being met; but so do no less than 74% of those who never attend.

With respect to how they see the religion-spirituality balance in their own lives, equal proportions of 43% each say that they are either “religious and spiritual” or “spiritual but not religious.” Relatively few describe themselves as “religious but not spiritual.” The remaining 10% or so say they are neither religious nor spiritual.

- Those who view themselves as R & S are slightly more likely than the SBNR to say their needs are being met.
- Both levels of spiritual fulfillment are higher than those people who either see themselves as religious but not spiritual and – as would be expected – those who are neither spiritual nor religious. Still, 6 in 10 in this latter category say the spiritual needs they have are being met.

Table 6.3. Spirituality in Alberta



Do you feel you have spiritual needs?	Yes	81%	
Are your spiritual needs currently being met?	Yes	33	
	Yes, for the most part	53	
	Not really	11	
	Not really at all	3	
Spiritual needs being met by attendance	Weekly	95	
	Never	74	
Which of the following describes you best?	Religious and spiritual	43	<i>Met</i> 93
	Spiritual but not religious	43	85
	Not religious and not spiritual	12	61
	Religious but not spiritual	2	75

Source: The Alberta Spirituality Survey, 2010.
Carried out with the assistance of Courtney Kitaguchi and Carly Seibel.

The Alberta survey further reveals that a disproportionate number of “SBNR” individuals are females in their 40s and 50s with no religious affiliation, who never or seldom attend services.

That said, the female-male difference is small and note-worthy numbers of people of all ages identify themselves as SBNR. They also include close to 1 in 5 weekly attenders and 1 in 3 Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Conservative Protestants, as well as a slightly higher proportion of people who identify with other major world faiths.

Overall, these findings underline the fact that very large numbers of people are pursuing spiritual needs. But many are looking in places other than conventional religion – and claiming they are coming away satisfied.

Table 6.4. SBNR Demographics

Gender	Female	45%
	Male	40
Age	<30	38
	30-39	41
	40-49	44
	50-59	55
	60+	37
Attend- ance	Never	65
	Yearly	57
	Monthly	32
	Weekly	16
Relig Family	None	68
	Other Faith	42
	ML Prot	36
	Cons Prot	34
	RC	32

Source: The Alberta Spirituality Survey, 2010.

Canadian Youth and Spiritual Needs.

- More than 1 in 2 Canadian teenagers indicate that they personally have spiritual needs.
- Such an acknowledgement is somewhat higher among Conservative Protestants, unspecified "Christians," and teens who identify with Aboriginal spirituality. It is somewhat lower among Quebec Catholics and Jewish young people.
- The figure drops to 30% among teens with no religion.

Polarization in the Mosaic Personally Have Spiritual Needs

NATIONALLY	54%
Roman Catholicism	62
Outside Quebec	67
Quebec	50
Protestantism	77
Conservative	89
Mainline	66
Orthodox	69
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	83
Other World Faiths	65
Aboriginal Spirituality	78
Hinduism	70
Buddhism	67
Islam	67
Sikhism	61
Judaism	48
No Religion	30

The Global Situation

When we turn to the topic of spirituality, it is difficult to find global data akin to the religion data that we have been accessing. Gallup has been inclined to conceptualize spirituality in terms of religion. In fairness to Gallup, much of the world has likewise not made a sharp dichotomy. In fact, it is only in recent years that academics and others who observe religion have noted that average Americans, Canadians, and Europeans, for example, have been making such a clear distinction.

Significantly, the distinction has been closely tied to the recognition that secularization has not eliminated a sense on the part of large numbers of people that they have needs that continue to outlive their involvement and interest in organized expressions of religion.

So it is that in some settings where secularization is seen as fairly rampant, increasing attention has been given to exploring how people continue to pursue ways of addressing their spiritual needs, versus focusing only on involvement in religious groups.

One might argue that if spiritual needs are fairly pervasive, then to the extent that interest in organized religion in any society declines, individuals would be expected to seek more specific, personal, and customized ways of having such needs addressed.

Highly-respected sociologist Wade Clark Roof, for example, has written extensively on how the American Baby Boomer era has seen a major shift from involvement in organized religion to highly individualistic spiritual quests. Moreover, he has described how a burgeoning spirituality industry has emerged in response to such interests, resulting in lively “spiritual marketplaces.”¹⁷

For Roof, three features in the U.S. have stood out.

The first is the sheer numbers of people involved in pursuing spiritual needs. Many who have lost traditional religious groundings are looking for new and fresh moorings. Others who are still religiously grounded are looking for further enrichment.

Second, a dominant theme is self-understanding. Consequently Roof speaks of quest, seeking, and searching.

Third, somewhat paradoxically, the spiritual yearnings are leading many beyond the self-focused, self-fulfillment themes of the 1960s and 70s. Now, he says, that quest has moved beyond consumption and materialism. “Popular spirituality may appear shallow, indeed flaky,” Roof writes. But it also “reflects a deep hunger for a self-transformation that is both genuine and personally satisfying.” His reading is that the current religious situation among American Boomers “is characterized not so much by a loss of faith as a qualitative shift from unquestioned belief to a more open, questing mood.”¹⁸

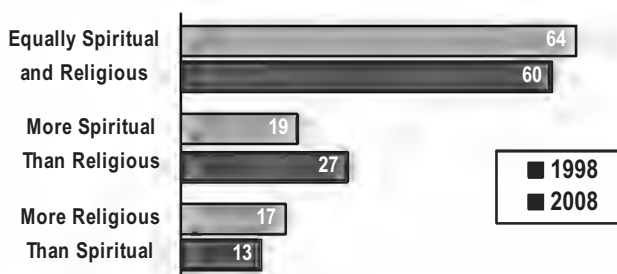
Prominent Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow has been giving research attention to post-Boomers, focusing on people between the ages of 21 and 45. In his book, *After the Baby Boomers*, released in 2007, he reminds readers that the availability of choices and the inclination to engage in seeking have never been greater.

In exploring the extent to which young adults are spiritual but not religious, Wuthnow noted that 55% of his sample were attending religious services less than once a month. Of these, 6 in 10 indicated that spiritual growth is important to them, and 3 in 10 said they had devoted at least a fair amount of attention to their spiritual life in the previous year. Many were what Wuthnow calls “spiritual tinkers” who, like their Boomer parents, piece together ideas about spirituality from many sources.”¹⁹

Consistent with the findings of Roof and Wuthnow, the National Opinion Research Center’s Tom Smith reports that poll data spanning just the last decade or so document a shift towards a “spiritual but not religious” outlook. A majority of people of all ages, he says, now describe themselves as “equally spiritual and religious.”

But a growing number are reporting that they are “more spiritual than religious.” The latter include 31% of Americans under 30 – double the 16% figure for those over 70.²⁰

**Figure 6.2. American Religious and Spiritual Self-Images:
1998-2008**



Source: General Social Surveys, 1998 & 2008. Reported in Smith 2009:88.

Smith notes that in Europe, the argument for the movement toward personal spiritual expressions has been summed up in the phrase, “believing without belonging.”²¹

Other European observers going back almost fifty years ago to Thomas Luckmann have spoken of “invisible religion,”²² while the concept of “implicit religion” has become increasingly popular in recent decades, in large part through the efforts of Edward Bailey.²³

A recent survey of European Common Market countries shows that interest in spirituality extends well beyond the parameters of conventional religion. As would be expected, there is a fairly strong relationship between attendance and spirituality, but there are also lots of exceptions to that pattern.²⁴ In all but one instance (Poland), levels of interest in spirituality fairly readily exceed attendance levels.

Consequently, there is every reason to expect that any movement away from organized religion will typically not result in the demise of spiritual interest.

On the contrary, “religious defection” will see many individuals move toward highly personalized forms of spirituality, and cultures will respond with increasingly lively “spiritual marketplaces.”

Table 6.5. Attendance and Interest in Spirituality: 20 Select European Countries

"Whether or not you think of yourself as a religious person, how spiritual would you say you are, that is how strongly are you interested in the sacred or the supernatural?"

% Indicating They Are "Very" or "Somewhat" Interested"

$r = .418$

	Attendance	Spirituality
Poland	62	52
Ireland	56	63
Slovak Republic	44	54
Spain	39	50
Portugal	38	59
Germany	30	36
Greece	29	57
Hungary	26	45
Switzerland	26	56
Netherlands	26	61
Luxembourg	26	53
Switzerland	26	56
Belgium	24	47
Ukraine	23	68
France	20	42
Bulgaria	16	53
Denmark	16	40
Czech Republic	15	32
Russia	15	40
Finland	12	47

Sources: Attendance - Gallup WorldView 2010;
Spirituality - European Values Survey 2008.

In looking for a current informed overview of spirituality developments worldwide, we have the benefit of the thinking of an acclaimed Canadian journalist and author, Douglas Todd of the *Vancouver Sun*, who specializes in spirituality. Over the years he has become a valued associate. Todd has been keeping a careful eye on developments relating to spirituality in Canada and abroad. His books on the topic include *Brave Souls* (1996) and *The Soul-Searcher's Guide to the Galaxy* (1994). His many awards include receiving the Templeton Reporter of the Year Award twice as the top religion reporter in North America.

In January of 2009, he penned a stimulating piece entitled, “Five spiritual trends to watch for in 2009.” A year later, he reaffirmed the trends, writing: “I’m coming to the conclusion the five trends have real staying power, which could see them sticking with us to 2020 and beyond.”²⁵

The five “religious and spiritual shifts” that Todd sees?

1. Eastern spirituality will flower.
2. Religious terrorism will be the new normal.
3. Religious liberals will build on advances.
4. The religious right will regroup.
5. Secular spirituality will strengthen.

Eastern spirituality, he says, has gone mainstream in the West. Once an East-West dialogue piece for a small number of intellectuals, Asian spirituality is being embraced by growing numbers of people around the world. “Small spiritual armies of young Buddhists, calling themselves Dharma Punx, are spreading around North America.” But Todd says that “it’s not only whites jumping on the Eastern spirituality train.” Growing numbers of Asians, inspired by the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and Thailand’s Sulak Sivaraksa, are transforming Eastern spiritual traditions with a commitment to an “engaged Buddhism” that emphasizes justice. He notes that the Taiwan-based Chi Tzi movement has millions of followers in 40 countries, including Canada. It downplays religious rites and zealously pursues international charity projects.

Religious terrorism. Todd draws on Pew Forum findings in noting that 9% of countries are experiencing some form of terrorism – “not only from Muslims, but from Christians, Hindus, atheistic leaders and others.” Surveys show that Islamic anger is based largely on a sense that Muslims are being oppressed by Western financial, political and military powers. But anger is also being felt much more widely.

Religious liberals. Spiritual searchers are yearning for alternatives to conservative versions of Western religion. Todd notes that they are finding it in progressive Christian and other writers who include Marcus Borg, Jim Wallis, Tariq Ramadan, and Ron Rolheiser. He suggests that, as civil rights, South African apartheid, and the Vietnam War brought religious progressives together in the 1960s and 70s, “possible environmental disaster now galvanizes them.”

The Religious right. The religious right, in Todd’s words, “has been hit some body blows,” including the rise of Obama, the failure of the Iraq war they backed, the defeat of Sarah Palin, and – in both the U.S. and Canada – same-sex union legislation. Nonetheless, its passion, anger, money, followers, and political and media connections will see it continue to be a societal force.

Secular spirituality. The inclination for people to dichotomize between religion and spirituality will persist. It is becoming increasingly common to reject organized religion, yet embrace a host of spiritual practices and beliefs. Todd sees “secular spirituality” manifesting itself in mainstream publishing, academia, widespread nature reverence, and pop culture figures, including Oprah, Eckhart Tolle, and Deepak Chopra.

He adds that polls – as we saw with Wuthnow’s work – show more and more people are becoming “spiritual tinkerers” who “mix and match an often dizzying variety of beliefs and practices.” Secular spirituality also is appearing in movies. Todd cites the example of *Avatar*, with its eco-spiritual theme, where the Na’vi humanoid heroes “practice a powerful indigenous form of nature spirituality that holds the potential to heal the universe.” He notes that Canadian director James Cameron took the title of his movie from Indian religion – that “an ‘avatar’ is an incarnation of a Hindu god.”

Assessment

These findings document the fact that spiritual interest and needs are widespread. That said, how spirituality is conceptualized varies considerably across the population.

Large numbers of Canadians of all ages who are not religious in conventional ways nonetheless express spiritual needs. At the same time, this does not mean that they necessarily are looking in the direction of conventional religion to have them met. In fact, many are finding alternatives to religion when it comes both to the conceptualization and nurturing of spirituality.

It seems clear that as polarization intensifies in Canada, spiritual needs and responses will persist – with and without the presence of religion in people’s lives.

Because of the subjectivity associated with spirituality, its nature will probably best be understood with the help of a good number of adjectives.

We will find ourselves thinking, for example, of Catholic spirituality, Baptist spirituality, Buddhist spirituality, Islamic spirituality, and so on.

But we also will find that a variety of atheistic and agnostic spiritualities exist, as do more generic forms of theistic and non-institutional spirituality.

To the extent that spirituality finds expression both within existing religions and apart from religion, there is no doubt that it will persist on a global basis. One would expect that its expressions will only become more and more diverse as it moves outside the parameters of formal religion in an increasing number of cultural settings around the world.

And like products of every kind, we can expect those expanding expressions to be exported, further expanding spirituality marketplaces pretty much everywhere.

Growing religious polarization in Canada will do little to reduce the apparent fascination most people have with spirituality.

That's not to say that all expressions of spirituality "are born equal" when it comes to functionality. Many expressions of spirituality, for example, along with "civil religions" and "implicit religions," have little or nothing to say about the death question.

On a number of occasions, Todd has reflected on the extent to which something like hockey, for example, has been said to be a Canadian "religion" – an idea that actually has been posited by some academics.²⁶ Obviously hockey – like sports such as soccer in many parts of the world – can call forth personal and collective emotions and bind people together. Sports also are replete with symbols and rituals.

But let's not get carried away. Whatever the functions of sports and other potential "invisible religions" to which we direct our energies – such as careers, materialism, or family life, they fall far short of being substitutes for religions that can address the "big questions of our existence." Such a reality was underlined in the aftermath of the tragic death of NHL executive Brian Burke's son, Brendan, in early 2010, when *Hockey News* writer Sam McCaig commented, it "makes things like trade deadlines, NHL playoff berths and Olympic tournaments seem like little more than surreal, meaningless pastimes."²⁷

Bell – and McCaig – are right. In the face of things like tragedy and death, most of us need much more.

Dating back to *Fragmented Gods* almost three decades ago, I have been among those who have argued that religion is only one source of meaning. People can obviously find ways of making life meaningful and do – without exclusively or even necessarily turning to religion. In the words of Bertrand Russell that I cited back then, "I do not think that life in general has a purpose. It just happened. But individual human beings have purposes."²⁸

In a recent polling of 84 countries, the Gallup organization confirmed the fact that meaning does not require religion. Only 2% of all respondents worldwide said they were secular or nonreligious. Nevertheless, 83% of these same people indicated that their lives have an

important meaning or purpose – about 5-10% below Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews, but still extremely high.²⁹

The gods are not indispensable to finding purpose. But they do not appear to have many equals when it comes to addressing with certainty what happens when we die.

Spiritual needs and spiritual expressions will outlive religion. What they will add to people lives, and the extent to which they will come up short, remains to be seen.

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A closing thought. I have found that the research news about various conceptions of spiritual needs that in turn are widely being met brings a fairly predictable response from religious leaders in particular. “People might be into spirituality,” they protest. “But what they are embracing is not “real” or “genuine” spirituality.

Maybe so. But the job of the sociologist is not to tell people of faith what “true” spirituality looks like. If the wide range of spiritualities is not viewed as bona fide, the onus is on those who feel that way to find ways of getting the word out to the growing number of people in Canada and elsewhere who feel otherwise.

The research suggests that large numbers are not only finding alternatives to conventional expressions of spirituality, but are also finding those alternatives to be highly functional.

Consequently, if they are travelling up the wrong mountains, they need to hear from some extremely persuasive and credible guides.

Many of them are quite happy with both their paths and their destinations.

7 Polarization & Social Well-Being

"It is doubtful whether men were in general happier when religious doctrines held unlimited sway than they are now; more moral they certainly were not." – Sigmund Freud

EVERYONE has heard the argument in one form or another. Are people who are religious *more* compassionate than people who are not religious? Or are they actually *less* compassionate? Does the valuing of God result in people being better people when it comes to how they relate to others? Even if that's the case, can't people be good without God?

Old questions, tough questions. Here again, if we opened up the mic to people in any audience, we know the input would be extremely varied and probably emotional. The data sources would be extensive.

- We can readily draw on *personal experience* – and why not? We all have known people who are religious and not religious. Some of them have been terrific people, others less than terrific.
- We can reflect on *history*. Some could offer stories of how religious groups helped their parents and grandparents when they arrived in Canada from other countries. A number of Aboriginals in the audience might remind us of what they know about residential schools, and decry what religious groups did to children in days gone by. Still others would raise the issue of religion having contributed to wars and conflict in many parts of the world, and go so far as to say that the world would have been a far better place without religion.
- A speaker or two might say that *they themselves* have been motivated to be better and kinder people because of their faith.

- An academic might try to inform us that *research* offers mixed reviews regarding the relationship between religion and compassion.

The discussion would get even more complex if we tried to carry out the Herculean task of not only comparing things personally and historically but also cross-culturally.

What about societies, past and present, where religion has been pervasive, versus those where religion has seemingly been absent – the United States, for example, versus the Soviet Union prior to the demise of the communist bloc in the late 1980s?

Would a person who lived in Chicago in the 1970s have found America to be a more compassionate place to be than his or her counterpart in Moscow? Today, ideology aside, is interpersonal life in a theocratic Iran more civil than in a highly secularized Sweden? How about life in predominantly Catholic countries like the Philippines or Ireland versus the Czech Republic or China?

Very big questions that conjure up very long answers, and, I suspect, very little consensus.

New Arguments from Science

Since the 1970s, science has accelerated its participation in the fray. The burgeoning disciplines of social and evolutionary biology, along with moral psychology, have led the way in giving increasing attention to the scientific study of human nature. The focus has been morality. In my mind, it is a short path from talking about what is right and wrong to talking about social well-being.

Much of this emphasis on “the new science of morality” has originated at Harvard University with faculty and graduates including Robert Trivers, Steven Pinker, Edward O. Wilson, Daniel C. Dennett, and Marc Hauser. In 1975, Wilson predicted that ethics would someday be taken out of the hands of philosophers and incorporated into the new synthesis of evolutionary and biological thinking.¹ Theologians seemingly had little say in the matter.

A 2010 gathering in Connecticut sponsored by the Edge Foundation brought together nine leading thinkers in exploring “the New Science of Morality.” John Brockman, the editor and publisher of *www.Edge.org*, noted that “it seems like everyone is studying morality these days, reaching findings that complement each other more often than they clash.” In introducing what people had to say he asked, “What do we have to offer a world in which so many global national crises are caused or exacerbated by moral failures and moral conflicts?”² Some of the participants included:

- Yale psychologist *Paul Bloom*, who maintains humans are born with hard-wired morality and have a deep sense of good and evil bred in the bone;
- University of Virginia psychologist *Jonathan Haidt*, who asserts that morality has evolved out of five or more innate foundations: harm, fairness, ingroup, authority, and purity – the highly educated tend to rely on the first two, more religious and lower class people rely on all five;
- Florida State social psychologist *Roy Baumister* cautioned against reductionism, offering the reminder that a focus on the individual and nature needs to be complemented by an emphasis on the interpersonal – nature and culture – where morality is an attempt to get people to overcome their natural selfish impulses.

Two others among the nine were Marc Hauser and Sam Harris. Here is a sampling of their thinking.

Marc Hauser. In his 2006 book, *Moral Minds: How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*,³ this Harvard evolutionary biologist and neuroscientist challenged the widespread assumption that morality is the product of learning, primarily through families, education, and religion.⁴

Hauser argued that, with evolution, humans have developed a universal, unconscious moral instinct. In an interview in 2006, he explained that we are born with “a universal moral grammar” or set of principles for making judgments about right and wrong. Those principles are “built into the brains of all humans.”

This sense of right and wrong consequently precedes everything, including our experiences and our judgments. Variables such as education and reflection colour our moral verdicts, but do not determine them. In fact, such moral principles are immune to commandments handed down by religions and governments and presumably everything else.

Similar to language, cultural variations can be expected. But, says Hauser, “the moral faculty will place constraints on the range of cross-cultural variation and thus limit the extent to which religion, law or teachers can modify our intuitive moral judgments.”⁵

For example, he points out that his research demonstrates considerable consensus on moral judgments concerning the permissibility of harming other individuals, with little variation by education or religion including – specifically – people who are religious and those who are atheists.

Hauser brings the resources of a wide range of disciplines to his research task, including evolutionary biology, neuroscience, moral and political philosophy, primatology, linguistics, anthropology. One of his primary research methods is to pose “artificial moral dilemmas,” where people are presented with situations calling for moral responses. His assumption is that intuition plays a major role in shaping their responses. An Internet version of his “Moral Sense Test” (MST) is available to potential participants.⁶

In short, for Hauser, our principles for determining morality are present at birth. They are not the product of either learning or reflection.

Following a three-year investigation, Harvard put Hauser on a year’s leave in August of 2010 for eight instances of scientific misconduct. For many observers, such developments called much if not almost all of Hauser’s work into question.⁷ For his part, Hauser maintained that he had “made some significant mistakes.” He indicated that “after taking some time off, I look forward to getting back to my work.”⁸

Sam Harris. The ideas of Harris are offered in a number of books, the latest of which is *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (2010)⁹. He further offered a succinct overview of his views on moral values in the 2010 Edge event just discussed.¹⁰ Science’s failure to address questions of meaning, morality, and values, says Harris, has provided the primary justification for religious faith. Such an abdication has resulted in religious dogmatism, superstition, and sectarian conflict. “We have convinced ourselves that somehow science is by definition a value-free space,” he continues, “and that we can’t make value judgments about beliefs and practices that needlessly derail our attempts to build happy and sane societies.”

Science consequently should not limit itself to merely describing existing moral systems but needs to be engaged in persuasion – persuading people who are committed to harmful things in the name of “morality” to change their commitments and lead better lives. He sees this as no less than “the most important project facing humanity at this point in time.” I’m not exaggerating. Harris argues that “it subsumes everything else we could care about – from arresting climate change, to stopping nuclear proliferation, to curing cancer, to saving the whales.”

“Project Two” for Harris is understanding right and wrong in universal terms. He notes that this is a particularly difficult task, since the pervasive idea exists that there is no intellectual basis for claiming there is “moral truth.”

Harris uses a poignant illustration to make his point. “In 1947, when the United Nations was attempting to formulate a universal declaration of human rights, the American Anthropological Association stepped forward and said, it can’t be done. Any notion of human rights is the product of culture. This was the best our social sciences could do with the crematory of Auschwitz still smoking.”

Harris challenges such a relativistic assumption. He maintains that we need to converge globally on the question of how we should treat each other. The point of consensus for Harris is well-being: “The concept of ‘well-being’ captures everything we can care about in the moral sphere.”

Harris is convinced that there are right and wrong answers to questions of human flourishing, and morality relates to that domain of facts. In his mind, science needs to give top priority to exploring and developing a universal conception of human values.¹¹

Rather than questions of meaning, morality, and purpose being outside the limits of science, Harris believes that science alone can uncover the facts that are needed to enable humans to flourish. Religion not only does not have the answers; it is a major source of world problems.

My re-reading of this brief exposition leads me to think I have made Harris sound more charitable toward religion than he is. In a back cover endorsement of *The Moral Landscape*, Richard Dawkins writes, “As for religion and the preposterous idea that we need God to be good, nobody wields a sharper bayonet than Sam Harris.” *Newsweek*’s Jerry Adler sums things up this way: “Dawkins and Harris are not issuing pleas for tolerance or moderation, but bone-rattling attacks on what they regard as a pernicious and outdated superstition.”¹²

Clarifying the Question

Undoubtedly, social compassion – concern for others – has a large number of possible sources. A starting point is to agree on that.

Let’s also be clear on some additional matters, and save ourselves considerable time and energy by not treating them as issues in question.

- ✓ Neurological or biological determinism can be treated and greeted as a scientific breakthrough. However, it really re-opens a very old claim – that nature can explain everything, with no recourse to nurture. Sociologists are equally adamant that social environment plays an important role in shaping individuals. A much more productive approach is to combine the insights of both perspectives, as the new area of “social neuroscience” is attempting to do.”¹³

- ✓ Religion is one source of compassion for some people in some situations. Religions often and perhaps even typically call on their followers to care about other people. Besides expecting them to adopt such ideals, they expect them to put them into practice. It therefore is hardly a shocker that people who are taught “to be good” and taught “to be kind” sometimes come through. American President Barack Obama recently acknowledged that he “came to Christian faith later in life and it was because the precepts of Jesus Christ spoke to me in terms of the kind of life that I would want to lead – being my brothers’ and sisters’ keeper, treating others as they would treat me.”¹⁴
- ✓ Do interpersonal values always translate into behaviour? Of course not. In causation parlance, values *are not* sufficient causes of behaviour. But they *are* necessary causes: a person who acts compassionately values compassion, even if someone who values compassion is not always compassionate. If the value is in place, compassionate behaviour is at least a mathematical possibility. Conversely, “no value = no compassion.”
- ✓ Does religion sometimes contribute to the lack of compassion – to pain, suffering, and even the death of other people? Unfortunately, the answer is yes.
- ✓ Do individuals who are not religious also sometimes treat other people in negative ways, spanning rudeness and exploitation to death? Here again, the answer is, unfortunately, yes.

So the question I want to bring to the Canadian scene assumes all of the above realities. What I want to know is this: *at this point in history in Canada, to what extent is religiousness associated with compassionate values and behaviour?*

An important related question, given the increasing religious polarization is: *how does the level of compassion of those who are religious compare with the level of compassion of those who are not?*

The answers will help us to assess the immediate implications of religious polarization for interpersonal life in Canada.

Civil societies require the adoption of values and norms that make for good interpersonal life. Consequently, the question of civility sources is an extremely important one.

In the fall of 2010, Hockey Calgary, the organization that oversees minor hockey in Calgary, became the first in the country to require parents to complete a one-hour on-line course before their children could play.

The president of Hockey Calgary, Perry Cavanaugh explained that cases of unruly parents and violence on the ice required exposure to standards to guide everyone toward mutual respect at the rink. He cited such things as hockey parents yelling at referees, climbing the glass, and throwing coffee cups on the ice, and a significant number of players being suspended because of illegal hits, fighting, and roughing penalties.

Thinking like a sociologist, Cavanaugh noted that “Calgary has gone through a period of negative activity in terms of violence in the community,” with those changes “propagating more and more into local arenas. We’re seeing less respect to individuals, players, coaches, parents, and we need to send a message that this kind of behaviour is not tolerated.”¹⁵

By the time the season started, 99% of Calgary’s 13,000-plus young hockey players had “Respect in Sport” – certified parents (at least one had to take the course). Cavanaugh commented that, even if some parents didn’t like the program, they were “putting their egos aside and getting the kids on the ice.”¹⁶

It seems that when it comes to social well-being, we need all the help we can get.

A Canadian Reading

Values. Going back to the 1980s, we have been asking adults and teenagers about the importance they give to a number of values. Some pertain to goals or objectives, such as a comfortable life, friendship, and success. Others focus on means or norms for living and relating to other people, such as honesty, politeness, and generosity. Findings

regarding the latter offer information on the extent to which Canadians of all ages place importance on traits that make for positive interpersonal life.

The most recent Project Canada surveys show that the majority of Canadians place a very high level of importance on almost all of these interpersonal values – although the size of those majorities vary considerably.

When one looks at the findings by age, some slight variations are apparent between older and younger adults – but perhaps not as much as some would expect.¹⁷ The major difference is the extent to which these traits are highly valued by adults versus teenagers.

Table 7.1. Interpersonal Values by Age Cohort
% Indicating “Very Important”

	Pre-Boomers	Boomers	Post-Boomers	Teenagers
Honesty	95	92	89	81
Concern for others	75	73	77	65
Politeness	79	76	70	64
Forgiveness	75	75	75	60
Generosity	53	54	57	---

Sources: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008.

Another variable that has some predictability is gender. Adult and teenage females are consistently more likely than their male counterparts to highly value all of these interpersonal characteristics.

Table 7.2. Interpersonal Values by Gender: Adults & Teens
% Indicating “Very Important”

	ADULTS		TEENAGERS	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Honesty	95	89	87	74
Concern for others	83	67	72	56
Politeness	80	69	70	57
Forgiveness	81	69	66	53
Generosity	64	46	---	---

*Shaded: a difference of 10 or more percentage points or more; viewed as substantively significant. The r's for adults, respectively: .113, .185, .128, .145, .184. Teens: .176, .180, .153, .146.

Source: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008.

Beyond these age and gender variations, what we want to know is whether or not religion is also associated with differences in the importance given to these values.

An examination of values by attendance, identification, and belief reveals a consistent pattern: Canadians who are religious according to these three indicators are consistently more likely than other people to place a high level of importance on these interpersonal traits.

A number of quick observations.

1. The relationships between religiosity and these interpersonal values are not always overly strong, but they are consistent. Overall, it is fair to say that people who are religious tend to be more likely to value these traits that make for civility than people who are not religious.
2. Not everyone who is religious places a high level of importance on these values. Conversely, large numbers of people who are not religious see these traits as “very important.” Such basic findings help us to understand why generalizations about people in both categories typically need to allow for considerable exceptions.
3. In general, these findings support the idea that, all sources considered, religion – measured here in three different ways – has *a unique impact* on the importance that Canadians place on these interpersonal values.¹⁸ (This note offers clarification on the statistics used for this analysis.)

Table 7.3. Interpersonal Values by Religiosity: Adults & Teens
% Indicating “Very Important”

	92%	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFN		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
ADULTS							
Honesty	92%	96	92	92	89	94	89
Concern for others	75	83	72	75	75	85	74
Politeness	75	80	71	75	71	81	63
Forgiveness	75	88	69	76	63	77	65
Generosity	55	76	44	56	45	67	37
TEENAGERS							
Honesty	81%	86	79	83	77	86	75
Concern for others	65	74	60	67	60	72	54
Politeness	64	69	61	68	58	71	57
Forgiveness	60	77	52	64	51	72	44
Patience	44	57	39	48	37	55	35

*Shaded: indicates a difference of 10 percentage points or more; viewed as substantively significant.

Source: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2008 national surveys.

A particularly interesting test of these findings is to see whether or not they hold up by gender, and also if they apply in Quebec, where secularization has been extensive. The teen data obviously also have a built-in control for age.

When we use belief in God as a non-organizational measure of religiosity, we see that positive relationships exist between theism and values in both the gender and regional instances. Teens who are theists are consistently more likely than others to place a high level of importance on interpersonal values. Something is happening “out there” with religion and interpersonal values that transcends region, gender, and age.

Table 7.4. Values of Theist & Atheist Teens by Gender

% Indicating “Very Important”

	Female		Male	
	Theist	Atheist	Theist	Atheist
Trust	94	86	82	71
Honesty	91	79	80	71
Concern	80	61	63	49
Politeness	76	60	65	54
Forgiveness	77	49	66	41
Hard work	64	48	58	50
Patience	59	30	49	39

Source: Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials* 2009:172.

Table 7.5. Values of Theist & Atheist Teens: QC & Elsewhere

% Indicating “Very Important”

	Quebec		Elsewhere	
	Theist	Atheist	Theist	Atheist
Trust	83	80	89	77
Honesty	86	73	86	76
Concern	58	47	75	58
Politeness	74	62	71	54
Forgiveness	62	37	73	48
Hard work	60	53	62	48
Patience	48	33	56	36

Source: Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials* 2009:172.

Behaviour. We all know that one of the shortcomings of surveys is their inability to capture actual behaviour. There is nothing surprising about that limitation. As I so often remind people, surveys at their best are simply good structured conversations. As such, they have no equal when it comes to understanding what’s going on in people’s heads – their thoughts including their beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and so on. In probing ideas, surveys have no equal.

When we want to get a good reading on behaviour, however, we all know that it can be precarious to simply rely on what people tell us they do or have done. We can ask them questions about how much money they give to charities, whether or not they ever have used marijuana,

how often they work out, the last time they received a speeding ticket, whether or not they ever gamble, how often they have sex, if they ever lie, and on and on.

But – and this is going to sound excessively cynical – we can only put a percentage of certainty on whether or not they have told us the truth. That percentage obviously depends on factors such as how well we know the person, whether or not we think they feel comfortable with us, and the risk involved in their providing the information.

That’s my long way of saying that it is difficult to gather reliable data through surveys on how people actually behave. Nonetheless, we try.

For example, in our latest youth survey, we again asked participants to imagine that they have bought something and have received \$10 more in change than they were supposed to receive. We asked them if they would be inclined to (a) keep the \$10 and keep walking, (b) go back and return the extra \$10, or (c) feel that what they would do would depend on factors such as the size of the store, whether they expected to shop there again, and whether or not they knew the sales person involved.¹⁹

It’s not behaviour – but maybe at least something in the way of anticipated behaviour.

- What the survey found is that some 4 in 10 teens claim they would return the \$10, while the remainder were almost evenly divided between those who said “it would depend” and those who admitted that they would probably simply keep the ten bucks.
- However, an examination by our three religiosity variables shows a consistent, positive relationship between attendance, identification and belief and the inclination to return the \$10.

Perhaps the findings reflect what young people *would do*; at minimum they reflect what they *think they should do*.

This takes us back to the argument about values functioning something like “good intentions.” Behaviour doesn’t necessarily follow; but the values have to be present in order for the behaviour to occur.

Our findings so far point to religion helping to at least instill positive interpersonal values. With our “\$10 data,” we are going a bit further in maintaining that the findings support the argument that religion is also related to Canadians holding some positive interpersonal intentions.

Table 7.6. Honesty in Action by Religiosity: Teenagers
“Do you think you would be inclined to...”

	38%	ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFN		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Return the \$10	38%	56	36	42	33	47	26
It would depend	31	22	34	30	37	27	36
Keep the \$10	31	22	30	28	30	26	38

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Civility. Most people, I think, would fairly readily concede that some kinds of behaviour reflect a measure of civility while others do not.

For example, there would seem to be some basic courtesy ideals associated with such things as people not walking on a red light and making traffic wait (apart from getting a ticket), saying sorry when we accidentally bump into someone, not parking in a stall reserved for those who are handicapped when one is not handicapped, and resisting the urge to “give someone the finger.”

The Project Teen Canada survey in 2008 asked young people across the country how they felt about such kinds of behaviour.²⁰ Participants were asked to indicate whether they approved, disapproved, or didn’t care either way.

Adults who are cynical about the civility levels of teenagers would be wise to take a close look at the results.

- Large majorities of around 80% disapprove of people misusing parking stalls for the handicapped, or not apologizing for bumping into someone.
- A two-thirds majority doesn’t approve of people walking on a red light at the expense of oncoming traffic.
- However, only 45% act troubled about people occasionally giving someone “the finger.”

Interestingly, differences by attendance, identification, and belief are consistently positive but extremely small – with the sole exception of extending the famous “finger.”

Clearly there are a variety of sources of such basic civil attitudes, besides religion.

Table 7.7. Select Behaviour Attitudes: Teenagers

% Indicating Disapproval

		ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFN		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Parking handicapped	82	85	79	84	80	85	77
No 'sorry' for bumping	77	77	77	79	76	78	74
Walking on a red light	63	66	61	63	63	64	58
Giving the finger	45	62	38	49	36	53	34

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Being Good. A basic hope for almost every parent is that their children – in the phrase of one of my former students – “will turn out OK.” Related to that essential hope, parents and other adults, along with our schools, churches, and other institutions want to see young people “stay out of trouble.”

How is everyone faring?

The 2008 national youth survey included a number of items that probe both self-image and behaviour with respect to the stereotypical notion of “trying to be good” or “trying to stay out of trouble.”

Teens are almost unanimous in claiming that they “are kind to other people.” The numbers drop a bit, as would be expected, when they are asked how well the two statements, “*I have never got into trouble with the police*” and “*I try to stay out of trouble*” describe them personally. Gender differences, by the way, are fairly small in both of these cases – 86% for females vs. 78% for males re: having not had police problems and 83% vs. 77% for staying out of trouble.

When we look at these variables through the eyes of religiosity, what we find is that almost all young people, whether they are religious or not, see themselves as kind to other people.

Where religion makes an appearance is when we look at experiences teens have had with the police.

- The differences are not overly large, but nonetheless smaller percentages of teens who attend weekly, identify with a religious group, or believe in God say they have got into trouble with the police.
- Those who are cynical about those self-reports need to take note of the fact that young people who are religious are also more inclined to say that they consciously try to stay out of trouble – a motivational difference that they would not seem to have any particular point in exaggerating.

Religion here again appears to be having a unique impact on teens, beyond other social and cultural factors.

Again I rush to emphasize that these data documenting the inclination of most teens to value “goodness” support the reality that there are many sources at work. Religion is certainly not the only source – but it *is* one source.

Teenagers clearly can be good without God. But God seems to increase the number of good teenagers.

Table 7.8. Teenage Goodness by Religiosity

% Agreeing

	■ + ■	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
I am kind to other people	94	96	93	95	93	95	89
I have never got into trouble with the police	83	90	78	86	79	86	75
I try to stay out of trouble	80	87	75	84	74	86	65

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Social Concerns. Over the years, teens and adults have been asked about the extent to which they regard various issues to be serious problems. Lists of 15 or more areas have been given, with respondents indicating their severity.

A look at a sampling of such issues by religiosity among teens, for example, reveals a consistent pattern. Those who are religious tend to be more likely than those who are not to see issues with very direct personal and interpersonal consequences – such as drugs, school violence, and bullying – as serious problems. Differences tend to be slight, however, in the case of more general issues, such as the environment or American influence.

Table 7.9. Canadian Concerns by Religiosity: Teenagers

% Indicating Are “Very Serious” Problems in Canada

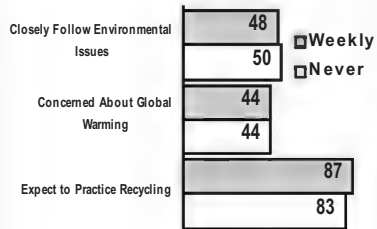
	🇨🇦	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Environment	54	48	56	55	55	53	55
Drugs	42	48	39	45	36	51	36
Violence at school	42	47	40	45	38	48	39
Bullying	34	38	31	36	31	39	29
American influence	24	25	25	25	22	27	24

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

Indicative of the pervasiveness of current attention being given to environmental and sustainability issues, there are no significant differences in levels of interest and concern being expressed about related topics on the part of teens who are religiously involved and those who are not.

“Thinking green” and being conscious of sustainability are widespread emphases in our culture. Here, even for the devout, religion is typically only one of many potential sources, and seldom a prime source at that.

Figure 7.1. Sustainability: Teens



Source: Project Teen Canada

Social Compassion. The Project Canada surveys have also included numerous items that have probed the prevalence of social compassion.

For example, given that Canada has had a publicly funded health care system for some time, it is not surprising that nearly all adults and teens agree that “*people who cannot afford it have a right to medical care.*” This is a good example of a compassionate outlook that has been engrained in Canadians. Religion would not be expected to be a unique source – and it is not.

Being concerned about people outside of Canada, however, is not an outlook endorsed by everyone. Some 25% of adults and approximately 30% of teenagers agree with the statement, “*We need to worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself.*”

- Among *adults*, disagreement with such a focus on taking care of ourselves varies little by the religiosity measures.
- However, *teenagers* who are religious are more likely than those who are not religious to be *opposed* to such an isolationist position. The differences are small, yet consistent across all three measures.
- For many teens, non-religious and religious, the Internet’s role in further reducing the size of the global village, making needs across the planet more visible, has *not* resulted in a particularly compassionate outlook toward “the rest of the world.”

Table 7.10. Social Compassion by Religiosity: Teens & Adults

		ATTENDANCE			ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never		Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
People who cannot afford it have a right to medical care	Agree							
	ADULTS	98%	97	98	98	98	98	99
	TEENS	94	93	94	94	93	94	92
We need to worry about our own country and let the rest of the world take care of itself	Disagree							
	ADULTS	73	78	70	72	79	76	79
	TEENS	67	74	62	70	64	71	59

Sources: Project Canada 2005 & Project Teen Canada 2008.

Global Concerns. Such an observation is further borne out by data from the 2008 national youth survey regarding the extent to which young people are concerned about a number of issues on a global basis.

Only about 40% indicated they are “very concerned” about issues like human rights violations, poverty, and AIDS “in the world generally,” while just under 30% expressed a similar level of concern about terrorism.

In each instance, religious teens are more inclined than others to express concern about these issues – especially in the case of poverty, AIDS and terrorism.

Table 7.11. Global Concerns by Religiosity: Teenagers

% Indicating “Very Concerned” About...

	42	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Human rights violations	42	43	40	42	41	45	41
Poverty	40	48	35	43	34	49	33
AIDS	37	40	35	39	32	41	33
Terrorism	27	31	23	30	21	33	21

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

These findings point to a significant preliminary conclusion: religion is one importance source of positive interpersonal life. Those who are not religious do not lack for civility and compassion. But, collectively, they tend to lag slightly behind Canadians who are religious.

To the extent that religion is making a contribution to social compassion in Canada, a decline in the proportion of people who embrace religion will be associated with a decline in the values and behaviour that make for social well-being.

It’s not that religion’s contribution cannot be made up by other sources. But until such sources are located and are operative, social well-being in Canada is going to take a significant hit.

Religious groups can easily be attacked and belittled. It is a far more difficult task to identify the functional alternatives that will fill the social well-being void.

Civility and Compassion Among Canadian Youth

- Conservative Protestant teens, along with their "Christian unspecified," Islam, and Hindu counterparts, are more likely than others to say they would return the 10 bucks and to disapprove of people using "the finger." Some 1 in 2 Catholic, Orthodox, Mainline Protestant, and Buddhist teens also give the finger a thumbs down.
- World poverty is a particular concern for young Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Protestants, and Catholics outside Quebec.

Teenage Polarization in the Mosaic **Social Civility and Compassion**

	Return the \$10	Disapprove of the Finger	Concerned About World Poverty
NATIONALLY	38%	45	40
Roman Catholicism	38	46	42
Outside Quebec	40	44	47
Quebec	32	51	32
Protestantism	51	56	43
Conservative	60	64	45
Mainline	46	48	43
Orthodox	29	47	41
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	53	58	49
Other World Faiths	43	49	47
Islam	54	60	57
Hinduism	53	63	55
Judaism	38	32	46
Sikhism	34	38	32
Buddhism	33	54	39
Aboriginal Spirituality	32	32	39
No Religion	30	36	34

The Global Situation

Helping Behaviour. In 2007, Gallup released survey findings on acts of compassion for three settings – Canada, the United States, and Britain. The pollster asked people if they had donated money, volunteered time, or helped a stranger “in the past month.” They then looked at the results by the importance that respondents said religion has in their daily lives.

Gallup found people in Britain were most likely to donate money, while Americans and Canadians were more likely to volunteer their time. Differences in helping a stranger were fairly small.

In all three settings, without exception, people who placed importance on religion were slightly more inclined than others to donate money, volunteer time, and help a stranger. Religion was making a small but consistent difference.

**Table 7.12. Helping Behaviour by Religiosity:
Canada, the U.S. & Britain**

% Who in the Past Month Have...

	ALL			Religion NB			Religion Not NB		
	Canada	US	UK	Canada	US	UK	Canada	US	UK
Donated money	60	64	73	66	71	82	56	50	67
Volunteered time	39	44	23	45	50	32	34	34	18
Helped a stranger	64	59	66	65	67	70	62	63	53

Sources: Gallup Poll analysis by English 2007.

Buster Smith and Rodney Stark have recently noted that “studies on the relationship between generosity and religiosity have been largely confined to examinations of developed countries.” They point out that Gallup’s world-wide data “make it possible to expand these analyses to countries in all regions of the world.”²¹

Brett Pelham and Steve Crabtree have used the Gallup data to examine the relationship between religion and “helping behaviour” worldwide. They report that people who are highly religious are more likely than others to have engaged in each of the three kinds of behaviour. What’s more, they say that the relationships are consistent not only across global regions but also are “consistent across the world’s largest faith traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism.” For example, they report that “differences for helping a stranger” range “from 7 percentage points among Buddhists to 15 points among Jews.”²²

Table 7.13. Helping Behaviour by Religiosity: Globally

% Who in the Past Month Have...

	DONATED		VOLUNTEERED		HELPED A STRANGER	
	Highly Religious	Less Religious	Highly Religious	Less Religious	Highly Religious	Less Religious
Europe	43%	28	24	17	42	36
Asia	41	26	24	19	46	37
Americas	39	28	29	18	56	49
Africa	23	15	27	17	52	43

Note: Gallup defines “highly religious” people as those who report that religion is important to their daily lives and also report having attended a religious service in the week prior to being surveyed. All others are categorized as “less religious.”

Sources: Gallup World Poll analyses by Pelham and Crabtree 2008.

Incidentally, Smith and Stark have carried the analysis a bit further, looking at generosity by attendance and salience separately. They have found the relationships to hold for both measures, controlling for variables such as gender, age, and marital status. They note that in each of the three instances, the associations with attendance are higher than they are for salience.²³ Such a finding, they suggest, points to the importance of community – and not just the subjective importance of religion – to individuals.

Development Assistance. On a national level, to what extent are countries that are relatively affluent showing generosity to countries that are in need of assistance?

The results are mixed. According to current figures provided by the key monitoring body, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *in absolute terms*, the top 10 donors are the U.S., Britain, Japan, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Canada, and Italy. The overall correlation between service attendance and giving in real dollars is both positive and appreciable ($r = .412$).

However, if giving is computed *as a percentage of Gross National Income*, the correlation between attendance and giving is actually negative ($r = -.441$).

One's conclusion here is based on one's judgment as to whether appropriate and significant giving is "how much" versus "what proportion" based on capabilities.

Attendance gets a "B" on the former, a "D" on the latter.

**Table 7.14. Development Assistance:
22 Member Countries**

National Contributions - 2008

	Attend- ance	Real USD millions	% of GNI
Average	29%	5.5	.48
Ireland	56	1.3	.59
Italy	49	4.9	.22
United States	43	26.8	.19
Spain	39	6.9	.45
Portugal	38	0.6	.27
Japan	38	9.6	.19
Austria	34	1.7	.43
Germany	30	14.0	.38
Greece	29	.70	.21
New Zealand	27	.35	.30
Luxembourg	26	0.4	.98
Switzerland	26	2.0	.42
CANADA	26	4.8	.32
Netherlands	26	7.0	.80
Belgium	24	2.4	.48
Australia	23	3.0	.32
France	20	10.9	.39
United Kingdom	20	11.5	.43
Sweden	17	4.7	.98
Denmark	16	2.8	.82
Norway	13	4.0	.88
Finland	12	1.2	.44

Real USD $r = .412$; % GNI $r = -.441$

BOLD: G-20 Countries.

Sources: Attendance - Gallup WorldView 2010;
Contributions - Organisation for Economic
Co-operation and Development 2010.

Trust and safety. Still other measures of positive interpersonal life might take the form of trust and lack of crime.

An examination of attendance, trust, and crime in a sample of 29 countries reveals that a modest positive relationship exists between trust and a lower crime rate ($r = .275$). But attendance all by itself is *not* positively associated with either trust ($r = -.468$) or a low crime rate ($r = -.195$).

In countries like Ethiopia, the Philippines, South Africa, and Brazil, for example, service attendance is fairly high – well above the levels in places such as Canada, Britain, and Sweden. Yet crime rates in all four of those settings are significantly above those of Canada and the other two countries, and – predictably – trust levels are much lower.

Table 7.15. Attendance, Trust, and Crime Rates: Select Countries

"Most people in society are trustworthy"

Crime rates per 100,000 population

	Attend- ance	Trust	Crime Rates
Nigeria	89%	32%	1.3
Ethiopia	78	47	6.4
India	73	54	2.8
Malaysia	73	56	2.3
Poland	62	48	1.2
Philippines	64	--	6.4
Mexico	60	46	11.6
South Africa	57	42	36.5
Pakistan	56	54	6.8
Palestinian Territories	55	34	3.9
Italy	49	41	1.2
Brazil	49	35	22.0
Iran	45	--	2.9
United States	43	58	5.2
Israel	39	42	2.4
Spain	39	43	.9
Japan	38	43	.5
Korea, Republic of	35	46	2.3
Germany	30	56	.8
CANADA	26	71	1.7
Ukraine	23	47	6.3
Australia	23	--	1.2
France	20	45	1.4
United Kingdom	20	65	1.4
Sweden	17	78	.9
Czech Republic	15	42	2.0
Russia	15	50	14.2
Norway	13	--	.6
China	9	79	1.2

Sources: Attendance - Gallup WorldView 2010; Trust - Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2008; Crime rates - United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2010.

These global findings underline the complexity of religion having an impact on both trust and crime in every social or geographical setting around the world.

In some countries where cultures of crime, violence, and corruption have been rampant historically – such as the Philippines, Mexico, South Africa, and Brazil – people have been attending churches in large numbers. However, religion all by itself has hardly turned those societies around.

Conversely, countries such as Canada and the United States, along with European countries including Britain, France, Poland, Germany, and Sweden, seemingly have come to know high levels of safety and civility, with religion being one of the contributors.

In short, the global portrait shows religion sometimes being an important source of enhanced interpersonal life, in other instances, having little effect.

The findings remind us that religion typically has an impact on individuals and societies to the extent that it is able to work with and through other institutions, such as families, schools, governments, private industry, and media that are positioned to influence personal and collective life.

Without that kind of social reinforcement, religion finds it difficult to have a significant impact in any setting.

Table 7.16. View Theism Makes for Better People by Belief in God: 10 Select Countries

“Belief in God or a higher power makes for a better human being”

<i>[r = .498]</i>	Agree	Believe in God
Nigeria	96%	99
Indonesia	96	96
Lebanon	92	92
India	91	99
United States	82	88
Russia	81	91
Mexico	80	97
Israel	71	95
South Korea	70	98
United Kingdom	56	86

Source: ICM poll conducted for the BBC Two program, “What the World Thinks of God.” 2004. Belief in God: computed from the World Religion Database in Smith 2009:284-287.

Assessment

These findings point to a fairly consistent pattern in both Canada and around the world: people who are religious are more likely than those who are not to endorse positive interpersonal values and exhibit positive interpersonal behaviour.

Put far more succinctly and provocatively, on balance, religion appears to be making a noteworthy contribution to social well-being.

Yet, religion typically has a positive influence to the extent that it also is associated with other institutions that have a positive impact on interpersonal life. American political scientist Walter Russell Mead comments that, in various parts of the world, one can readily uncover “young Muslims who have only a narrow and sectarian education, and young Pentecostals who know very little outside of their Bibles. God may have a special love for the poor,” he says, “but that does not mean that the poor get sophisticated religion. They get strong religion and hot religion more than they get subtle religion and sophisticated religion.” The result can be a dangerous world.²⁴

The findings also make it very clear that religion is not the only source of civility. Far from it. Without question, people can be good without God.

Nonetheless, on balance, religion, for all its downsides and darksides, is one important source of civility.

Such a finding should hardly come as a surprise. When we stop to think about, it is fairly readily apparent that there are few institutions and organizations that exist with one of their foremost goals being the enhancement of interpersonal life. Religions typically have such a goal. It is a central part of what they are about.

Consequently, if religion ceases to be practiced by significant numbers of Canadians, some equally effective sources of social well-being will have to be found.

At this point in our history, it is not at all clear that such functional alternatives are anywhere in sight.

Some might argue that Canada and much of Europe benefit from “the shadow effect” of Christian legacies – sort of like the after-effects that our parents and grandparents have on our lives, long after they are gone. Historian Mark Noll, for example, has suggested that Canada has not abandoned its “communal social order” – just “the Christian presence that did so much to build” it.²⁵

Those claims undoubtedly carry some truth. But one can also argue that shadows disappear with time – that some semblance of their sources needs to exist if they themselves are to live on.

Such would seem to be the case with religion in Canada.

Highly-respected *Toronto Star* journalist, Carol Goar, pointed out a short time ago that “faith-based organizations are the bedrock of Canada’s charitable sector.” She noted that they run homeless shelters and transition homes for abused women, offer asylum to refugees and settlement assistance to immigrants, set up after-school programs for kids in troubled neighbourhoods, organize soup kitchens, open their doors to seniors, community groups and service clubs, raise millions of dollars “for good works” and mobilize thousands of volunteers. But, Goar wrote, “as their membership rolls shrink and their collection plates lighten, they are struggling to maintain this network of charitable activities.”

She concluded with these strong words: “It is fine to say – as the majority of Canadians do – that you prefer to explore your own spirituality, practise your religion privately and ponder metaphysical questions in solitude. But, she says, “Look around. There’s a world in need out there. Church members are on the front lines, putting their faith to work. They could use some help.”²⁶

The concerns raised by Goar have received considerable support in an important analysis released in 2009. Ray Pennings and Michael Van Pelt of Cardus – a think tank that examines cultural, social, and religious intersections in Canada – note that the vitally important

civic sector, with its array of charitable and nonprofit organizations, accounts for just under 10% of Canada's gross domestic product. This "Third Sector," distinct from the public and private sectors, is driven disproportionately by a small core of citizens: some 20% of adults donate 80% of the money given to charities, while about 10% of adults provide 80% of the hours volunteered.²⁷

The imminent problem raised by Pennings and Van Pelt is that the vast majority of people in this "civic core" are older and often religious. As they pass from the scene, many organizations and charities will feel the effects.

An ongoing Statistics Canada survey series on giving and volunteering corroborates such an assertion. The latest survey in the series, conducted in 2007, found that Canadians who attend weekly services were more likely than other people both to be among top donors (25% vs. 15%) and top volunteers (25% vs. 9%).²⁸

Maclean's offered this provocative take on the findings: "If religion is simply a license for bad behaviour, how does one explain the mammoth gap between the charitable acts of those who believe and those who do not?" The magazine then posed the important question: "If organized religion continues to fade from mainstream practice, how will society ever replace the massive contributions of time and money that believers currently provide?" *Maclean's* concluded, "Spirituality and altruism share an obvious and welcome concern for humanity and its future. Do atheists?"²⁹

In the midst of our debating whether or not religion contributes more or contributes less to optimum social life, perhaps we would be wise to recognize that religion has the potential to be one important source of social well-being, and give greater attention to identifying additional sources that also can be effective.

~

A quick footnote with respect to the response I expect I will receive to this chapter. Sam Harris has said that when he wrote his first book, *The End of Faith*, the most hostile communications came from Christians – ironic, he felt, given that “Christians generally imagine that no faith imparts the virtues of love and forgiveness more effectively than their own.”³⁰

In October of 2007, some of the preliminary findings presented in this chapter were released in a story by Charles Lewis in the *National Post*.³¹ In this case, the most hostile and mean-spirited responses came from atheists.

I would suggest that one measure of compassion will be found in people who are religious suppressing the urge to gloat, and those who are not religious suppressing the urge to slay the messenger.

8 Polarization & Death

"If mortals die, will they live again?" – Job 14.14, RSV

B

ABY BOOMERS increasingly have been having to come to grips with mortality in recent years – while people following them have been pondering the strain they will be putting on health care and social services. The oldest in the cohort were born about 1946 and turned 65 in 2011. The youngest, who arrived around 1965, hit 45. As a “borderline Boomer,” I know how many of them were feeling.

We all know the folk wisdom, but most of us ignored it when we were younger. “Life is short.” “Take time to smell the flowers.” “If you’ve got your health, you’ve got everything.” “Enjoy people while you can.” Those things all sounded so trite.

But in the last while, lots of Boomers have had to deal with aging and ailing grandparents, parents, and other relatives and friends. There also have been quite a few deaths. It’s not just the older people. Friends and acquaintances who were supposed to be around are no longer here, reduced to memories far too early. What has been particularly difficult to deal with has been the loss of the very young, whose lives were just beginning.

There has been something so random, unpredictable, and surreal about it all. One year or one day people are with us. The next year or the next day they are so gone.

The fact that we know that aging and death are facts of life provides little comfort. Watching such things unfold as an inevitable part of life and life cycles does not make them any easier to accept.

Few things underline limits, helplessness, and finality with more vividness than death.

So it is, writes Tom Harpur, that “surely the most momentous personal question of our day – or indeed any other – is, having once died, is that the end or do we somehow live again?”¹

The Problematic Death Question

The Boomers have been problem-solvers. They have been a generation that collectively has worked hard, pursued a good education, set challenging goals, and achieved many of them. In Canada and the United States, they have been part of social and technological revolutions that have elevated the quality of life for millions of people. Few things have been outside of what's doable.

Contrary to excessively enthusiastic commentators, the Boomers haven't done it all and they haven't achieved it all. They have accomplished much and provided a rich legacy upon which Post-Boomers can build.

But as they have to come to grips with death, they don't appear to have any particular advantages over generations before them. As one Boomer, Michael Coren, has put it, death as "the great egalitarian blade comes to us all. We can shout and moan and complain, but in the end we can do nothing. We slide and slip into the beyond."²

The Limits of Science

The information explosion has not resulted in our knowing much more than earlier generations about death.

When we think about it, it's rather strange. Science can enable us to explore the universe. It can provide us with miraculous technologies for carrying out our work, performing life-saving medical procedures, and transmitting music, images and messages.

Yet while science and technology can combine to equip us, inform us, entertain us, and prolong our lives, the mighty duo have few trustworthy product lines to offer when it comes to understanding the reality for which no one gets an exemption – death.

It remains as much a mystery as ever.

The difficulty, of course, is that we as humans have to rely on what we can know. And as long as the rules of science limit the knowable to what we can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste, we remain remarkably clueless in the face of death.

There could be something more. But science throws up its hands and declares, “There is no way of knowing.”

It may not be an exaggeration to say that, rather than being less troubled by death, the Boomers find it all the more frustrating to accept.

They have been a generation accustomed to finding solutions to problems, including the need to respond to physical deterioration. Much has been written about their age-defying outlook and their co-opting of technology to enable them to deal with declining hearing, sight, mobility and sexual abilities. Their generation has been replete, as well, with people who can tell them what the weather will be like next month, with social forecasters who allegedly can tell them what will happen decades from now.

Why should death be any different?

Alas, with death Canada’s Boomers meet their resource match. And the fact that many of them decided to take a pass on religion along the way doesn’t exactly help. To borrow the poetry of songwriter Randy Newman, they won’t have any God to greet them, having already taught their children “not to believe those lies.”³

Efforts to go lightly with death do not help much. *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wentz recently put things this way: “I hate the modern loss of ritual and solemnity surrounding death. Something’s lost when people get together and have a party and pretend the loved one has done nothing more dramatic than move to Cleveland. She adds, “These are serious matters, and we shouldn’t pretend they’re not.”⁴

Death and Religion

If science can’t help us with the question of death, what options do we have?

Option 1 would seem to be to take the advice of someone like Freud.⁵ He reminded us that it would be great to be able to believe that there is something out there after we die – that there is life after death.

Unfortunately, he says, there isn’t. Consequently, we have to take a deep, last breath and realize, “That’s it.” No

more. It's over. It's not great. But things are what they are. Christopher Hitchens, at 61, found out in 2010 that he had cancer. Somewhat stoically, he told Noah Richler of *Maclean's* that he had been "looking forward to some good sixties. I really didn't want more than a decade" when "I'd cash out a bit. And now I'm not going to get that."⁶

Option 2 would be to plead ignorance – to take an agnostic position toward death and declare we just don't know. Maybe there's life after death; maybe there's not.

This second option likewise doesn't do much for morale. But perhaps "maybe" is better than "no" – akin to something being better than nothing. .

Option 3 would be to believe that death is not the end, that there actually is life after death. Obviously this has been an option that many religions have posed.

The difficulty here for those who are empirically minded is that we don't have much, if any, reliable scientific data on which to base such a possibility.

Lots of people have claimed that they have had near-death experiences that allowed them to observe first-hand what life after death is like. A religion such as Christianity, of course, makes the claim that Jesus died and was raised from the dead, providing a concrete example of what can be experienced.

What the choices come down to is this: is one going to rely exclusively on what is known scientifically, or is one open to the possibility that faith is also a way of knowing?

Since science cannot speak to the non-observable, it really is unable to address the question of life after death.

Religions, to varying degrees, claim to have insight into what happens after we die.⁷ In lieu of being accompanied by observable evidence, those claims have to be taken on faith.

Option 1 goes with science, option 3 with religion. Option 2 is the choice of the undecided.

As we will see, these are more than just belief choices. The directions that people choose to go have very important emotional and outlook consequences.

A Canadian Reading

A few months ago, I sat in a food fair in the West Edmonton Mall, reflecting on the extent to which young people reflect. Over to my left? Live data. Two buoyant teenage females ostensibly were having lunch with each other. What intrigued me was that both were text-messaging the whole time. As they got up from their table, they were still texting, taking a few seconds out to simultaneously pop in earbuds as they returned to the mall.

I thought to myself, “Are my surveys really capturing what’s going on in the world? When would two people like that possibly give time to thinking about life’s ‘big questions’? They barely give time to each other.”

I can almost hear someone saying, “Those teens were multi-tasking.” I’m not so sure. Ron Rolheiser’s observation seems more apt – that multi-tasking is really the ability to be inattentive to more than one thing at the same time.

Deep Thoughts. Actually, my West Edmonton Mall data reflected a number of realities – beyond multi-tasking. The percentage of teens who admit that they seldom or never take time to “sit and think” has doubled from 13% in 1984 to 26% today. Further, the percentages who say they *never* think about issues like death, suffering, and purpose have risen slightly.

Still, these so-called “ultimate questions” seem to get squeezed in – maybe because they sometimes simply force themselves in. Dating back to our first surveys in the 1970s and 80s, we have found that a consistent 9 in 10 Canadians of all ages say that they raise questions about meaning and purpose, suffering and death.

Figure 8.1. Raising of the Life After Death Question: Adults 1975-2000

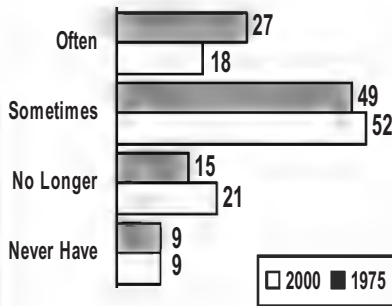


Table 8.1. Raising of Ultimate Questions: Teens, 1984 & 2008 (%)

	Often/Sometimes		No Longer		Never Have		TOT
	1984	2008	1984	2008	1984	2008	
What happens after death?	84	78	11	15	5	7	100
Why suffering in the world?	82	75	12	16	6	9	100
What is the purpose of life?	79	75	13	15	8	10	100

Source: Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials*, 2009:173.

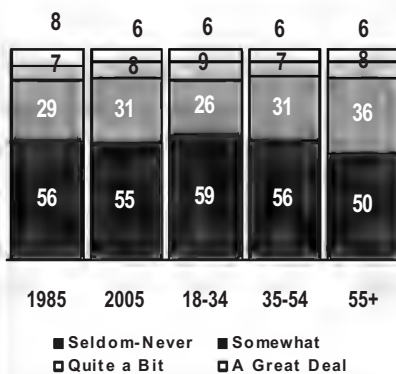
Undoubtedly, the reflections are typically periodic – often the result of teens and the rest of us having to come to grips with illness and death, other times the result of events that receive extensive media attention. But, either way, the questions are raised, regardless of how full lives might be.

What *has* changed slightly over the past few decades is the inclination for adults, in particular, to put these so-called “ultimate questions” aside a bit faster. It appears to be necessary not because they think they have found answers, because most indicate they have not. Rather, they either have not been able to find satisfactory answers, or don’t believe it is possible to find them. As a result, they simply have moved on to more tangible and doable things – led by those pragmatically minded Boomers.⁸

In the case of life after death specifically, more than 9 in 10 adults and teens say they have raised the question. Needless to say, good answers have been hard to come by.

Close to 5 in 10 adults admit that “dying” concerns them “somewhat” or more. Such concern levels have remained the same in recent years. Perhaps surprisingly, concern about dying also differs very little by age group.

Figure 8.2. Concern About Dying, 1985-2005 by Age Group (%)



Belief in Life After Death. Currently, some 67% of Canadian adults indicate that they believe in life after death, 12% that they definitely do not. The comparable figures for teenagers are 78% and 8% respectively. The adult numbers are virtually unchanged from the mid-1980s. In fact, the 12% figure for disbelief is identical to what Gallup found when it first put the question to Canadians way back in 1945.

What our polls since the mid-70s have documented is the ongoing reluctance of people to rule out the possibility of life after death, but their ongoing ambivalence as to whether it actually exists.

Such lack of clarity should hardly come as a surprise. After all, we don't

know anything more for sure about the chances of a hereafter today than we did in the past.

Those things said, if religion offers some "market entries" on the topic, we would expect that differences in belief would certainly vary by religiosity.

And they do. Canadian adults and teens who are theists are considerably more likely than atheists to believe in life after death. Relationships between belief in the hereafter and both attendance and identification are also sizable.⁹

One might assume that the link between atheism and belief in life after death is obvious: one has to believe in the gods in order to believe we will live after we die. Actually, as we will see shortly, it's not quite that straightforward.¹⁰ Many atheists, for example, are among those who believe contact with the spirit world is possible.

**Table 8.2. Belief in Life After Death:
Adults, 1985-2005**

"Do you believe in life after death?"

	1985	2005
Yes, I definitely do	36%	36
Yes, I think so	29	31
No, I don't think so	20	21
No, I definitely do not	15	12

Source: Bibby, Project Canada Survey Series.

Table 8.3. Belief in Life After Death: Adults & Teenagers

		ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFN		BELIEF		
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist	
ADULTS								
Yes, I definitely do	36%	72	17	41	9	67	3	
Yes, I think so	29	17	29	32	26	20	10	
No, I don't think so	20	7	29	19	33	9	10	
No, I definitely do not	15	4	25	8	32	4	77	
Teenagers								
Yes, I definitely do	34	64	21	43	16	69	11	
Yes, I think so	41	24	44	41	41	22	25	
No, I don't think so	17	8	23	12	27	5	29	
No, I definitely do not	8	4	12	4	16	4	35	

• **Shading:** differences are *not* at least 10 percentage points.

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008 national survey.

Views of What Happens After Death. About 6 in 10 Canadian adults believe in *heaven* and 5 in 10 believe in *hell*. Believing in one usually means one believes in the other. But not always.

- No less than 99% who “definitely” believe in hell also “definitely” believe in heaven.
- That said, among those who are certain there is a heaven, a lower figure of 76% are also certain there is a hell. Who said we have to take the bad with the good?

Illustrative of the belief complexities of Canadians, if a person believes in heaven or hell, that must mean they believe in life after death. Right? Well, usually, but....

- About 8% who are certain that there is a hell don't think there is life after death. If hell is associated with some kind of non-existence, I guess that makes sense.
- But some 8% who believe in heaven also don't believe in life after death. Presumably heaven is something else.¹¹
- Among teenagers, belief in heaven (75%) is even more prevalent than among adults. So is belief in hell (60%) – although it is slightly less “popular.”
- As would be expected, adults and young people who are religious according to our three measures are generally considerably more likely than others to embrace beliefs about heaven and hell, angels and spirit world contact.

Table 8.4. Belief in Elements of Life After Death: Adults & Teens

		ATTENDANCE		IDENTIFN		BELIEF		
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist	
ADULTS								
Heaven	62%	94	32	72	12	89	4	
Angels	62	94	34	71	18	88	3	
Hell	48	82	24	55	8	72	4	
Spirit world contact	46	53	37	48	33	57	9	
Teenagers								
Heaven*	75	93	57	84	47	96	18	
Good people rewarded	61	76	47	72	37	84	19	
Hell*	60	82	44	67	37	80	15	
Spirit world contact	46	45	45	48	43	53	31	

• **Shading:** differences are *not* at least 10 percentage points.

Sources: Project Canada 2005 and Project Teen Canada 2000* and 2008 surveys.

One interesting pattern that is even more pronounced among teens than adults is the inclination to believe in life after death, without necessarily believing in God.

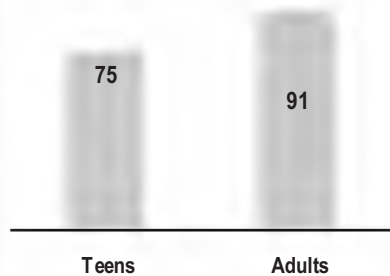
- Among adults, 91% who say they “definitely” believe in life after death express the same certainty about the exist-ence of God.
- In the case of teenagers, just 75% who are certain there is an afterlife express the same certainty about God.

Such findings point to the fact that our culture – notably the music and video game industries – gives

credence to super-natural phenomena generally, including spirits, angels, demons, and the like. God? Not so much.

Sara Yoheved Rigler sums up the situation this way: “The popularity of angels, psychic phenomena, faith healing, meditation, and near-death experiences testifies to

Figure 8.3. Certainty of Belief in God by Certainty About Life After Death (%)



Sources: Project Teen Canada 2008 & Project Canada 2005.

a paradigm shift in our concept of reality,” she writes. “But somehow God has gotten lost in the shuffle.”¹²

Some 6 in 10 teens agree that “*good people will be rewarded after they die.*” What’s interesting to note here is that this idea is endorsed not only by young people who are religious but also by large numbers who are not.

- The latter include close to 50% who never attend services, 40% who say they have no religion, and 20% who are atheists.
- Those levels are fairly consistent with the proportion of non-religious teens who believe in heaven and hell.

The “afterlife” clearly is something that intrigues significant numbers of Canadians. For many, it seems to be almost “a justice issue necessity.” If the universe is rational and fair – two pretty big assumptions – then the afterlife is necessary in order that “good people can be rewarded” and “wrongs can be made right.”

However, for most atheists, it seems that the balancing out of things will have to take place this side of death. Atheists are particularly disinclined to think that how we live out life now will influence what we will experience after we die.

Table 8.5. Adult Views of What Happens When We Die
“Which of the following comes closest to your view of life after death?”

	70% 70%	ATTEND		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Somehow, some day injustices will be made right	70%	86	53	73	51	86	30
How we live will influence what happens to us after we die	62	84	42	67	34	85	3

Source: Project Canada 2000.

Our findings on what people think will actually happen when we die leave one with the sense that religious groups either *don’t have much to say* about life after death, or just *aren’t saying much*.

Pushed on the specifics of their views:

- about 4 in 10 Canadians say that they “believe there must be something beyond death,” but admit that they “have no idea what it may be like”;
- another 3 in 10 think there probably is no such thing;
- 1 in 10 maintain we will experience reincarnation;
- the remaining 2 in 10 believe we will be looking at some combination of rewards and punishments.

The idea of rewards/punishments is most commonly held among weekly service attenders. That said, the “no idea” acknowledgment is the most common among everyone else who believes in life after death, including the 30% of weekly attenders – the same level as found among those who never attend services.

These findings document the fact that large numbers of people view life after death as a time when things will be made right – when good people, in particular, will be rewarded.

Beyond generalities, however, things are very vague.

Table 8.6. Adult Views of What Happens When We Die
“Which of the following comes closest to your view of life after death?”

	36% 18 8 4 18 16 100	ATTEND		ID		BELIEF	
		Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Something, no idea what	36%	30	30	38	28	41	21
Rewards & punishment	18	45	4	21	5	22	1
Reincarnation	8	3	9	8	9	9	5
Rewards no punishment	4	8	1	4	<1	4	<1
No life after death	18	5	37	14	41	9	57
Unsure if life after death	16	9	19	15	17	15	16
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

• **Shading:** differences are *not* at least 10 percentage points.

Source: Project Canada 2000.

Responses to Death. We all are well aware that death brings with it an array of emotional responses. Foremost, initially at least, is sorrow. A life has been lost. A family member, a friend, an acquaintance, perhaps a stranger with whom we empathize, is gone. If a partner or a child is involved, maybe it’s the thought of the pain that will be

experienced by the ones we leave behind that pains us most. In his book, *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch wrote that as much as he was troubled about the fact he would not be able to see his three young children grow up, what was more disturbing to him was the fact they would grow up not having a father.¹³ A survey respondent summed up another dimension of parental pain when he said he'd be troubled most by having any of his children die before him.

The prospect of our own death brings forth so many additional emotions...simply not being able to live, laugh, love...all the things we want to be able to do. Even someone so confident and enthusiastic about life after death as the Apostle Paul wrote that he nonetheless struggled with the fact that he needed to live life, and therefore on balance preferred to be able to live a little longer.¹⁴

In our Project Canada surveys, we have put the tough question to Canadians. In 1980 and again in 2000 we asked, “What would you say your primary response is to the reality of death?” We have offered five responses – fear, sorrow, mystery, hope, and no particular feeling; in the 2000 survey people were given the opportunity to cite any other primary responses.

- The surveys have found that *sorrow* (26%) and *mystery* (23%) are mentioned most often, followed by *hope* (19%) and *fear* (15%). About 1 in 5 have said they don't have any particular feeling, seemingly having many emotions.

Table 8.7. Primary Emotional Responses to Death
 “What would you say your primary response is to the reality of death?”

	ATTENDANCE		ID		BELIEF			
	1980	2000	Weekly	Never	Yes	No	Theist	Atheist
Sorrow	20%	26	19	33	25	34	22	25
Mystery	24	23	17	21	22	30	22	29
Hope	18	19	45	9	22	6	33	5
Fear	18	15	10	13	14	11	13	14
No partic feeling	20	17	9	24	17	19	10	27
Totals	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

• **Shading:** differences are *not* at least 10 % points. The r's for hope & attendance 338, ID .141, belief .312.
 Sources: Project Canada 1980 and 2000.

- What stands out when we look at the survey results by religiosity is the inclination of *weekly attenders* to cite *hope* (45%) more frequently than anything else.
- *Hope* also stands out as the dominant *theist* response, and the least common response for *atheists* and those with *no religion*.


An examination of the belief in life after death and the response of hope by religious groups and attendance reveals some important Canadian variations.

Generally speaking, attendance – which makes so much difference nationally – continues to have that same relationship across groups. The single exception is with belief in life after death among *Quebec Roman Catholics*. The percentage of Catholics who say they believe in an afterlife is the same (76%), regardless of how often they attend services. The belief obviously has been well-instilled.

In the case of *Protestants*, belief and hope levels are higher for Conservatives than Mainliners. Nonetheless, in both group cases, the levels go up with attendance.

Overall, Protestant hope levels are higher than that of Roman Catholics – especially in comparison to Quebec.

Table 8.8. Life After Death: Beliefs and Responses by Religious Families & Attendance

	Believe in Life After Death		Hope is Primary Response	
	Weekly	<Weekly	Weekly	<Weekly
	88%	60	45	12
Roman Catholics	89	73	36	14
Outside Quebec	93	69	44	18
Quebec	76	76	24	10
Protestants	85	60	56	14
Conservative	88	76	65	30
Mainline	81	59	52	11
Other World Faiths	---	65	---	17
No Religion	---	35	---	5

Sources: Project Canada 2005 (life after death) & Project Canada 2000 (hope).


A more detailed look at Catholic and Protestant responses to death reveals some important variations.

- The two most common responses of *Catholics outside Quebec* are hope and sorrow – *in Quebec*, mystery, sorrow, and fear, with hope relatively low.
- *Conservative Protestants* stand out in maintaining that their predominant response is hope, followed by mystery. Sorrow is fairly low.
- In the case of *Mainline Protestants*, the most common responses are sorrow, mystery, and no particular feeling. Hope is quite low.

These findings suggest that the country’s historically dominant Catholic and Protestant groups vary considerably in providing their affiliates with a sense of life after death that creates feelings of hope and mystery, versus sorrow, fear – or no particular feeling at all.

Clearly funerals and funeral homes are reflecting the varied ways in which Canadians are understanding and responding to death. A perusal of death announcements provides a reminder of the range of choices involved – from people requesting nothing be done, through a gathering of celebration, to a traditional funeral. One local Alberta funeral home has run an ad recently showing an endearing father-son picture with the caption, “Dad wasn’t really a churchgoer,” and goes on to emphasize, “There are many options available...for whatever you think is best.”¹⁵

Table 8.9. Life After Death: Catholics & Protestant Responses

	Sorrow	Mystery	Hope	Fear	No Partic Feelings	Totals
 Roman Catholics	26%	23	19	15	17	100
Outside Quebec	24	18	27	17	14	100
Quebec	25	28	13	23	11	100
Protestants	25	20	24	10	21	100
Conservative	12	23	50	9	6	100
Mainline	28	21	18	10	23	100

Source: Project Canada 2000..

Beliefs About Life after Death Among Canadian Youth

- Strong majorities of teens who identify with religious groups believe in life after death, as do 57% who have no religion.
- The idea that good people will be rewarded when they die is held by majorities in all religious categories, led by Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, Orthodox, Catholics outside Quebec, and "Christians."
- Belief we can have contact with the spirit world is common among those who value Aboriginal Spirituality. It also is held by about 1 in 2 Catholic, Conservative, "Christian," Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim youth. Some 43% of those with no religion also endorse such an idea.

Teenage Polarization in the Mosaic **Life after Death**

	Believe in Life After Death	Good People Are Rewarded After They Die	We Can Have Contact With the Spirit World
NATIONALLY	75%	61	46
Roman Catholicism	85	74	49
Outside Quebec	84	79	46
Quebec	85	62	55
Protestantism	88	65	39
Conservative	92	60	46
Mainline	85	69	39
Orthodox	85	81	38
Christian <i>unspecified</i>	89	76	52
Other World Faiths	80	78	48
Islam	85	94	44
Aboriginal Spirituality	85	51	72
Hinduism	81	78	54
Judaism	72	55	21
Sikhism	78	83	45
Buddhism	75	75	59
No Religion	57	37	43

The Global Situation

The reality of death and its social and emotional impact obviously is felt worldwide. Every culture since the beginning of time has had to find ways of responding to death. Every individual who has ever lived has had to find ways of coping with the loss of others, as well as the fact that one's own life eventually will end.

It therefore should surprise no one that reflecting on death is a universal phenomenon.

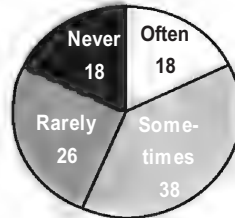
Just before the end of the 20th century, people in almost 50 countries were asked in the World Values Survey, “Do you ever think about death?” Some 80% indicated that they do – about 20% saying “often,” 40% “sometimes,” and the rest “rarely” or “never.”

The countries in the survey with the highest number of people indicating they “never” think about death? China (46%), Slovenia (36%), and Brazil (35%). Many countries with low attendance levels still had relatively few people who said they never raised the death question, including Sweden (11%), Great Britain (14%), and Norway (7%). The level in Canada was only 9%, in the U.S. 8%.

The same survey found that a solid majority of people (77%) took the position that because “death is inevitable, it is pointless to *worry* about it.”

Reflection and anxiety levels aside, a majority of people around the world are inclined to give credibility to the idea of life after death. Another World Values Survey in 2000, involving people in some 75 countries, found that 61% said they believe in life after death while 28% indicated they did not; the remaining 11% were unsure.¹⁶

Figure 8.4. “Do you ever think about death?” (%)



Source: World Values Survey 1990.

Here again, what's interesting to note is the tendency for people in countries where conventional religiosity levels are fairly low not to rule out the life after death possibility. Significant numbers either expressed believe in life after death or said they didn't know – Sweden, for example, at 39% and 15% respectively, Japan 32% and 38%, Russia 26% and 28%.

Some 58% said that they believe in heaven – just above the 50% who believe in hell.

- As with Canada, we would expect fairly high correlations to exist between service attendance and belief in God, life after death, and heaven.
- A statistical look at the relationships bears out those expectations (see details in notes).¹⁷
- But the fact the correlations are far from perfect points to these beliefs being fairly common among people not involved in religious groups.
- Further, the three beliefs are not necessarily closely tied to each other.

Table 8.10. Attendance, Belief in God, Life After Death and Heaven: Select Countries

	Attend	God	LAD	Heaven
Nigeria	89%	99	86	99
India	73	99	59	66
Saudi Arabia	68	99	97	98
Philippines	64	99	81	95
Poland	62	96	70	70
Mexico	60	97	67	85
South Africa	57	99	66	87
Ireland	56	96	69	77
Pakistan	56	99	100	100
Iraq	53	99	95	98
Italy	49	83	61	50
Iran	45	99	95	94
United States	43	88	75	84
Turkey	42	98	89	93
Singapore	40	95	68	75
Spain	39	92	43	42
Japan	38	87	32	22
Chile	33	90	76	75
Germany	30	77	27	23
Greece	29	97	47	38
CANADA	26	85	65	70
Netherlands	26	74	47	36
Ukraine	23	85	29	29
Australia	23	83	53	56
France	20	80	38	28
United Kingdom	20	86	43	45
Sweden	17	70	39	28
Finland	12	91	45	50
Czech Republic	15	57	29	17
Russia	15	91	26	25

Sources: Attendance Gallup WorldView 2010; God computed from World Religion Database in Smith 2009:284-287; LAD and heaven World Values Survey 2000. Australia LAD and heaven Nielsen 2009.

Reincarnation – the idea that our spirit or soul will return in another life form after we die - is, of course, particularly associated with Hinduism. Accordingly it has been widely held in countries like India.

The most recent information we have suggests that, to varying degrees, belief in reincarnation extends to countries throughout the world. For example:

- One in 2 Brazilians believe in the idea, as do about 1 in 3 people in countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and South Africa.
- About 1 in 4 Canadians say they believe in reincarnation, as do similar proportions of people in settings including Russia, France, and the United States.
- Just under 1 in 5 Scandinavians also indicate that they hold the belief, and are joined by similar percentages of many other European groups, including Brits, Belgians, Greeks, and Poles.

These findings on heaven, hell, and reincarnation illustrate the fact that people have highly divergent ideas concerning the nature of life after death. But what the majority of people on the planet have in common is a sense that we will continue to exist somewhere, in some form, after we die.

Table 8.11. Belief in Reincarnation by Select Countries

India	88%
Brazil	54
Mexico	37
Nigeria	36
Argentina	33
South Africa	30
Japan	29
Ukraine ¹	28
CANADA	27
Portugal ¹	27
Russia ¹	26
Ireland ¹	25
France ¹	22
Hungary ¹	22
United States ²	21
Spain ¹	20
United Kingdom ³	19
Finland ¹	18
Netherlands ¹	18
Belgium ¹	17
Denmark ¹	17
Sweden ⁴	17
Germany ¹	16
Czech Republic ¹	15
Greece ¹	15
Italy ⁴	17
Poland ¹	15

Sources: World Values Survey 1990; ¹European Value Surveys 2008; ²Harris 2007; ³Associated Press 2005. ⁴World Values Survey 2000.

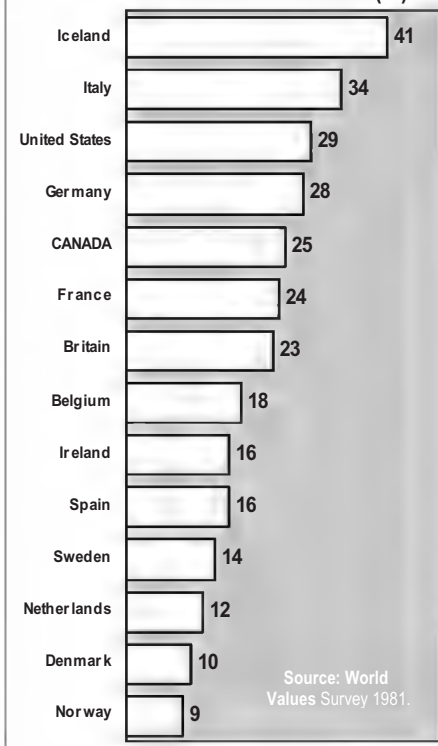
Some additional global findings further illustrate how extensive the belief in life after death actually is.

The responses to an item administered in the World Value Survey three decades ago are not necessarily indicative of what the levels might be today; until the item is repeated we won't know for sure. But it demonstrates something of the extent to which large numbers of people believe that relatives, friends, and others have not ceased to exist after they die.

The survey asked people a question about what many would think is a fairly unusual phenomenon: *“Have you ever felt as though you were really in touch with someone who had died?”*

- About 1 in 5 people (22%) said that they had – not exactly a small number of people.
- The levels ranged from around 4 in 10 in Iceland through 3 in 10 in the United States and what then was West Germany, to 2 in 10 in Britain and some 1 in ten people in the Netherlands, and the three Scandi-navian countries.
- The level in Canada: 25% – 1 in 4 people. Translate that into 1 in 4 people in a given mall or on a given highway or just about any-where and you get a sense of the magnitude of the claim.

Figure 8.5. Felt in Touch with Someone Who Has Died: Select Countries (%)



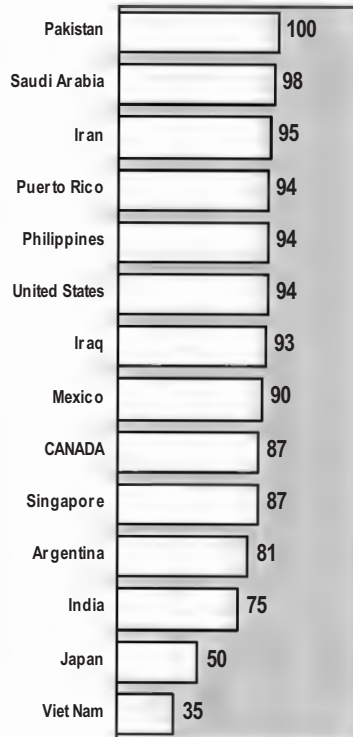
If these reports have seemed like fodder for supermarket tabloids because they sound bizarre and extremely rare, we need to think again. The fact of the matter is that a lot of Canadians back in the early 80s were keeping such experiences to themselves. I suspect that sizable numbers of people these days are doing the same thing.

One of the reasons that belief in life after death appears to readily outdistance and outlive involvement in organized religion is because the belief that we have souls is so pervasive. I'm not exaggerating.

A World Values Survey item, administered in 33 countries as the new century began, asked the question, *“Do you believe that people have a soul?”*

- Eighty-five percent said “Yes,” 10% “No,” and 5% indicated they didn't know.
- The levels range from highs of 100% or so in countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, through 90-95% in places such as Iran, the United States, Iraq, and Mexico, to 75% in India, 50% in Japan and 35% in Viet Nam.
- Canada came in at 87%.

Figure 8.6. Belief People Have a Soul: Select Countries (%)



Source: World Values Survey 2000.

These diverse probes into the hereafter point to a very clear overall conclusion: the market for answers to the ongoing, universal question of what happens after we die remains extremely vast.

In his classic work, *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud acknowledged that everyone would like to be able to believe that there is life after death. Using the language of his day, Freud pointed out that the desire to live after death is a universal wish of all mankind.

The problem, he said, is that just because it is hoped for doesn't make it any more real. His expectation was that, in time, we would "learn to endure with resignation" such "great necessities of fate, against which there is no remedy."¹⁸

Through the present time, people worldwide have continued to defy Freud's prediction. To put things bluntly, his assumption that one day we would put such hopes behind us was wrong.

Survey after survey has demonstrated that the belief there is something "out there" after we die – as nebulous as views of what that "something" might be – simply persist.

It's axiomatic: as long as people die, most of us will contemplate what, if anything, happens next.

Actually, that's an understatement. The majority of people around the planet do more than simply contemplate.

They do not believe that death is the end.

Table 8.12. Belief Death is Not the End by Belief in God: 10 Select Countries

"I don't believe death is the end"

	Death Not the End	Believe in God
Nigeria	79%	99
Lebanon	75	92
United States	74	88
Indonesia	64	99
South Korea	57	98
Mexico	55	97
Russia	54	91
United Kingdom	54	86
India	51	99
Israel	50	95

Sources: Death is not the end - ICM poll conducted for the BBC Two program, "What the World Thinks of God." 2004; belief in God: God computed from Smith 2009:284-287.

Assessment

The age-old questions about meaning and purpose, suffering and purpose continue to be raised in our time.

Just this past week I received word that my best friend during the late 70s and early 80s, Mark Gibson, died. They said it was surprising. A student had to withdraw from my class. His beloved one-year-old son is undergoing life-threatening brain surgery. That was more than surprising.

Journalist Wenthe writes, “I envy people of faith. By all accounts, they are happier, healthier and more emotionally secure than the rest of us. They give away more money and do more good works. They are kinder, more generous and more community-minded.” She wryly adds, “We secular humanists, by contrast, tend to be stingy, lonely folks” who are still in search of some larger purpose. “I wouldn’t choose to be a nonbeliever if I could help it, but I can’t.”¹⁹

The purpose question can be set aside; the death question cannot. The emotions that are felt when loved ones die, as well as the awareness that we too will only live so long, awakens it over and over again in our lifetimes: “What happens when we die?”

With increasing religious polarization in Canada and around the world, we will not see a decrease in the inclination of people to ask the life-after-death question. Reflective people *have to* raise it – and not answer it prematurely. There is too much at stake.

However, our findings also make another conclusion clear: without religion, hope will be hard to find.

We are wary of people who seem to know too much – of titles such as, *What Happens When I Die?*²⁰ or *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven.*²¹ Yet we do want some solid, authoritative assurances.

At the end of his book, *Life After Death*, published in 1991, Tom Harpur hinted that he personally believed in life after death. Two decades later in 2011, his update appeared – with the title, *There Is Life After Death*.

The desire for increasing clarity on this critical issue is something most of us want. That widespread desire guarantees a permanent place for religion.

9 The Comeback

*"Our souls are restless until
they find their rest in Thee, O God"*
-St. Augustine

P

ROPHECY is not exactly a social science virtue.

We can do a reasonably good job of explaining what happened after the fact. But we haven't been known for our ability to accurately foresee economic slowdowns, the rearranging of nation-states, or the arrival of the Web with its transforming powers. For years I have taught students in Research Methods classes that the three great goals of social science are description, explanation, and prediction. To date we don't have much to show in the way of success in long-range social forecasting.

It's not that we never try. When it comes to religion, we have had a good share of would-be social prophets. People like Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) saw religion's disappearance as inevitable. Comte said scientific thought would replace religious thinking, Marx felt the resolving of social and economic inequities would eliminate the need for religion as a pain-killing drug, and Freud maintained that science and personal resolve would combine to allow us to abandon our child-like fantasies about a father-like God and a future existence in heaven.

There obviously is much data that point to the fact that such thinkers were too quick to write off religion. In settings where religion is currently flourishing, a measure of secularization undoubtedly will take place. The historical precedents of Europe and North America suggest such a trend will be closely associated with heightened levels of development.

But in other places where polarization is prominent, or where secularity is pronounced, comebacks are in the works.

Why It Can Be Expected

Not every social science prophet has declared that religion is doomed.

In 1912, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) offered many stimulating thoughts about the nature, functions, and future of religion in his classic work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Durkheim believed that, theoretically-speaking, science would one day answer all of our questions. However, he maintained that religion would continue to have an important speculative function because science “is fragmentary and incomplete; it advances but slowly and is never finished; but life cannot wait.”¹ In the foreseeable future, religion would continue to exist.

Durkheim’s point about religion’s gap-filling role is important. However, the problem does not only lie with the speed with which science progresses. The problem also lies with the nature of science itself. Put bluntly, science is not equipped to say very much about many of religion’s claims.

The reason is that scientific knowledge is based on verifiable observations. The problem with such an empirical method is that important questions about the existence of God and life after death cannot be addressed through observation. They consequently stand outside the grasp of science. This second limitation is not one of speed, but capability. Science simply cannot address everything.

Precisely because of such limitations, other meaning-makers have stepped forward to fill the market void. That’s why religion and other such initiatives have been able to have a significant presence throughout the world in the past and present. That’s also why they – and their market successors – will have a place in the future.

So it is that social scientists beyond the classic high-profile positivists have taken quite a different position on religion’s future.²

For example, three prominent twentieth century Harvard sociologists offered some stimulating ideas about what happens to religion over time.

Sorokin, Davis, and Bell. One was Russian-born Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968), who founded the Department of Sociology at Harvard. The second was Kingsley Davis (1908-1997), a student of Sorokin's, who spent most of his career at the University of California Berkeley. The third was Daniel Bell, (b. 1919) a renowned social forecaster at Harvard who wrote extensively on the emerging post-industrial world.³

Sorokin maintained that societies oscillate or swing between an emphasis on "rationality" and "irrationality," between a moving away from religion and a moving toward it. History more generally, he said, has consisted of pendulum-like fluctuations between "ideational" and "sensate" cultures. The ideational period is characterized by ideals and spiritual concerns, while the sensate period is a time when a society emphasizes material values.

Davis picked up on Sorokin's thinking in arguing that there is "a limit to the extent to which a society can be guided by illusion." But "there is also a limit to which a society can be guided by sheer rationality." Secularization, he wrote, will therefore "likely be terminated by religious revivals of one sort or another," complete with new sects. But religion is unlikely to be replaced by secular substitutes.⁴

In like manner, Bell saw people in post-industrial societies as experiencing the limits of modernism and alternatives to religion. He wrote that "a long era is coming to a close. The theme of Modernism was the world beyond.... We are now groping for a new vocabulary whose keyword seems to be limits."⁵ Bell predicted that new religions will arise in response to the core questions of existence – death, tragedy, obligation, and love.

This "oscillation" argument became increasingly popular in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Social analyst Jeremy Rifkin, for example, claimed that it accounted for the emergence of the charismatic movement and the accelerated success of evangelical Christianity.⁶

Intentionally or not, American research in the late 1980s and early 90s suggesting that “Baby Boomers” were heading back to the churches fed the idea that the religious pendulum was swinging once again.⁷ Even prominent futurist John Naisbitt proclaimed in 1990 that the world was on the verge of a massive return to spirituality.⁸

Parsons and Greeley. It needs to be pointed out that there were some observers – standing alone for the most part – who had been protesting that the notion that a major religious shift had taken place was a gross exaggeration.

Perhaps inadvertently taking their cues from the writer of Ecclesiastes who I have often cited over the years – that “there is nothing new under the sun” – they disputed the claim that religion's influence had been diminishing. Among the most prominent were still another Harvard sociologist, Talcott Parsons, along with American sociologist, priest and, more recently, best-selling novelist, Andrew Greeley.

In a very influential essay, Parsons (1963) maintained that it has been a mistake to equate either the decline of the church's authority over life, or the individualistic approach to religion, with a loss of religious influence. Christianity, said Parsons, has continued to have an important place in the western world, particularly in the United States. While there has been a decrease in religion's direct control in a number of societal spheres, its legacy nonetheless was being felt. Values emphasized by Christianity, such as tolerance and decency, Parsons claimed, have been institutionalized. He wrote, “I suggest that in a whole variety of respects, modern society is more in accord with Christian values than its forebears have been.”

Parsons argued that the increasingly prevalent personal expressions of religion were consistent with both “the individualistic principle inherent in Christianity” and the emphasis on differentiation in modern societies. The result? Religion has become a highly “privatized,” personal matter, differing from earlier expressions in being less overt and less tied to formal group involvement.

For Parsons, Christianity was not in a state of decline. Rather, it has been both institutionalized and privatized. Similar to the traditional family, Parsons wrote, religion "has lost many previous functions and has become increasingly a sphere of private sentiments." But, he insisted, "It is as important as ever to the maintenance of the main patterns of the society."

One might conclude from reading Parsons that all was well on the religious front. Individuals were still taking religion seriously, but were keeping their commitment to themselves. Religious groups had not lost influence. They were helping to shape cultural values and, if anything, were in a better position than ever before to concentrate on religion.

Andrew Greeley went even further than Parsons. He argued that secularization is a myth. Greeley acknowledged that religion was facing significant secular pressures and was not important to everyone. However, he insisted that such realities were not unique to our time.

Greeley explicitly addressed a number of common claims about the decline of religion. He maintained that:

1. faith was not being seriously eroded by science and education, religion was no less significant in daily life than in the alleged great ages of faith;
2. participation levels were not down relative to periods of time beyond the immediate past;
3. the impact of religion was continuing but in less obvious ways;
4. private commitment was having an impact on the public sphere; and
5. the sacred remained highly visible in everyday life.

According to Greeley, religion was continuing to flourish. Rumours of its decline and death simply were not warranted.

For quite some time, Greeley – always the unflappable individualist – stubbornly stood his ground. These days he does not lack for company.

Stark and Market Demand. As we saw earlier, since the late 1970s Rodney Stark has played a major role in championing the idea that secularization actually stimulates innovation. Ironically, the decline of existing religious forms actually triggers the appearance of new ones.

The process is not just something that will take place in the future. On the contrary, it always has been in place. The reason is that the demand for religion has been and continues to be constant. What has changed is not the demand for religion, but its “suppliers.”

Such an argument clearly goes back at least as far as Durkheim. While he observed that Christianity in late nineteenth century Europe was in decline, he believed that religion more generally would persist because of its “gap-filling” role. Science and religion had co-existed since the birth of science, and would continue to do so. Religious explanations might be forced to retreat and reformulate, and give ground in the face of the steady advance of science.⁹

Table 9.1. Reflections on Meaning & Purpose and Prayer-Meditation: Select Countries

	Meaning & Purpose	Prayer/ Meditation
Ethiopia	93%	95
Jordan	89	99
Iran	88	95
Morocco	87	88
Zambia	84	86
Italy	88	78
South Africa	88	85
Korea, Republic of	88	47
Brazil	87	89
CANADA	83	77
Mexico	81	84
United States	80	84
Ukraine	75	62
Argentina	73	76
Poland	72	87
Malaysia	71	85
Chile	71	78
Germany	70	47
Finland	79	70
United Kingdom	75	50*
Norway	73	33
Sweden	70	47
India	67	80
Hong Kong	63	---
China	61	---

Items: “Do you think about meaning & the purpose of life?” Here: “often” or “sometimes”; “Do you take some moments for prayer, meditation, or contemplation, or something like that?” – “Yes”

Source: World Values Survey, 2005. Surveys span 2005-2007. *World Values Survey, 2000.

But, as Kingsley Davis noted in summing up Durkheim's point, "Religion retreats. But it never surrenders."¹⁰

Stark and his colleagues have maintained that religion is guaranteed an indispensable role when it comes to meaning. Only ideas that are grounded in the supernatural, they say, can provide plausible answers to the big, "ultimate questions" pertaining to the meaning of life and death.

As carriers of explanations based on such supernatural assumptions, religion plays a unique and irreplaceable role in human affairs.

Religious activity, they argue, is dynamic and ever-changing. Some religions and some groups are always losing ground. But because the market for religion persists, the activity only increases and the competition intensifies, as old groups and new groups struggle to gain, retain, and increase market shares.

The never-ending human quest for meaning ensures religion's viability.

Table 9.2. Importance of Religious Rites of Passage: Select European Countries

"Do you personally think it is important to hold a religious service for..."

	Birth	Marriage	Death
ALL	73%	73	82
Poland	96	95	96
Ireland	91	93	96
Portugal	90	89	92
Italy	89	85	89
Ukraine	86	69	85
Finland	84	83	90
Slovakia	83	80	85
Austria	81	76	85
Spain	78	75	80
Russia	75	54	79
Iceland	74	67	91
Belgium	70	70	74
Greece	67	83	87
Denmark	65	63	80
France	61	66	73
Sweden	60	62	78
United Kingdom	59	69	79
Germany	50	56	60
Czech Republic	42	40	50
Turkey	42	82	95
Netherlands	40	45	56

Source: World Values Survey 2000..

The Old or Something Else?

The good news that such thinking brings to religious groups is that religion's future is not in question. Ongoing needs guarantee that it will always have a place in the lives of large numbers of people in Canada and around the world. Note – not everyone, but very large numbers.

That said, the sobering news for groups everywhere is that their own specific futures are anything but guaranteed. Quite the opposite. To the extent that they can effectively address the needs of people relating to ultimacy – led by the question of life after death – they have a future. But the success of any given group – measured by size and sheer ongoing vitality – will depend on how well it performs.

As Stark and his associates have pointed out, the viability of religious groups over time in the United States, for example, has been determined by how well they have addressed the needs of Americans. They argue that the same pattern holds for the entire planet. The demand is universal; the question is which suppliers will emerge.

Stark and his associates maintain that sects and revival, cults and innovation, potentially contribute to lively religious marketplaces. But they typically face stiff competition from the existing, well-established groups that, to varying degrees, reinvent themselves in the light of social change and changing demographics. The Church of England did not disappear just because upstart groups such as Methodists and the Salvation Army came into being. Southern Baptists did not shrivel up just because Nazarenes and Pentecostal groups arrived on the American scene. Canadian Catholics are not going to limp to the sidelines just because Muslim franchises are springing up across the country. We would expect no less of Mainline Protestants.

Apart from performance, however, there are no guarantees as to which “religious companies” will thrive and which will, in effect, be headed toward insolvency. All we know for sure is that universal and national market demand means there will be both winners and losers.

The Canadian Situation

As we look at Canada, some general observations about the immediate future of some of the groups can be made with a high level of confidence.

Roman Catholics. Make no mistake about it – this is the big player in Canada. The 2001 census revealed that close to 13 million Canadians (43%) viewed themselves as Catholic – about 7 million outside Quebec (23%), 6 million in Quebec (20%). The median age of Catholics is 37.8, about the same as the Canadian population as a whole.

As the Roman Catholic Church goes, so goes organized religion in the nation. Other groups may get much of the ink. Some might even believe they are the key to the country's religious health. But at the end of the day, Catholics rule. Don't fear for their future. Besides, this is not just a big regional or national company. This is a vast and powerful multinational corporation.

Figure 9.1. Eight Fast Facts the Research Tells Us About Canadian Catholics

1. They have an enormous number of people.
2. They benefit immensely from immigration.
3. Their people are slow to defect.
4. Large numbers are enriched by their faith.
5. Many are open to greater involvement.
6. The less involved are looking for ministry.
7. The onus is on the Shepherds.
8. The Shepherds need the help of the Sheep.

Source: Presentations to Toronto Roman Catholic Archdiocesan priests, fall 2010.

Seen in such perspective, the Catholic Church in Quebec is “merely” a problem spot on the Catholic global map. Yes, the provincial government plays no religious favourites.¹¹ Yes, Catholics have become selective consumers. But the research to date is definitive: most people in the province remain Catholic and are not going anywhere. Lack of commitment understandably troubles leaders. But widespread defection is not on the horizon. Religion à la carte, Catholic-style, rules in Quebec.

Elsewhere, Catholicism's vitality is fuelled in part by new arrivals from other countries. But let's not minimize the importance of faith for earlier generations of people who were raised in Canadian Catholic homes.


The time has come to quit belittling the health of Canadian Catholicism. Large numbers may show up only occasionally for seasonal services, for rites of passage, or because they think they are overdue to share in a Mass. But they still show up. And they are still Catholic.

Large numbers also are open to greater involvement if they find it be worthwhile. The challenge lies with the supplier. If the Catholic Church comes through, who knows what could happen?

Mainline Protestants. As I look at the four primary “firms” in this grouping – the United, Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterians churches, I see far more than cold numbers. I see the faces of many people I have known who value faith and have been working hard to resuscitate their denominations. Minus their formal titles, they include people such as Lewis Garnsworthy, Ted Scott, Gord Turner, Ralph Milton, Muriel Duncan, Sandra Severs, Vince Alfano, Allan Saunders, Mardi Tindal, Tony Plomp, Wayne Holst, Michael Pryse, and Susan Johnson.

Yet, the research findings point to a reality that would not surprise any of them: it is difficult to see much hope for viable futures. The poetic line that Emile Durkheim used to describe the demise of Catholicism in nineteenth century Europe comes to mind: “*The old gods are growing old or are already dead.*”

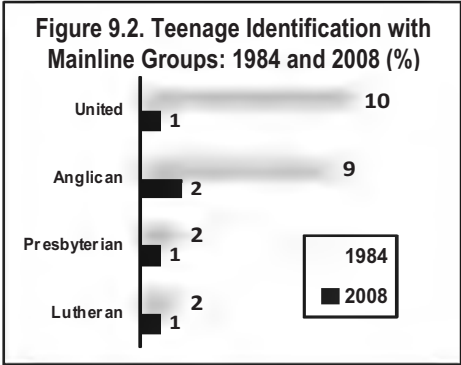
Such a prognosis set to poetry will result in some people dismissively declaring, “Bad News Bibby has been saying those things for years.” My response is, “Yes, that’s true. The problems have been evident for years.”

Table 9.3. Mainline Identification: 1931 & 2001						
% of the Canadian Population						
		MLPROT	United	Anglican	Presbyterian	Lutheran
1931	99%	48	20	16	8	4
2001	84	20	10	7	1	2
Median Age	37.6	44.0	44.1	43.8	46.0	43.3

Source: Statistics Canada census data.

Kenneth Bagnell, in a recent, astute article in *The Observer*, sees hope for the United Church. He is not clear, however, as to why.¹² We have seen that there is no secret as to why the Mainline Protestant groups have been declining numerically since the 1960s.

- Growth via their once-potent immigration pipelines has dropped off considerably from pre-60s levels.
- They have not been successful in retaining their children.
- They have not been inclined to emphasize and be engaged in very aggressive evangelism – the result being limited additions of “outsiders.”



In short, the demographics have not been good. Limited growth through immigration, migration, and birth, coupled with mortality, add up to an obvious result: zero or negative growth. Given their global nature, Anglicans have the potential to be helped considerably by immigration. But to date their potential global gains have been neutralized considerably by divisive homosexuality and gender issues.

There’s an additional problem. To the extent Stark and others are right in maintaining people will be drawn to groups which address questions that “only the gods can answer,” it’s not clear that Mainline Protestants have particularly strong ultimate answer “product lines.” Tom Harpur doesn’t mince his words. In the case of life after death, he says that many groups simply “avoid the topic completely.”¹³ And he’s not talking about the evangelicals.

Unlike Catholics, for example, who give a fair amount of attention to things like heaven and the importance of “last rites” so that people are ready for life after death, the United Church – for example – rightly or wrongly is seen by many as focusing almost exclusively on life. Perhaps Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Lutherans are different.¹⁴

Beyond tirelessly debating the reasons for the decline, the bottom line is that Mainline numbers are down, with significant resource implications: good ministry is all the more difficult to accomplish.¹⁵ Still, Diana Butler Bass could be right: it may yet be possible for Mainline churches to be renewed “by weaving personal spiritual quests” with a primary strength – their “more traditional forms of religious life.”¹⁶ David Harris, editor of the *Presbyterian Record*, comments that “the church desperately needs to find a way to move forward.” But he cautions that flexibility and creativity can be hard to come by. In the words of one former moderator, “Zacchaeus was not a Presbyterian.”¹⁷

Conservative Protestants. The “evangelicals,” as they are commonly known collectively, are characterized by considerable vitality. Their major demographic accomplishment has been their ability to sustain a market share of approximately 8% (7% Baptist) from the first census in 1871 through to the present day.

Religious intermarriage alone should have decimated the Conservative Protestants. Yet, because of factors that include immigration, their emphasis on tight-knit communities and strong youth and family ministries, they have been able to sustain their market share. The thesis of Mainline Protestant executive Dean Kelley, put forth in the early 1970s, also knows increasing support. In his book, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, Kelly maintained that two key factors of central importance were (1) the demands that evangelicals placed on their members, in the form of expectations such as participation, tithing, and lifestyles and (2) the provision of answers to ultimate questions, including life after death.¹⁸

My examination of Calgary evangelical church growth dating back to the late-1960s shows that, contrary to popular myth, Conservative Protestants know only modest growth through the recruitment of outsiders. Their numerical stability and growth are tied primarily to their ability to retain their own people – their children and their geographically-mobile members.¹⁹

To the extent they add outsiders, the key factor is relationships: they tend to either befriend or marry them.

Table 9.4. Select Conservative Protestant Group Identification as Percentages of the Population: 1901-2001

	1901	1921	1941	1961	1981	2001	1000s	Median Age
1. Christian	*	*	*	*	*	2.6	780	30.2
2. Baptist	5.9	4.8	4.2	3.3	2.9	2.5	729	39.3
3. Pentecostal	.0	.8	.5	.8	1.4	1.2	369	33.5
4. Mennonite	.6	.7	1.0	.8	.8	.6	191	32.0
5. Salvation Army	*	*	.3	.3	.5	.5	88	39.3
6. Christian Reformed	*	*	*	.3	.3	.3	77	32.3
7. Evangelical Missionary	*	*	*	*	*	.2	67	35.2
8. Christian & Miss Alliance	*	.0	.0	.1	.1	.2	66	34.5
9. Adventist	*	.2	.2	.1	.2	.2	63	35.5
10. Non-denominational	*	*	*	*	*	.1	41	33.0
11. Brethren in Christ	*	*	*	.1	.1	.1	21	38.2
12. Church of Christ	*	.2	.2	.1	.1	.0	15	39.4 ^a
13. Church of Nazarene	*	.0	.0	.0	.0	.0	14	39.1 ^a
14. Free Methodist	*	*	.1	.1	.1	.0	14	36.5 ^a

^aMean.

Source: Statistics Canada census data & Hiller 1976a:360-361.

Those demographic patterns are consistent with Kelley’s argument. The emphasis on a religion that has value and addresses life’s big questions helps to explain the vitality and significance that contribute to evangelicals’ high level of retention.

Somewhat paradoxically, while Conservative Protestants tend to stay with their “Believers’ Church” denominations, they move fairly freely between individual evangelical groups.²⁰ As a result, no single denomination in this “family” makes up even 3% of the Canadian population, nowhere near the 7% who identified themselves as “Baptist” when the first census was conducted in 1871. Many prefer to go simply by “Christian.”²¹

Evangelicals, who typically are younger than Mainline Protestants, will continue to be a smaller player on the Canadian religious scene. But their steady market share of 8% is finally about to increase. Why? The explosive growth of evangelicals in many parts of the world will result in an increasingly robust immigration pipeline – and an increasingly multicultural church. More about this shortly.

Other Faith Entries. As people came to Canada from an array of countries, they brought other religions besides Christianity to Canada. At the time of Confederation, Jews made up about one-tenth of one percent of the population. With the arrival of increasing numbers of people from countries other than Europe and the United States, additional faiths also took root.

Through about 1981, the number of people identifying with faiths other than Christianity remained very small. Much of the difficulty such groups had, of course, was tied to the fact that they had difficulty holding on to their children: many married Protestants and Catholics.

The net result was that, by 1981, less than 3% of Canadians indicated they were either Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Sikh. Another 1% were either Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons.

As we have seen, over the past three decades or so, immigration has seen the percentage of people who identify with the other major world religions double to about 6%. The largest of these is Islam at 2%.

The historical track records of a number of these faiths – Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, along with the Latter Day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses – suggest that they will continue to be part of the Canadian religious scene. But like the four Mainline Protestant groups, they will not be among the major religious firms.

Table 9.5. Identification with Other Religious as Percentages of the Population: 1921-2001

	1921	1941	1961	1981	2001	1000s	Median Age
1. Muslim	*	*	*	.4	2.0	580	28.1
2. Jewish	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1	330	41.5
3. Buddhist	.1	.1	.1	.2	1.0	300	38.0
4. Hindu	*	*	*	.3	1.0	297	31.9
5. Sikh	*	*	*	.3	.9	278	29.7
6. Jehovah's Witnesses	.1	.1	.4	.6	.5	155	38.7
7. Latter Day Saints	*	.2	.3	.4	.3	102	28.7

*Confucianism: .3% in 1921, .2% in 1941; smaller %'s since.

Source: Statistics Canada census data.

Islam is another story. There already are more Muslims in Canada than Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and Jews, for example. They may well be on the verge of attaining the proverbial “critical mass” – such as the evangelicals have experienced – where their numbers reach a point where they are able to cut down on losses through intermarriage. Moreover, Islam obviously is a very powerful multinational religion. In light of the diverse number of countries in which it is prominent, the immigration pipeline that has been such a critically important component of religious group growth over the years will continue to produce new people for some time to come.

In addition, a relatively high birth rate and an emphasis on the retention of children will further contribute to Islam’s viability. It is worth noting that the median age of Muslims as of the 2001 census was 28.1. Some additions through proselytism – or what many social scientists call “switching” – also can be expected.

Finally, the two traits that observers such as Kelley and Stark see as essential to success – an emphasis on demands and rewards, as well as the ability to speak to ultimate questions – are major features of Islam.

Table 9.6. Canada’s 16 Largest Religious Groups

	Numbers	%	Median Age
1. Roman Catholic	12,793,125	44	37.8
2. United Church	2,839,125	12	44.1
3. Anglican	2,035,500	8	43.8
4. Christian (<i>unspecified</i>)	780,450	3	30.2
5. Baptist	729,475	3	39.3
6. Eastern Orthodox	606,620	2	40.1
7. Lutheran	606,590	2	43.3
8. Muslim	579,640	2	28.1
9. Protestant (<i>unspecified</i>)	549,205	2	40.4
10. Presbyterian	409,830	1	46.0
11. Pentecostal	369,475	1	33.5
12. Jewish	329,995	1	41.5
13. Buddhist	300,345	1	38.0
14. Hindu	297,200	1	31.9
15. Sikh	278,410	<1	29.7
16. Greek Orthodox	215,175	<1	46.1
* No Religion	4,796,325	16	31.1

Source: Statistics Canada. 2001 Census.

In short, as we look to the future of religion in Canada, we can anticipate that the Roman Catholic Church will continue to be the dominant player. Other key market members will be the Conservative Protestants and Muslims.

The marketplace will not lack for other players, both old and new. But those groups will have to work hard just to retain – let alone expand – their market shares.

The Global Situation

As with Canada, there are and will continue to be people all over the world who are not in the market for religion, old or new. But they will be in the minority.

At this point in history, some 6 billion of the planet's 7 billion people are identifying with a religion. They are led by Christians (2.1 billion), Muslims (1.5 billion) and Hindus (900 million).

Like the auto multi-nationals, including Toyota, GM, Volkswagen, Ford, and Hyundai, these religious powerhouses will continue to lead the way as the most prominent religious “suppliers” on earth.

To the extent that markets in any country become open to their presence and that of other smaller suppliers – in part because their existing clienteles simply move to new places – religions will make national inroads.

Collectively, the religious companies have been performing very well of late. In the words of Harvey Cox, “Instead of disappearing, religion is now exhibiting new vitality all around the world.”²²

1. Christianity	2.1 billion
2. Islam	1.5 billion
3. Hinduism	900 million
4. Chinese folk	395 million
5. Buddhism	375 million
6. Sikhism	23 million
7. Juche	19 million
8. Spiritism	15 million
9. Judaism	14 million
10. Falun Gong	10 million
11. Bahäi	7 million
12. Cao Dai	5 million
13. Confucianism	5 million
14. New Age	5 million
15. Jainism	4 million
16. Shinto	4 million
* No Religion, secular 1.1 billion	
Sources: www.adherents.com 2010 and www.religionfacts.com 2010..	

Christianity's Growth. In recent years Christianity has experienced more worldwide growth than any religion. Such a reality of the faith's global health will come as news to many people. After all, as Philip Yancey noted recently, it's not making the headlines of CNN.²³ *Globe and Mail* columnist Neil Reynolds similarly wrote in early 2010, "You could call it the greatest story never told."²⁴

Reynolds drew on two prominent observers of the global religious scene, U.S. political scientist Walter Russell Mead and British scholar Scott M. Thomas. Their thoughts are worth retrieving in detail.²⁵

The flamboyant Mead has noted that Christianity is now "on its biggest roll" in its 2,000-year history.²⁶ It is both the world's largest faith and the world's fastest-growing faith. Its absolute numbers and market share are at all-time highs. In the last fifty years, Mead says, "It has surpassed Islam as the most popular religion in sub-Saharan Africa and as the leading Abrahamic religion in China." The Christian faith, he asserts, "claims almost twice as many adherents as Islam worldwide."²⁷ By 2050, the worldwide Christian population could top three billion.

- Roman Catholic commentator John Allen would note that, between 1950 and 2000, the number of Catholics worldwide grew from just under 500 million to over one billion. The Church suffered serious losses in the global North (Europe and North America), but grew dramatically in the global South (Africa, Asia, and Latin America).²⁸
- In a country like Russia, Orthodox Christianity is enjoying a revival after seventy years of communist suppression.²⁹
- But of particular significance, Pentecostals have experienced the fastest growth of any religious movement in history, says Mead, "from zero to something like half a billion members in the last 100 years." Growth has been pronounced in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.³⁰

Thomas likewise maintains that "around the world, religion is on the rise, and notes that "the most dramatic religious explosion is the spread of evangelical Protestantism, led by Pentecostalism." After Catholics, he says, Pentecostals represent the largest single group of Christians worldwide.³¹ It typically crosses class lines.

What perhaps is startling to learn is not only that evangelicals now number close to 700 million people worldwide; it's that they have achieved strategic masses in such places as China, Indonesia, India, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, and Brazil.

For example, it is estimated that, by 2050, there could be 220 million Christians in China – about 15% of the population.³²

In many instances, Thomas notes, Christianity is “returning to its roots by becoming

a post-Western religion dominated by the peoples, cultures, and countries of the global South.”³³ While having a strong personal focus, it also has become increasingly politically active, especially in Latin America.³⁴

These expansion patterns, of course, have not been without conflict. Thomas points out that “three countries with substantial Muslim communities – India, Indonesia, and Nigeria – also have large Pentecostal populations and sizable minorities of Christians more broadly.” Tensions have been rising, resulting in violence such as the conflict in Nigeria in 2010 that left over 500 people dead.³⁵

In addition, competition with Catholicism in various parts of the world is frequently intense. John Allen writes that as “Pentecostals march across the planet,” they have been “siphoning off significant numbers of Catholics.” He notes that “the Catholic Church is itself being ‘Pentecostalized’ through the Charismatic movement.”³⁶

Table 9.8. Presence of Pentecostals and Charismatics in 10 Countries: 2006

	Pente- costals	Charis- matics	Total
UNITED STATES	10%	18	28
LATIN AMERICA			
Guatemala	20	20	60
Brazil	15	34	49
Chile	9	21	30
AFRICA			
Kenya	33	23	56
Nigeria	18	8	26
South Africa	10	24	34
ASIA			
India	1	4	5
Philippines	4	40	44
South Korea	2	9	11

Source: PewResearchCenter 2006.

A massive shift in population growth from the developed countries of the North to the developing countries of the global South will result in a changing global religious landscape. Thomas points out that the developed countries of the North accounted for 32% of the world's population in 1900 and 18% in 2000. By 2050, that figure will drop to just 10%.³⁷ “A new kind of world is in the making,” he says, “and the people, states, and religious communities that compose the global South are making it.”³⁸

In the case of Roman Catholics, Allen notes that the Church was dominated in the last century by the global North. Today, two in three Catholics are found in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.³⁹ One obvious result? An unprecedented number of Catholic leaders are coming from all over the world⁴⁰ – often, in the Canadian instance, to a parish near you.

Table 9.9. World Religion Increases: Next 24 Hours

Christians	69,000
<i>Roman Catholics</i>	37,000
<i>Pentecostals</i>	30,000
Muslims	68,000
Hindus	37,000
Chinese folk	10,700
Buddhists	10,600
Atheists	1,200
Sikhs	1,100
Jews	350

Source: Barrett et al. 2001:4.

Mead and Thomas both draw attention to the fact that the rise in evangelical Christianity in particular can be expected to bring with it a concomitant increase in Protestant ideals, such as the work ethic, entrepreneurial aspirations, and personal freedom.⁴¹ Thomas sees global Christianity as becoming more conservative than European Christianity, but more liberal than the Catholic model which, in some Latin American settings, will be replaced by evangelicalism. Sometimes it will be a hybrid with Catholicism, sometimes not.⁴²

In addition, both Mead and Thomas maintain that the spread of evangelical Christianity will have important social consequences. Globally, “Evangelicals will be a major religious, social, and political force in the coming century,” Thomas writes.⁴³ In China, for example, he maintains that the government tacitly allows the established

religions of Christianity and neo-Confucianism “to operate relatively freely, believing that they can promote social harmony amid rapid social changes.” He suggests that if Christianity achieves the culture permeation in China that it knows in South Korea – at around 25%– it could fundamentally alter China’s political fabric.”⁴⁴

Islamic Growth. Observers maintain that Islam also is experiencing a revival that extends well beyond the more extreme Islamic fundamentalist movements. As we have seen with the global Gallup data, large proportions of people in predominantly Muslim countries are saying that religion is an important part of their daily lives. In reminding readers that Islamic renewal is extending far beyond the Arab world, Thomas writes that “more Muslim women are wearing the veil, more Muslim men are growing beards, and more Muslims are attending mosques more often.”⁴⁵

- Russia now has more Muslims than any other country in Europe.
- Northwestern China “is home to over 20 million Muslims and is now in the grip of an Islamic reawakening.”⁴⁶ Many young Chinese Muslims are studying across the Middle East.
- Sheer numbers alone mean that Christian-Islam relations will, in John Allen’s words, “be a major driver of world history in the twenty-first century.”⁴⁷

1. Indonesia	202
2. Pakistan	160
3. India	151
4. Bangladesh	125
5. Egypt	72
6. Turkey	71
7. Nigeria	68
8. Iran	64
9. Morocco	33
10. Algeria	33

Source: CIA World Factbook; cited in Allen 2009:99.

One cannot underestimate the role that the Internet is playing in connecting Christians, Muslims, and people of many other faiths who, because of geographical separation, were isolated religious diasporas.

Yet, ironically, notes Thomas, globalization in general simultaneously contributes to “a more unified and yet more fragmented world.”⁴⁸

Assessment

Obviously the receptivity levels to religion vary considerably around the world. In Stark's parlance, settings are variously religiously "regulated" and "deregulated." They have open as well as closed markets, robust competition as well as long-standing monopolies.

But because of both (1) the ongoing demand and (2) the ongoing availability of global suppliers, one thing is clear: religion will persist as far as the social scientific eye can see, individually and organizationally.

The scope of the market for religion is so vast that, apart from the gods, entrepreneurial human beings would find its potential too great to ignore.

Religions, major and minor, well-established and freshly minted, will continue to be at work, attempting to increase their local, national, and global market shares.

Individuals will continue to explore the options, and will usually opt for one – or more. After all, for some, religion enriches life. For all, it offers market entries when it comes to death.

And as for the gods, if they actually exist and people ignore them for very long, they can be expected to shake things up from time to time.

It is, I think, significant that Scott Thomas would conclude his recent overview of global religious developments by underlining the importance that religion has for the vast majority of people around the world. Precisely because "faith informs the daily struggles of millions in confronting" life, he says, countries like the United States need to understand the worldwide religious resurgence. If they fail to do so, says Thomas, "the potential for religiously motivated violence across the globe may increase dramatically over the next century."⁴⁹

At a time when the debate about God's existence has become something of a spectator sport, the scale of the resurgence of religion will affect the entire planet.

Did someone say that people are fiddling, while some parts of "Rome" are flourishing – and others are burning?

Conclusion

*"When people believe that the future will be different,
it transforms the way they feel about the present."*

-Harvey Cox

To look at the religious situation in Canada, all by itself, is to learn a fair amount about ourselves. We are characterized by religious polarization. That polarization seems to be increasing, particularly as growing numbers of people take a pass on organized religion.

When we ask the question, "So what?" we receive a number of reasonably clear-cut answers.

- With or without religion, the quality of *personal well-being* will probably not change very much.
- *Spiritual needs* will continue and, for the most part, they will also continue to be met, with and without religion.
- When it comes to *social well-being*, the loss of religion – to the extent that such a reality takes place – will be met with a societal loss of one important source of civility and compassion. It may be that the religious pathway to positive interpersonal life can be replaced. But in the interim, however long that might be, something will be lost.
- The one area that undoubtedly would suffer the most from the demise of organized religion is *death*. Despite the enormous market for meaning-makers in this area, our society is not showing signs of producing strong and viable alternatives to religion.

To the extent that we try for some perspective on our situation as Canadians, we typically ask, "How do we compare to the Americans?" That's not a bad strategy. But I think it is readily apparent that we can get a much better reading on our religious situation by expanding the comparisons to countries around the world.

I have no illusions that I have been comprehensive. As I have emphasized throughout the book, to try for cross-national comparisons is a daunting task. The complexities and nuances make it extremely difficult to identify clear and consistent patterns.

Nonetheless, these limitations acknowledged, I would suggest that we have some good, preliminary findings in the four “so what?” areas we have focused on in Canada.

Globally-speaking:

1. Subjective *personal well-being* often is associated with high levels of religiousness. However, objective measures of personal well-being are typically associated with strong economies. Those economies in turn provide the varied physical, educational, and health resources that elevate a country’s quality of life. Such strong economies are found disproportionately in countries where Christianity is or was prevalent.
2. *Spiritual needs* are highly pervasive throughout the world. They persist regardless of whether or not countries are characterized by religious monopolies, polarization, or secular monopolies. In the latter two situations, spiritual needs are addressed by both non-religious and religious means.
3. The importance of *social well-being* is emphasized by religious groups. In many if not most cases, their teachings include ethical components. Followers are expected to exhibit honesty and integrity, and to be respectful and compassionate in their dealings with other people. Accordingly, religiousness is associated with a somewhat greater tendency to value such traits. Behaviourally, indicators such as the lack of crime and global generosity do not point to clear national patterns. Some observers would argue that in highly secularized settings such as Europe, for example, something of religion’s “shadow effect” is at work, but is not reflected well in measures of current religiousness. Maybe, maybe not.
4. The desire to address the question of *life after death*, and to believe that death is not the end, are both universal inclinations. There is little evidence to suggest such questions and beliefs will be set aside in the foreseeable future.

This last point brings us back to the central feature of most religions. They typically have clear multidimensional components. Christianity, for example, emphasizes God, self, and society – summed up in the so-called Great Commandment to “love God with all one’s being and one’s neighbour as oneself.” But while religions have a number of key facets, the indispensable starting place is the gods.

Beyond the Gods...and Back

Are there dangers in being religious? Of course. Highly acclaimed American philosopher and novelist Rebecca Goldstein is among many humanists and atheists who express alarm about the destructive potential of religion. In an interview with the *Globe and Mail's* Martin Levin in early 2010, she commented that it “is terrifying” to see the strength of mounting, primitive religious emotions.”¹ That’s true. But there are also significant losses when religion is abandoned.

In Canada and around the world, the majority of people do not live life beyond the gods. It is further worth noting that, for many who do, the experience is not life-long.

The reason is not that they are deprived or unintelligent or brainwashed. Rather, in the words of esteemed anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, it appears that “in all probability most [people] are unable...just to look at the stranger features of the world’s landscape in dumb astonishment or bland apathy without trying to develop...some notions as to how such features might be reconciled with the more ordinary deliverances of experience.”² Max Weber put things this way: religion is the product of an “inner compulsion to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos and take up a position toward it.”³ Charles Taylor argues that people continue to have a need for a sense of fullness that reflects transcendent reality. In his words, “Our age is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief.”⁴

Apart from the role of reflection, personal experience seems to confirm for many that the gods exist. Consistent with some neuroscientists who go so far as to say we are “wired” to the gods,⁵ I reminded readers in *Restless Gods* how sociologist Peter Berger has suggested that our sense of justice, order, hope, and even humour might be innate “signals of transcendence.”⁶

For close to three centuries now, there have been prominent thinkers who have been telling us that religion is destined to become a thing of the past. The old Comtean

formula was presumably law-like. Civilizations move through three dominant thought-form stages – from religion to metaphysics to science.

But Comte and his Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment colleagues were wrong. It's time for a mind-shift. Religion is still very much with us. The gods have not gone anywhere.

When we revisit polarization in Canada, what the data tell us is that we are polarized when it comes to organized religion, as seen in attendance, but far less so by belief.

The same pattern holds across the planet. It's evident that more than a few thinkers have been taking notice.

In a new book, *God Is Back*, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, editor in chief and Washington bureau chief respectively of *The Economist*, have agreed that religion is making a major comeback. Their analysis seems consistent with much of what Rodney Stark has been saying now for some time. There is a market for religion; the question is, what suppliers will come through?

Micklethwait and Wooldridge, like other observers we have noted, maintain that the resurgence can readily be seen in such diverse places as Africa, China, Southeast Asia, Brazil, and Europe, as well as the United States. Central to much of the new life, they argue, is an American-style emphasis on marketing and choice. The emphases and styles of the U.S. megachurches are being exported around the world, with considerable success.

“Those things that seemingly were going to destroy religion,” they write, “democracy and markets, technology and reason – are combining to make it stronger.” They optimistically conclude that the global rise of faith, despite frequently being associated with violence and instability, can eventually be channelled away from volatility.⁷

Their argument is consistent with the research findings of Stark and his associates as they carried out research around the world, including Canada, back in the late 1970s and 1980s. Regardless of the national setting, they said, the demand persists for religions that address questions that only the gods can answer. When religious groups address those demands, people will respond.

The problem with living without the gods is that there are times when we are forced to deal with the mysteries of life and death. There are experiences of ecstasy and euphoria, perplexion and despair, suffering and tragedy that sometimes seem to call out for something beyond us.

Yancey has written that in his extensive travels, “I have found certain themes to be universal. The question, ‘What good is God?’ occurs in some form to every person who experiences pain or death or poverty or unfairness – in other words, to everyone.” Yancey clearly believes that there is a God that “can wrest permanent good out of this flawed planet.”⁸

If there is nothing there – if, in the graphic words of Helmut Thielicke, we look to the heavens for the eye of God and see only an empty socket – so be it.⁹ But if there *is* Something....

During those “deep times” in life, there are many who find significant resources in believing that back of all of creation there is a Presence that brought everything into being, is sustaining it, and will be there at the end of history to greet it.¹⁰ This is not merely Something to rely on when we die. It is Something that is an unmatched resource when we live...resulting in lines like this being penned years ago:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...

He restores my soul...I will fear no evil.

*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*¹¹

Rolheiser sums things up this way: “Given that we live under a smiling, relaxed, all-forgiving and all-powerful God, we too should relax and smile, at least once in a while, because irrespective of anything that has ever happened or will ever happen, in the end, ‘all shall be well’.”¹²

Because of what we experience in our lifetimes and because we are exposed to the possibility of such a Presence, it is not precarious to conclude that most of us will choose to live life beyond the gods for only so long.

That said, don’t get me wrong. People are not yearning for churches and their counterparts. No one should trivialize what twenty-first century Canadians want by

naively assuming that the findings tell us that most will “come back to church.” I’ve been reminding everyone for some time now that we *have never found* anything in our research that points to the uninvolved being in the market for churches.

What we *have found* is that, to the extent that people “come back” to organized religion, it is because they have discovered there are some things taking place that resonate with their desire to know the presence and the resources of the gods.

For example, large numbers of teens say they will want that presence in the future when they experience some of life’s “big events” – things like marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a parent. Moreover, as we have seen, when Canadians speak of spiritual needs, very often they have something in the way of transcendence in mind.

Many consequently are open to groups that are in touch with and can respond to their spiritual, personal, and relational needs.

Table C1. Desire for Religious Rites of Passage in the Future: 1987-2008 (%)

	1987	2000	2008
Wedding ceremony	94	89	84
Funeral	93	86	83
Birth-related	85	70	65

Sources: Project Teen Canada Surveys, 1987, 2000, 2008.

Table C2. Teenage Openness to Greater Involvement

“I’d be open to more involvement with religious groups if I found it to be worthwhile”

	< Monthly	Monthly+
Nationally	38%	65
Catholic: Outside Quebec	55	67
Catholic: Quebec	30	65
Orthodox Christian	56	63
Christian: unspecified	39	59
Conservative Protestant	35	65
Mainline Protestant	47	62
Other Faiths	51	69
<i>Buddhism</i>	56	60
<i>Islam</i>	54	72
<i>Judaism</i>	47	62
<i>Aboriginal spirituality</i>	49	**
<i>Hinduism</i>	30	74
<i>Sikhism</i>	**	63
No Religion	28	53

**N’s insufficient to permit accurate and stable percentaging.

Source: Project Teen Canada 2008.

People who are inclined to give religion a serious look can be expected to *start* with the traditions with which they have some kind of affinity – notably the religions of parents and, partners. These are the same groups to which many of them, on occasion at least, already are turning.

Here, an organization like the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec, for now at least, has a unique opportunity and huge “market advantage.” The research suggests that, ironically, the only religion most Quebeckers are willing to seriously entertain in the foreseeable future is Catholicism. Seasonal services and unique events – such as the October 2010 mass for the province’s newest saint, Brother Andre, which brought more than 30,000 people to the Olympic Stadium – serve as reminders that the Catholic faith has not vanished.¹³

Yet, unless the Church responds to the latent demand, journalist Konrad Yakabuski probably is right: the parish steps where their forefathers assiduously greeted the curé each Sunday may, for young Quebeckers, be nothing more than a good place to skateboard.”¹⁴

Beyond only Quebec and even beyond Canada, John Allen explicitly warns Catholic leaders that, in the twenty-first century, what they will need above all else is imagination. “They’ll need the capacity to reconsider how they think about the Church and what they do with their faith,” he says. Otherwise, instead of rising to the occasion and responding to important new challenges, the Church will “be steamrolled by them.”¹⁵

On paper, groups such as the United and Anglican churches also are not yet out of the running in Canada, given the size of their affiliate pools. But time is not on the side of either denomination. They have to move quickly. Their problems are exacerbated by a sharp decline in human and financial resources. As we have seen, both have nothing less than a mega-crisis, for example, with respect to their young people. Yet national staff cutbacks for both denominations in 2010 included the United Church laying off its youth and young adult coordinator.¹⁶

A basic problem is that many and perhaps most people who identify with Catholic and Protestant traditions have

no particular reason to associate what they want and need with what those groups are doing.

That has to change. People have to know that groups are addressing the life and death questions that they are asking, and are capable of having a positive impact on their lives and the people and issues they care about.

Religious groups that can do those kinds of things have futures. Those that can't or won't are going to fade away.

Over the past four decades, Harvey Cox has been carefully studying the religious times. His work has spanned the era when the secularization argument was pervasive (*The Secular City* 1965), through the explosion of pentecostalism (*Fire from Heaven* 1995). In 2009, the year he retired from Harvard Divinity School, he offered his thoughts about where religion is headed (*The Future of Faith*). He has some important things to say.

Cox maintains that modern science and traditional religion, after three centuries of slugging it out for the privilege of being the ultimate source of meaning and value, have – like two tired boxers – reached an exhausted stalemate. He says that “people are still willing to rely on science for the limited things it has proven it can do, but they no longer believe it will answer their deepest questions. People remain vaguely intrigued with the traditional religions, but not with conventional churches.”

His conclusion? “Increasing numbers of people appear ready to move on, and are on the lookout for a more promising map.”¹⁷ But most are not looking for creeds and hierarchies. They want personal faith. “The experience of the divine is displacing theories about it,” says Cox.¹⁸

What is less clear is *where* they can experience faith.

In the conclusion of their landmark work, *American Piety*, in which they documented the state of religion in the United States at the end of the 1960s, Rodney Stark and Charles Glock wrote that “the institutional shape of the religion of the future is as difficult to predict as its theological content.”¹⁹ Their last two lines were borrowed from poet William Butler Yeats:

*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?*²⁰

Similarly, there's value in recalling the rest of that "old gods" thought of Durkheim's that I mentioned in discussing the future of Canada's Mainline Protestants. The words were penned a century or so ago as he reflected on religion in Europe:

*The old gods are growing old or are already dead, and others are not yet born. There are no gospels which are immortal, but neither is there any reason for believing that humanity is incapable of inventing new ones*²¹.

It may well be that, in the course of reaching out for answers to those questions "that only the gods can satisfy," large numbers of people in Canada and elsewhere are going to bypass the existing groups altogether, and opt for some "new ones" that are "not yet born."

What is certain is that the needs that call for the gods will persist. Until the responses that are required appear, we will have the paradoxical situation where many groups are going broke precisely at a time when many people are going hungry.²²

The gods potentially can contribute to life in a number of ways. They can elevate personal and social well-being. They can make us happy, contribute to justice, satisfy our spiritual needs, and make us better stewards of the planet.

So can everyone else.

But in addition to speaking to all of life, and adding to all of life, the gods are unique in that they alone can also speak to death. What's more, they have some encouraging things to say.

As the people around us, and we ourselves, approach that inevitable and mysterious ending of life, the gods may be our best hope...in fact, they may be our only hope.

Some people will choose to go it alone. Yet, it's hard to escape the conclusion that there's really no need for us to experience life and death alone.

That's why, in the long run, many people may say goodbye to any number of forms of organized religion.

Few of us will say goodbye to the gods.

Appendix

The Project Canada Survey Series Methodology

Since the mid-1970s, I have been carrying out a series of national surveys from the University of Lethbridge that have provided considerable data on social trends, including religion. Seven “Project Canada” surveys of adults were conducted every five years from 1975 through 2005, while four complementary “Project Teen Canada” surveys were completed in 1984, 1992, 2000, and 2008. Another adult survey is on the drawing board for 2015.

With respect to religion, the surveys have generated comprehensive information on attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour. The adult samples have averaged about 1,500 people who are 18 and over, and have been highly representative of the adult population. The youth samples have been comprised of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 who are still in high schools/secondary schools or their equivalents (e.g., CEGEPs in Quebec). These highly representative samples have been comprised of an average of about 3,800 cases. The sample of 5,564 in 2008 was our largest ever, and included an important oversample of 818 teens attending Aboriginal schools.

Full methodological details for the surveys can be found in three books: *The Emerging Millennials* 2009:214-219, *The Boomer Factor* 2006:225-226, and *Restless Gods* 2002:249-254.

A Methodological Note for the Statistically-Minded: Correlates of the Three Religiosity Measures

Some readers – including many quantitatively minded social scientists – undoubtedly will be inclined to view the three religiosity measures of attendance, identification, and belief in God as three variables, whose individual impact on various values needs to be “flushed out” using statistical techniques like regression analysis. The assumption is that other factors besides attendance, identification, and belief *per se* could be accounting at least in part for the differences. Such factors might include family structures, race and ethnicity, education, and the religiosity of family members and friends. Age and education, of course, are already controlled for in the case of teenagers. Gender is frequently isolated in the table presentations.

Such analyses, of course, can readily be carried out.

But appropriate statistics are determined by the task at hand. They are merely tools to be drawn upon as required in the course of testing clear and good ideas.

What I am assuming is that all three religion measures – attendance, identification, and belief – are not so much important in and of themselves, but rather as indices of the broader personal settings in which people live.

For example, I am not so naïve as to think that a teenager's attending a church every week is, all by itself, shaping the young person's values. Rather, regular attendance presumably is associated with other key learning variables, such as pro-religious parents and friends, and the personal importance of faith. I have little interest in pontificating about the sole influence of attendance and then comparing its impact with these other related variables that, frankly, make it noteworthy.

The same is true of the other two religiosity variables I am using – identification and belief in God. They are potentially helpful as two additional indices of religious and non-religious social environments, and not primarily as measures of only identification and belief as such.

Measures of association, however, that sum up the broad relationships between religious environments and the dependent variables being examined are, in my mind, statistics that in both table and correlation coefficient form are very useful and important in summarizing the data. Many are offered.

A Memo to Neuroscientists, Evolutionary Biologists, and Other Scientists Who Are Increasingly Focusing on Religion

The burgeoning amount of work that is being done on religion by people other than social scientists is potentially extremely valuable. As I indicated in the preface, the experience I have had in trying to understand my young daughter's development has given me an overdue appreciation for what neuroscience, for example, can tell us about so many things. The University of Lethbridge is home to the Canadian Centre of Behavioural Neuroscience, with three colleagues among the top neuroscientists in the world – Ian Whishaw, Bryan Kolb, and Rob Sutherland. They are a reminder of the field's importance.

I am not in a position at this point to be able to adequately and appropriately critique such work. But I do want to acknowledge it and, for starters, argue that a comprehensive understanding of religion will require drawing on the contributions of both the physical and social sciences. In my next life, I plan to do a Ph.D. in social neuroscience.

Notes

Introduction

¹ See, for example, Thiessen and Dawson 2009 and my response, Bibby 2009, as well as a critical *United Church Observer* piece by Wright, 2009.

1 The Days of God's Dominion

¹ Grant 1988:1.

² Grant 1988:8.

³ Bramadat and Seljak (eds.) 2008 and 2009.

⁴ Grant 1988:65.

⁵ Beyer, 1997:276-277.

⁶ CBC, 1973.

⁷ Grant, 1988:161.

⁸ The sources for table 1.1: *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1916-1966*; United, Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, and Presbyterian yearbooks; McLeod, 1982; Beyer, 1997; Stats Canada, *The Daily*, June 1, 1993.

⁹ Beaucage and LaRoque 1983:31.

¹⁰ CBC documentary, *The Quieter Revolution*, 1976,

¹¹ Noll 2007:18.

¹² Kristofferson, "Sunday Morning Coming Down," 1969.

2 The Boomer Bust

¹ Noll 2007:36-37. For a valuable set of responses to Noll, see *Church and Faith Trends* 2008.

² Foote, 1996:1.

³ Yakabuski 2009.

⁴ Bibby 1990:9.

⁵ Hordern 1966:46.

⁶ Quote below taken from Bibby 2006:67.

⁷ Smith 2008. Also discussed by Harris 2008.

⁸ Taylor 2007:580.

⁹ Taylor 2007:588.

¹⁰ Putnam 2000:195.

¹¹ Some of these ideas, accompanied by data, are described in more detail in Bibby 2005.

¹² Statistics Canada catalogue 96F0030XIE2001015, p. 6.

¹³ Taken from the Toronto Archdiocese website, <http://www.archtoronto.org>, December 2010.

¹⁴ For a summary of the key findings regarding Aboriginals, see Bibby with Fox and Penner, 2010.

¹⁵ Valpy 2010.

¹⁶ Dueck 2010. A take on the debate is offered by Scrivener 2010a.

3 The New Polarization

¹ Valpy and Friesen, December 11, 2010.

² Dobbelaere 1981, 2002.

³ Berger, 1961.

⁴ See Luckmann, 1960 and Berger 1961.

⁵ Berger, 1961.

⁶ See, for example, Cox 1995:xv-xvi and Berger 1999:2.

⁷ Specifically, the 1990 General Social Survey and the Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2000. For details, see Bibby 2002:75-76.

⁸ Bibby 2002:73. The table accidentally omitted the “Other Faiths” data line.

⁹ Bibby 2002:90.

¹⁰ See, for example, his work with Bainbridge (1985), Finke (1992 and 2000), and Iannacone (1992ff).

¹¹ Stark and Bainbridge 1985:7.

¹² Stark and Bainbridge 1985:2.

¹³ Stark and Bainbridge 1985:529-530.

¹⁴ Finke and Stark 1992:238,250.

¹⁵ Finke and Stark 1992:252-255.

¹⁶ Stark and Bainbridge 1985.

¹⁷ Bibby, 2002:62ff.

¹⁸ The “no religion” figure was 4% in 1971, 7% in 1981, and 12% in 1991.

¹⁹ This argument is developed in detail in Bibby 2002:66ff.

²⁰ Stark and Finke, 2000:259-274.

²¹ Bibby, 2002:68.

²² Bibby 1993:282.

²³ Gregg 2005:21-22.

²⁴ See, for example, Dawkins 2006, Hitchens 2007, Harris 2006.

²⁵ Hiller 1976b.

²⁶ See the WVS website at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

²⁷ See, <http://www.gallup.com> and background document, http://media.gallup.com/dataviz/www/WP_QuestionsWHITE.pdf.

²⁸ See <http://pewglobal.org>.

²⁹ For a background sketch see <http://experts.uchicago.edu/experts.php?id=174>.

³⁰ Data included in Smith 2009:88.

³¹ See, for example, Winseman 2002, describing how Gallup measures “spiritual commitment.” The article views commitment in highly traditional religious terms.

³² Smith 2009:15-16.

³³ For a sampling of information on resource issues, see Sumner (2010), and Williams 2010a and 2010b (Anglicans); Shepherd 2010 (Lutherans), Kouwenberg 2010 (Presbyterians), Johnson 2009 (Lutherans).

³⁴ Peritz 2010.

³⁵ For an excellent article summing up this paradox, see Yakabuski 2009.

4 Polarization & Pluralism

¹ Bibby 1990:9.

² Bibby 1990:9.

³ *Globe and Mail*, October 8, 2010. See also the *Globe and Mail* articles by Peritz and Friesen, 2010 and Friesen and Martin, 2010.

⁴ McDonald 2010. The correlational data are from PC2005. For a very good response from the Conservative Protestant side, see Koop 2010.

⁵ Bibby 1990:92.

⁶ See, for example, de Souza, 2010.

⁷ Martinuk 2011.

⁸ Murphy 2009.

⁹ Park and Burgess 1921.

¹⁰ Bibby 1990:24.

¹¹ Bibby 1990:24.

¹² Bibby 1990:48.

¹³ Bibby 1990:48.

¹⁴ Cited in Bibby 1990:25-26; Palmer, 1988:1741.

¹⁵ Cited in Bibby 1990:28; Palmer, 1988:1742.

¹⁶ In contrast to the past; see Bibby 1990:32.

¹⁷ Bibby 1990:19.

¹⁸ Bibby 1990:19.

¹⁹ Bibby 1990:21.

²⁰ Bibby 1990:20-21.

²¹ Cited in Bibby 1990:54; Boyd 1984:1.

²² Cited in Bibby 1990:50. Christiano 1990:19-20.

²³ Giuliano 2009: <http://www.united-hurch.ca/communications/news/moderator/090130>.

²⁴ Howard 2009: <http://www.emergingspirit.ca/wondercafe> joins the dialogue on atheist ads. Posted January 30.

²⁵ Quoted in Mackey 2009.

²⁶ Quoted in Morton 2009.

²⁷ Quoted in Mackey 2009.

²⁸ Drake 2010.

- ²⁹ Quoted in Chai 2010.
- ³⁰ Centre for Inquiry website, <http://cficanada.ca>, accessed December 5, 2010.
- ³¹ Peters 2010.
- ³² Allemang 2010.
- ³³ Chase, 2010.
- ³⁴ Quoted in Breen 2010.
- ³⁵ Hitchens 2007:153.
- ³⁶ Hitchens in Hart House, 2006.
- ³⁷ Breen 2010.
- ³⁸ Mackey 2009.
- ³⁹ The following summary draws on *The Catholic Herald* 2010.
- ⁴⁰ Flaccus 2010.
- ⁴¹ D’Emilio 2010.
- ⁴² Schmidt 2010.
- ⁴³ Baetz 2010.
- ⁴⁴ D’Emilio 2010.
- ⁴⁵ CBC 2010.
- ⁴⁶ Thanh Ha 2010.
- ⁴⁷ CCCB, 2010.
- ⁴⁸ For a succinct summary of the controversy and mixed reactions surrounding his visit, see Winfield 2010.
- ⁴⁹ Beckford 2010.
- ⁵⁰ This was my interpretation then and remains my take now; see Bibby, *Unknown Gods* 1993:68-75.
- ⁵¹ Saad 2009.
- ⁵² Gallup, April 9, 2009.
- ⁵³ Persichilli 2010.
- ⁵⁴ This item was taken from Glock and Stark’s survey of church members in the San Francisco Bay area in the early 1960s. See Stark and Glock 1968:1-10.
- ⁵⁵ Grossman 2008.
- ⁵⁶ Bibby 2009:158.
- ⁵⁷ Valpy and Friesen 2010.
- ⁵⁸ PewCenter report on Islamic terrorism, August 14, 2005.
- ⁵⁹ The item wording: “If your party nominated a generally well-qualified man/person for president who happened to be....an atheist, would you vote for that person/him?”
- ⁶⁰ Jones 2007.
- ⁶¹ Lewis 2010a..
- ⁶² Reid 2010.
- ⁶³ Mani 2010.
- ⁶⁴ Lewis 2010b.

- ⁶⁵ See the website, www.charterforcompassion.org.
⁶⁶ Interview, *Bill Moyers Journal*, March 13, 2009.
⁶⁷ Blair in *Globe and Mail*, Geiger November 29, 2010.
⁶⁸ Valpy and Friesen 2010.

5 Polarization & Personal Well-Being

- ¹ Dawkins 2006:281, 308.
² Hitchens, 2007:13.
³ Harris 2004:236, 79.
⁴ An interview in Gruending 1996.
⁵ Collins, 2010.
⁶ Quoted in Wallace 2010.
⁷ Helpful reviews of the first three are offered by Kolbert 2010. For a review of happiness research in economics through 2005, see Frey and Stutzer 2005. A journalist's comment on scientific efforts to explore joy is offered by Scrivener 2010b.
⁸ Samuel 2009.
⁹ Vandore 2008.
¹⁰ See Castle 2010; also Watson and Coates 2010.
¹¹ Putnam and Lim 2010. For a brief synopsis, see the Harvard press release, Brockmeyer 2010. A good journalistic take on the study is offered by the *Globe and Mail*'s Sarah Hampson 2010. General information on social capital material is available at <http://www.socialcapital.wordpress.com>.
¹² Drawn from Southard 1961.
¹³ Hampson 2010.
¹⁴ For gender breakdowns, see Bibby 2009:70.
¹⁵ See Bibby 2006:115.
¹⁶ Bibby 2009:66.
¹⁷ Bibby 2009:31.
¹⁸ Newport 2007.
¹⁹ Newport, Agrawal and Witters 2010.
²⁰ Miller 2000.
²¹ Specific quotes from Miller 2000
²² Stokes 2007.
²³ Pelham and Nyiri 2008.
²⁴ See, for example, Crabtree 2010:2.
²⁵ Stratton, 2010.
²⁶ Social Capital Blog, October 27, 2010.

6 Polarization & Spirituality

¹ Rolheiser 1999.

² Rolheiser 1999:6-7.

³ Rolheiser 1999:7-11.

⁴ Taken from the website, “SBNR.org”, January 2, 2011.

⁵ Taylor 2007:506.

⁶ Roof 2001.

⁷ Nouwen 1999, Tickle 2008, Young 2008, McLaren 2011. Explicit spirituality titles for the other religions mentioned can readily be found with a simple scan of sites such as Amazon or Chapters.

⁸ *The Secret* Byrne 2006; Aboriginal, Friesen 2000; Celtic, Davies 2002; Mormon Davies 1987; Wicca Saunders 2002.

⁹ *God Without God*, Hampson 2008; *Little Book Comte-Sponville* 2007; *Spirituality Without God*, de la Rouvière 2005; *The Christian Atheist*, Blake 2003; *The Homemade Atheist*, Brogaard 2010.

¹⁰ http://www.ehow.com/how_4728678_be-spiritual-atheist.html.

¹¹ <http://www.naturalism.org/spiritual.htm>.

¹² <http://centreculturelchretienmoutreal.org>. See “program 2010, “The spiritual quest: with or without God.”

¹³ Rigler, 2008.

¹⁴ Allemang 2010.

¹⁵ Miller 2010.

¹⁶ The sample was non-probability in nature and was selected using purposive and “geometric” sampling, through a wide-range of contacts throughout the province. With minor weighting, the sample is highly representative of Albertans with respect to age, gender, and religious identification.

¹⁷ Roof 1999:91.

¹⁸ Roof 1999:9.

¹⁹ Wuthnow 2007:134.

²⁰ Smith 2009:

²¹ Smith 2009:15. See, for example, Davie 2006, Gill 2004.

²² Luckmann 1967.

²³ See, for example, Bailey 2006.

²⁴ The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) is .418.

²⁵ Todd 2009a and 2010a. The quotes that follow are from Todd 2010a.

²⁶ See, for example, Todd 2008, 2009b, and 2010b; an example of an academic take on hockey is Sinclair-Faulkner 1977, American football French 2001.

²⁷ McCaig 2010.

²⁸ Cited in Cogley 1968:171.

²⁹ Crabtree and Pelham 2008.

7 Polarization & Social Well-Being

¹ Edge Conference 2010.

² http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/morality10.

³ Hauser 2006.

⁴ An insightful interview with Hauser is found in Ross 2006.

⁵ Quoted in Ross 2006.

⁶ Website: <http://moral.wjh.harvard.edu/index2.html>.

⁷ See, for example, Highfield 2010.

⁸ *USA Today* August 20, 2010.

⁹ Harris 2010. For two informative reviews, see Appiah 2010 in the *New York Times* and Horgan 2010 in the *Globe and Mail*.

¹⁰ http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/morality10/morality.harris.html

¹¹ An excellent video of Harris' views on science and morality is available via YouTube – “Sam Harris: Science can answer moral questions,” posted by Tedtalks. (www.ted.com).

¹² Adler 2006.

¹³ For expositions of the emerging field, see, for example, Cacioppo et al. 2002 and Todorov, Fiske and Prentice 2011.

¹⁴ Quoted in Babington and Superville 2010.

¹⁵ Ferguson 2010.

¹⁶ Wood 2010.

¹⁷ None of the correlation coefficients for these values and adult age cohort even reach .100.

¹⁸ For reasons explained in detail in Appendix A, my interest is in the cumulative effect of religion – including other related variables such as age, gender, family characteristics and so on. That is why I am using measures that examine correlations – rather than regression measures that explore the unique impact of a single variable, such as attendance, controlling for these other variables.

¹⁹ This item appeared in both the teen and adult surveys in 2000; it did not appear in the Project Canada 2005 survey. That is why we do not have recent comparable adult data.

²⁰ A number of these same items were included in the 2000 national adult and youth surveys. For items and findings, see Bibby 2001, pp. 17 & 233.

²¹ Smith and Stark 2004:4.

²² Pelham and Crabtree 2008:3.

²³ Smith and Stark 2009:2.

²⁴ Mead 2010:3.

²⁵ Noll 2007:56.

²⁶ Goar 2006.

²⁷ Pennings and Van Pelt 2009. The entire policy paper, “A Canadian Culture of Generosity” is available via the Cardus website, [www.cardus.ca/Generous Culture](http://www.cardus.ca/Generous_Culture).

²⁸ Hall et al. 2009:6, 41. Frank Jones (2002) the 1997 and 2000 data sets, examines these correlations in considerable details, including looking at religious groups differences.

²⁹ *Maclean's* 2010.

³⁰ Harris, 2008:vii.

³¹ Lewis 2007.

8 Polarization & Death

¹ Harpur 1991:16. See also his updated volume 2011.

² Coren 2005.

³ Line from Randy Newman, “Old Man on the Farm,” 1977; *Little Criminals* album, Warner Bros.

⁴ Wente 2009.

⁵ Freud 1927.

⁶ Richler 2010:18.

⁷ For expositions of the positions various religions take on life after death, see, for example, Harpur 1997 and 2011.

⁸ Bibby 2002:133-136.

⁹ The Pearson correlation coefficient r 's for the three religiosity measures and belief in life after death are .437, .316, and .664 respectively for adults, and .363, .311, and .612 for teenagers.

¹⁰ The r 's for belief in God and belief in life after death is .654 for adults and .440 for teens.

¹¹ The Pearson correlation coefficient r 's are as follows: heaven-hell .790; LAD heaven .728, LAD hell .657.

¹² Rigler 2008.

¹³ Pausch 2008:191-192.

¹⁴ Apostle Paul, Philippians 1.23-25.

¹⁵ *Lethbridge Herald*, September 25 and following.

¹⁶ World Values Survey 2000.

¹⁷ The Pearson r 's: attendance and God .270, LAD .232, heaven .303; God and LAD .411, heaven .531; LAD and heaven .639.

¹⁸ Freud 1957:89.

¹⁹ Wente 2009.

²⁰ Stiller 2001.

²¹ Kreeft 1990.

9 The Comeback

¹ Durkheim 1965:477-479.

² An earlier version of some of the following material appeared in my chapter in Hewitt 1993.

³ See, for example, Sorokin 1957, Davis 1949, and Bell 1977.

⁴ Davis 1949:542-544.

⁵ Bell 1977.

⁶ Rifkin 1980.

⁷ See, for example, again Roozen et. al 1990, Brady 1991, Koop 1991.

⁸ Naisbitt and Aburdene 1990.

⁹ Durkheim 1965:477-479.

¹⁰ Davis 1949.

¹¹ See, for example, de Souza 2010 re: the government's apparent commitment to secularism.

¹² Bagnell 2011.

¹³ Harpur 1991:15.

¹⁴ For some forthright thoughts about life after death from an Anglican priest, see Nicolosi 2010.

¹⁵ Bagnell (2010) offers an excellent, brief overview of the United Church's numerical decline, its current resources problems, and hopes for the future.

¹⁶ Butler Bass 2006:45; this is her central thesis.

¹⁷ Harris 2009.

¹⁸ Kelley, 1972.

¹⁹ See, for example, Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973 and Bibby 2003.

²⁰ See Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973ff and Bibby 2003.

²¹ For a helpful analysis of "Christian," see Clarke and Macdonald, 2007.

²² Cox 2009:1.

²³ Yancey 2010:4.

²⁴ Reynolds 2011.

²⁵ See Mead 2010 and Reynolds 2010.

²⁶ Mead 2010:2.

²⁷ Mead 2010:2.

²⁸ Allen 2009:20.

²⁹ Thomas 2010:96.

³⁰ Mead 2010:2-3.

³¹ Thomas 2010:94

³² Thomas 2010:95.

³³ Thomas 2010:93.

³⁴ Thomas 2010:94-95.

³⁵ Thomas 2010:94.

³⁶ Allen 2009:3.

³⁷ Thomas 2010:95.

- ³⁸ Thomas 2010:101.
³⁹ Allen 2009:2.
⁴⁰ Allen 2009:2.
⁴¹ Mead 2010:3.
⁴² For research that includes examples of hybrid and non-hybrid possibilities and remains relevant see Brinkerhoff and Bibby 1985.
⁴³ Thomas 2010:95.
⁴⁴ Thomas 2010:95.
⁴⁵ Thomas 2010:95.
⁴⁶ Thomas 2010:95.
⁴⁷ Allen 2009:98.
⁴⁸ Thomas 2010:97.
⁴⁹ Thomas 2010:101.

Conclusion

- ¹ Levin 2010.
² Geertz 1968.
³ Weber 1963.
⁴ Taylor 2007:727.
⁵ See, for example Wade 2009 and Tiger and McGuire 2010, and Brian Bethune's interview with Tiger in *Maclean's* 2010.
⁶ Bibby 2002:165-182; Berger 1963.
⁷ Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009. For excellent informative and provocative reviews, see Goldstein 2009 and Rosin 2009.
⁸ Yancey 2010:7.
⁹ Thielike 1960.
¹⁰ Thielike 1960.
¹¹ Psalm 23; combination of KJV and NRSV.
¹² Rolheiser 1990:241.
¹³ For an account of the Olympic Stadium mass, see, for example, Sutherland 2010.
¹⁴ Yakabuski 2009.
¹⁵ Allen 2009:1.
¹⁶ Milne 2010.
¹⁷ Cox 1995:299.
¹⁸ Cox 2009:19-20.
¹⁹ Stark and Glock 1968:223-224.
²⁰ Cited in Stark and Glock 1968:224.
²¹ Durkheim 1965:475.
²² Bibby 1993:181.

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