

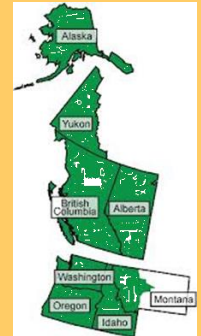
# Millennials and the Gods



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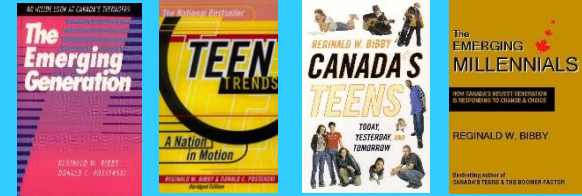
# ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors focus on young adults under the age of 30 in reporting the results of two major Canadian national surveys spanning 2015 and 2016. The surveys, involving some 6,000 people, offer unique intergenerational and trend data that provide an update on religion and spirituality in the lives of Canadians.

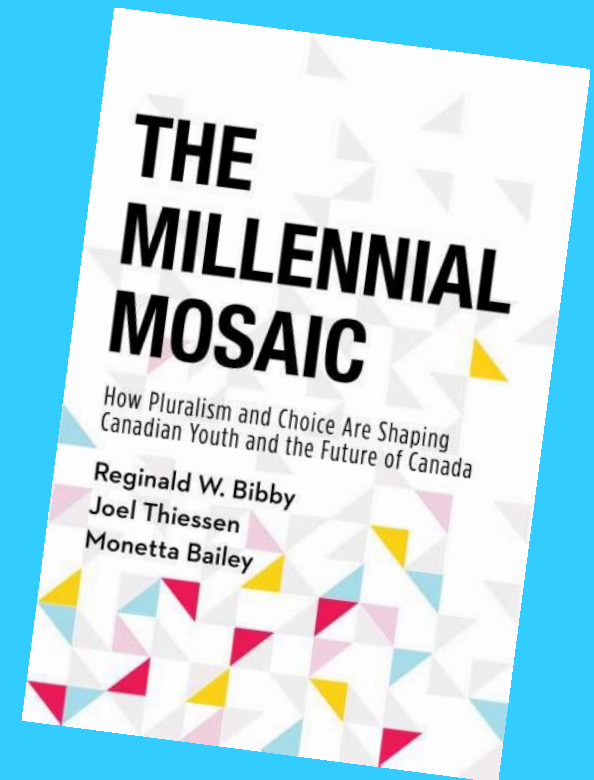
The authors find that, religion and spirituality continue to be present for large numbers of young Millennials. Beliefs, practices, involvement, and the expression of spiritual needs characterize the lives of many. But things are different. A noteworthy core of about 1 in 3 young people have little use for organized religion. Religious polarization is more blatant than perhaps at any time in Canadian history. Further, just as Millennials and other Canadians have an unprecedented number of choices as they live out life in Canada, today's emerging generation has all kinds of choices when it comes to religion and spirituality. So it is that there is less consensus on conventional beliefs, a greater sense that organizational involvement is optional, and a recognition that spiritual needs can be met in extremely diverse ways – if they have to be met at all. Millennials have the choice of opting for faith, bypassing it, or drawing on some of its features when they find it is expedient to do so.

What stands out from their findings and the research of others is the pervasiveness of individualism, choice, and subjectivity in how Millennials – regardless of religious tradition – approach religion and spirituality. Similar inclinations have been documented in research in Europe and the United States. Although parents and family are invariably the most influential source in the faith development of their offspring, Millennials want control and choice, with technology, the Internet, and social media assisting in exposing them to the limitless religious and spiritual options available. Significantly, the survey findings suggest that there is limited interest in organized religion on the part of two very visible and vocal groupings – Indigenous peoples and the LGBTQ community. The authors conclude with some reflections on American Millennials, as well as implications for the future of religion in Canada and beyond.

# Background



- Project Teen Canada surveys: 1984-1992-2000-2008
- Project Teen Canada 2015-2016



- **Extensive Data, Analysis Possibilities**

- **Project Teen Canada**

*1984-1992-2000-2008*

- **Project Canada adults**

*1975-80-85-90-95-00-05*

- **2015 & 2016 updates**

*-6,000; >1,000 18-29, 500 18-23*

- **Age cohort comparisons**

*Millennials, GenXers,  
Boomers, Pre-Boomers*

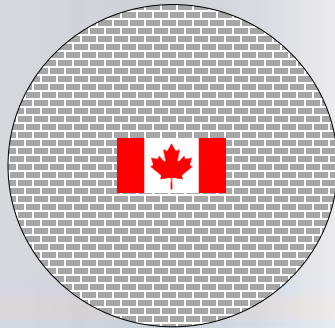
- **Trend comparisons**

- **Cohort analyses**

# • Our Central Thesis

Millennials are being shaped by our primary emphases on

- ✓ pluralism &
- ✓ choice



The impact is everywhere...

values, enjoyment, personal & social concerns, social attitudes, views of institutions, sexualities, equality, families, **religion & spirituality**, expectations & aspirations

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# • Millennial Religions and Spiritualities

Much has been made of the possibility Millennials are less religious than older adults in both Canada and the United States.

According to the Pew Research Center, Millennials born since around 1980 are much less likely than older Americans to identify with a religion, attend services, pray, or consider religion to be an important part of their lives. The asterisk; in some areas such as beliefs, they do not differ all that much from older Americans.

The unaffiliated level among younger Canadians is similarly at a current all-time high.

The important question in both settings is whether the apparent growth in no religion inclinations will continue, or reflects life-stage and will turn out to be short-lived.

Pew thinks it will be permanent.

If Millennials are not “into” religion, the question is where are they not only with respect to supernatural beliefs but spirituality more generally? And what the implications for how they live – and how they die?

Our surveys provide us with considerable data to address these questions.



# The Gods

- ✓ Religion and spirituality continue to be present for large numbers of Millennials
- ✓ But things are different: a solid core have no use for religion or beliefs
- ✓ Those who embrace religion: have never been more selective

# Select Beliefs

**Table 6.1 Select Conventional Religious Beliefs  
of Millennials and Other Adults**

“Do you believe ... ”

% Indicating “Yes, I definitely do” or “Yes, I think so”

	ALL	Millennials 1986–plus (18–29)	Xers 1966–1985 (30–49)	Boomers 1946–65 (50–69)	Pre-Boomers Pre-1946 (70-plus)
God or a higher power exists	73	66	72	76	80
God or a higher power cares about you personally	61	53	59	63	70
That Jesus was the Divine Son of God	59	50	57	63	68
You have experienced God's presence	47	44	46	48	54
In life after death	66	70	66	65	59
In heaven	63	62	62	65	64
In hell	42	46	44	39	35
In angels	62	59	62	64	58
That you have been protected from harm by a guardian angel	56	52	55	60	57

Shading: highlights differences of 10% points or more

**Table 6.2 Select Less Conventional Supernatural Beliefs  
of Millennials and Other Adults**

“Do you believe ... ”

% Indicating “Yes, I definitely do” or “Yes, I think so”

	ALL	Millennials 1986–plus (18–29)	Xers 1966–1985 (30–49)	Boomers 1946–65 (50–69)	Pre-Boomers Pre-1946 (70–plus)
Miraculous healing sometimes occurs	69	61	67	71	79
We can have con- tact with the spirit world	50	53	57	48	31
We can communi- cate with the dead	42	44	48	42	25
Some people have psychic powers enabling them to predict events	51	39	54	57	44
You personally have experienced an event before it happened (precog- nition)	49	45	52	52	37
In astrology.	35	39	38	32	30
That you yourself will be reincarnated	33	36	33	33	27

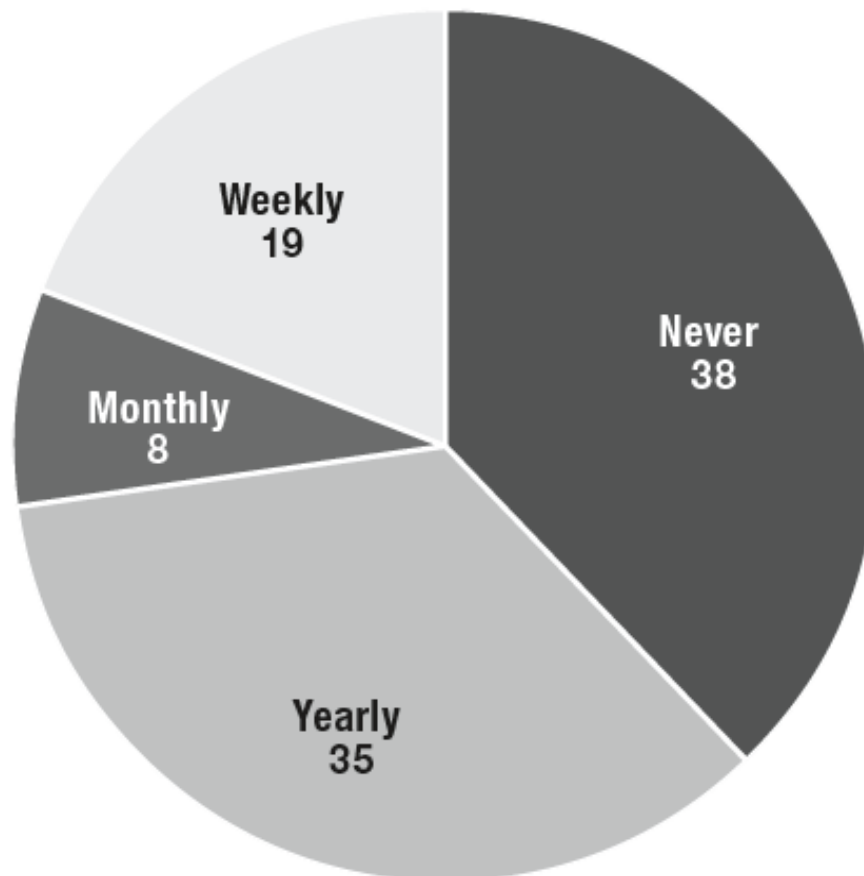
# Select Practices



**Table 6.3 Religious Identification and Select Practices of Millennials and Other Adults**

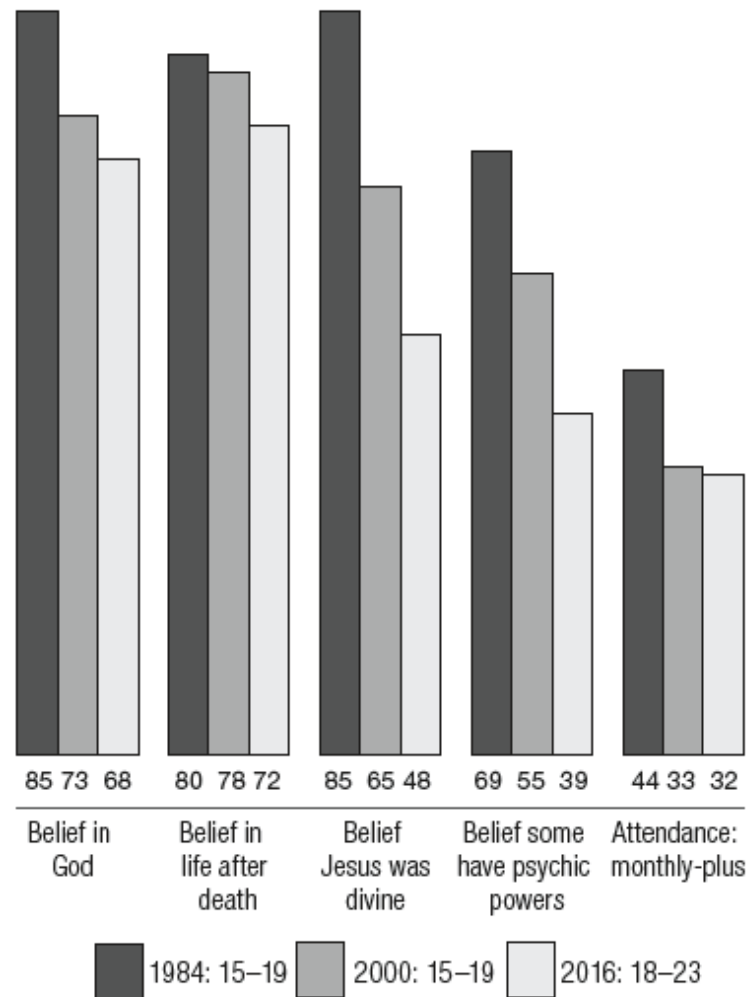
	ALL	Millennials 1986–plus (18–29)	Xers 1966–1985 (30–49)	Boomers 1946–65 (50–69)	Pre-Boomers Pre-1946 (70-plus)
<b>Identification</b>					
Identify with a religion	79%	72	76	83	88
<b>Weekly-plus</b>					
Service attendance	14	18	12	11	25
Private prayer	38	33	33	41	47
Table grace	19	24	17	16	22
Scripture reading	13	18	12	11	16
Watch worship services online	4	7	5	3	1
Practice other spiritual activities online	6	9	7	4	3
Feel strengthened by your faith	29	27	27	28	39
Feel you experience God's presence	25	23	22	26	33

Figure 6.1 Frequency of Service Attendance: Millennials (%)



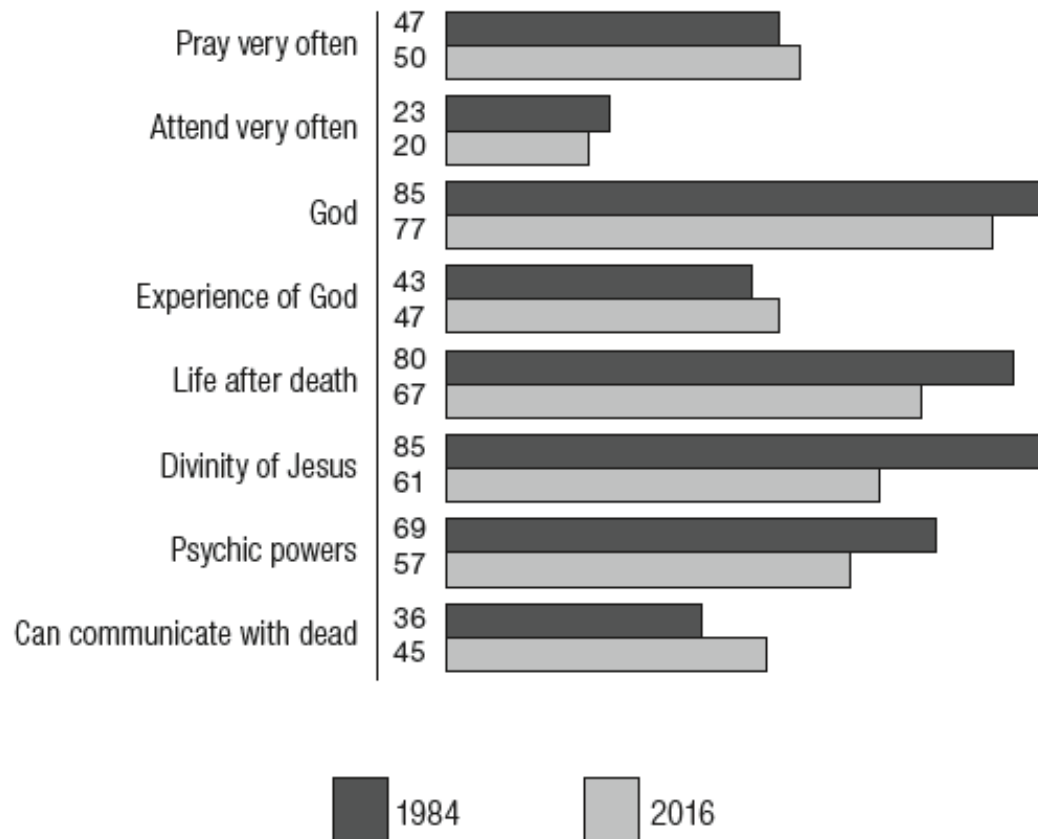
# Beliefs and Practices – Trend Data

Figure 6.3 Select Beliefs and Practices of Youth: 1984, 2000, 2016 (%)



# Beliefs and Practices – Changes with Age

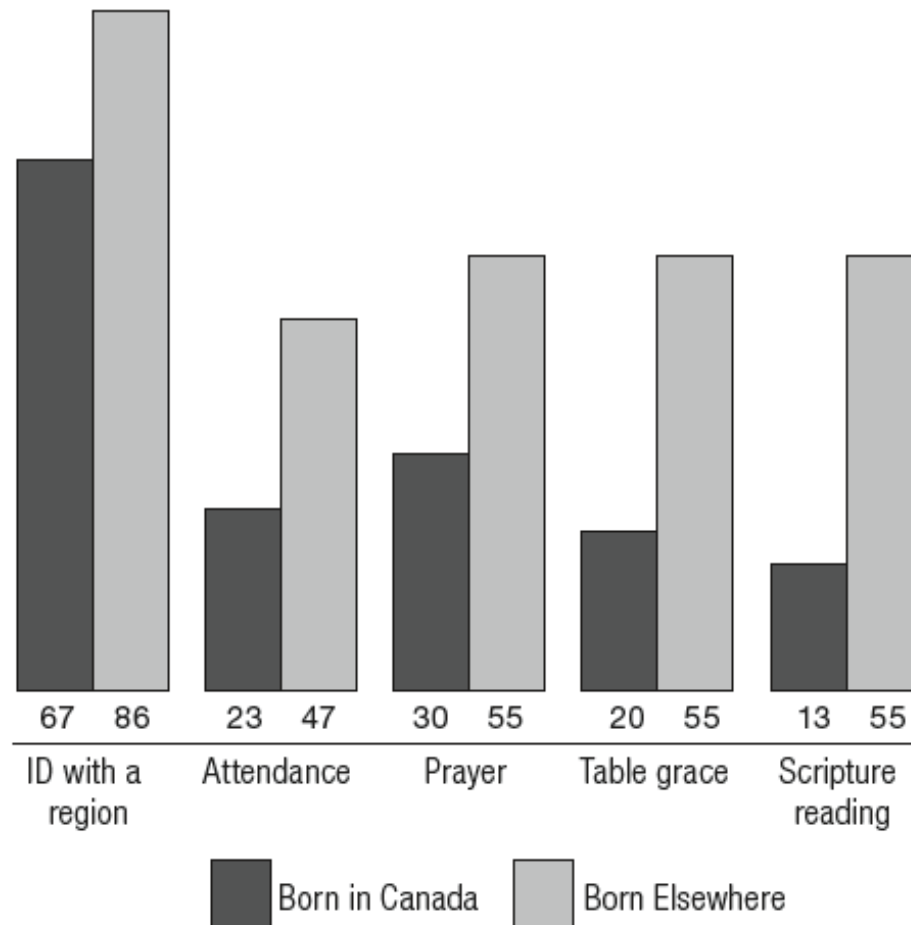
Figure 6.4 Select Beliefs and Practices: Teens 15–19 in 1984 as Adults 47–51 in 2016 (%)\*



\*In 2016: pray = weekly-plus; attend = monthly-plus.

# Religion & Birthplace

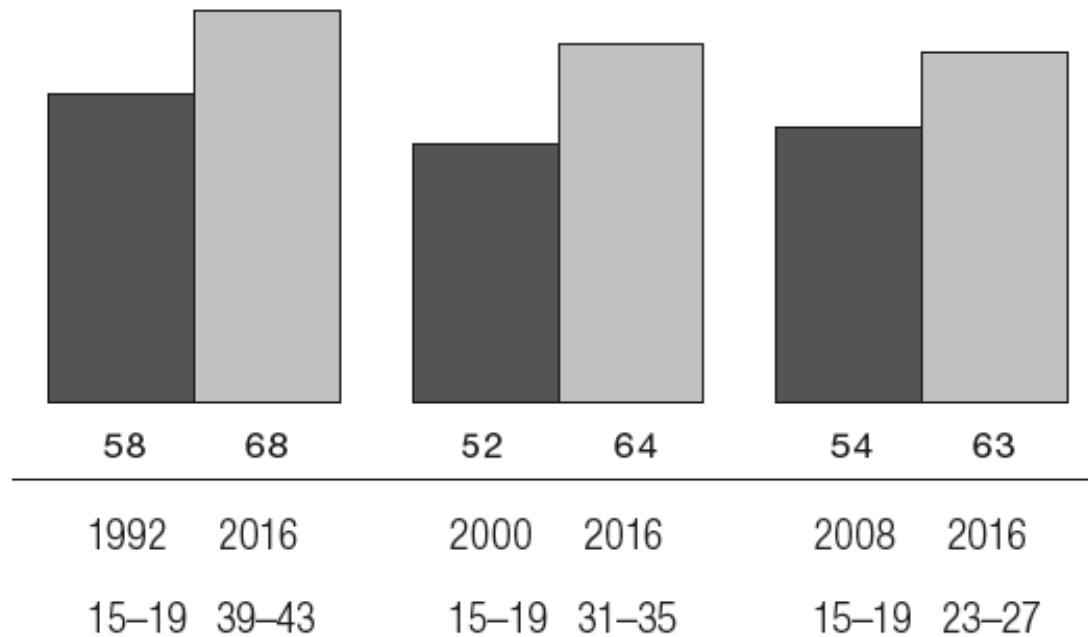
Figure 6.2 Millennial Practices by Birthplace (%)





# Spirituality

Figure 6.7 Spiritual Needs of Teens: 1992, 2000, 2008, versus 2016 (%)



**Figure 6.5 Religion & Spirituality Self-Descriptions of Millennials and Other Adults (%)**

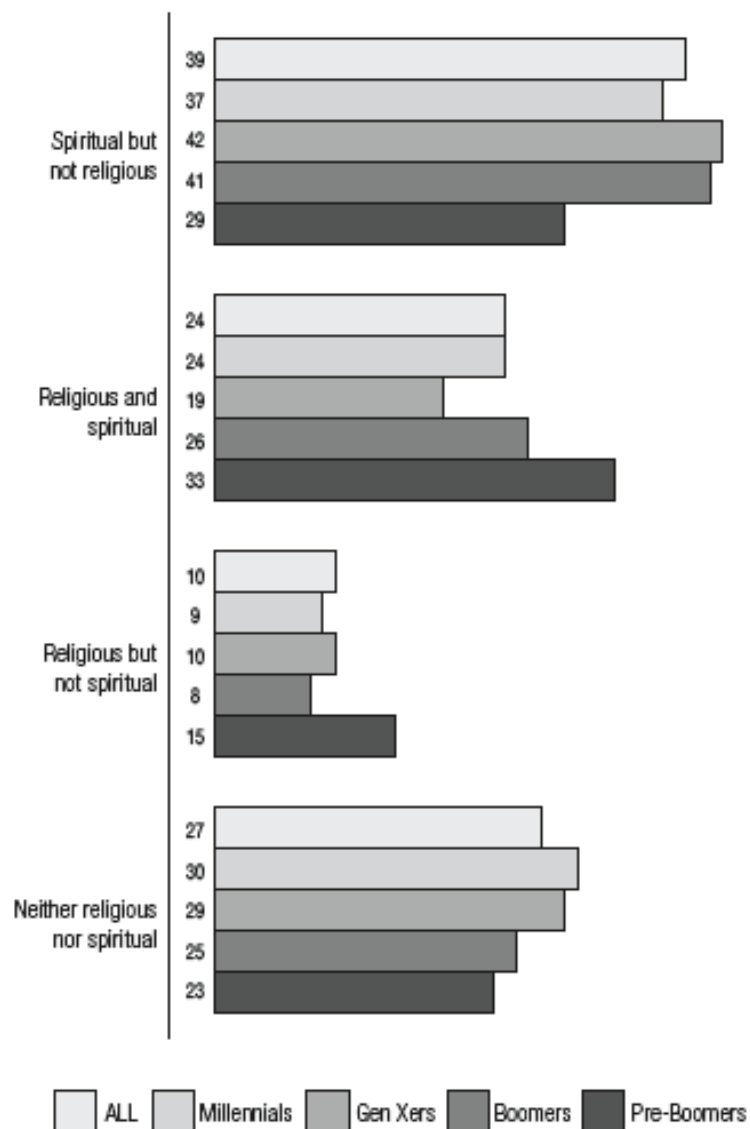
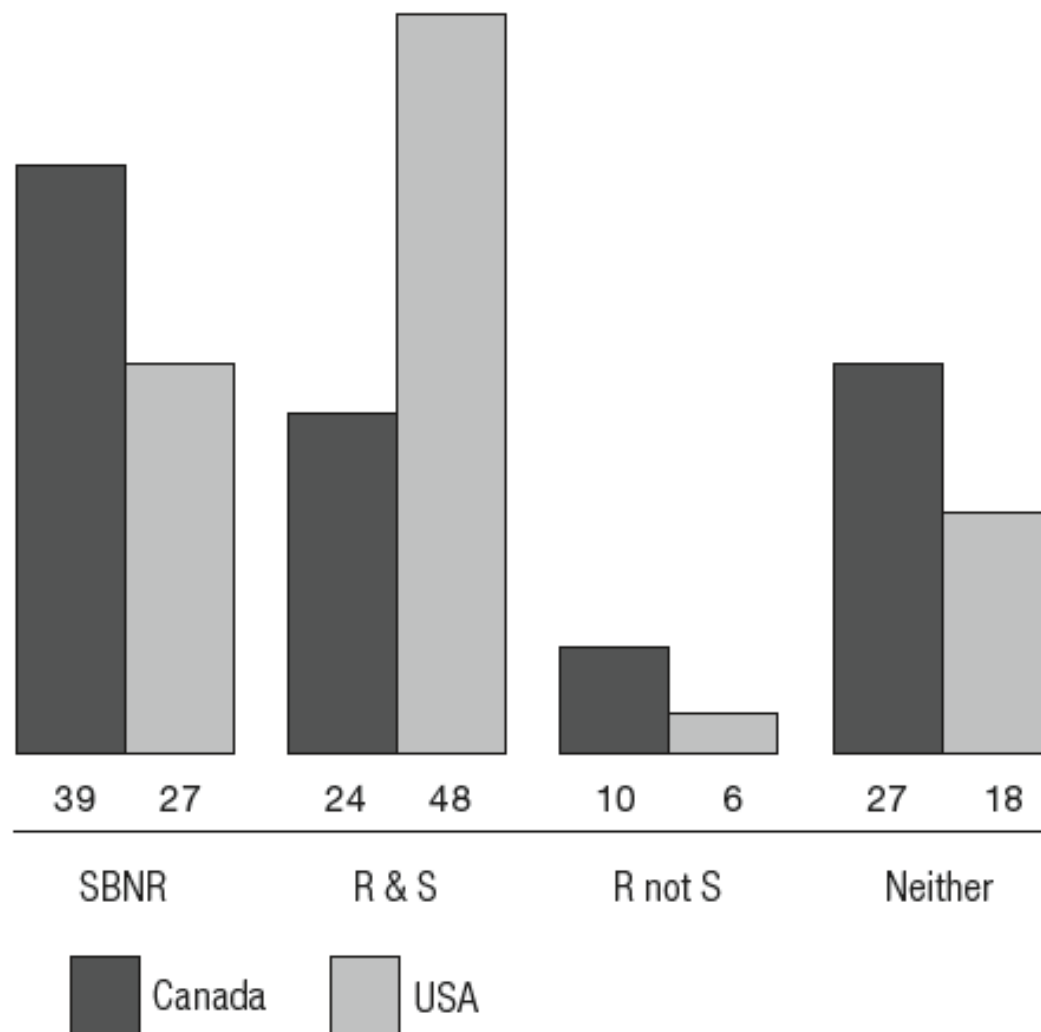


Figure 6.6 Self-Descriptions of Spirituality:  
Americans and Canadians (%)



# Religion's Impact and Importance

Table 6.4 Outlook on Religion of Millennials and Other Adults

	ALL	Millennials 1986–plus (18–29)	Xers 1966–1985 (30–49)	Boomers 1946–65 (50–69)	Pre-Boomers Pre-1946 (70-plus)
<b>Religion's Impact</b>					
The Ten Commandments still apply today	73%	63	68	77	91
I think that religion's overall impact on the world is positive	51	44	47	52	68
I think the decline in religious involvement has been a bad thing for Canada	48	38	42	52	69
I think the growth in atheism is a good thing in Canada	33	47	40	25	16
<b>Religion's Importance</b>					
It's important for parents to teach their children religious beliefs	61	53	56	65	78
I'd be open to more involvement with religious groups if I found it worthwhile	39	42	41	35	43
I prefer to live life without God or congregation	33	47	40	25	16
When you die, you want to have a religious funeral	41	45	40	38	45
You feel you experience God's presence.	25	23	22	26	33

# Are you a “Belieber?”



***“I do not want to shove this down anyone’s throat. I just wanna honestly live like Jesus. Not be Jesus — I could never — I don’t want that to come across weird. He created a pretty awesome template of how to love people and how to be gracious and kind. If you believe it, he died for our sins ... It doesn’t make you a Christian just by going to church. I think that going to church is fellowship, it’s relationship, it’s what we’re here on the earth to do, to have this connection that you feel there’s no insecurities. I think that’s where we need to be. Like I said, you don’t need to go to church to be a Christian. If you go to Taco Bell, that doesn’t make you a taco.”***

REGINALD W. BIBBY

RESILIENT GODS

BEING PRO-RELIGIOUS, LOW RELIGIOUS,  
OR NO RELIGIOUS IN CANADA

*Not Secularization...*

Religious



Not Religious

*But Polarization...*

---

Pro-Religious

Low Religious

No Religious

***Around the world,  
in every country,  
and within regions within each country,  
people variously  
embrace religion,  
reject religion,  
or are ambivalent toward religion.***

***“Everywhere”  
includes Canada,  
Quebec,  
Ontario,  
& Ottawa.***



# We've checked it out

*Some people say Canadians variously (1) embrace religion, (2) reject religion, or (3) are somewhere in between the two extremes.*

*Where would you be tend to locate yourself ?*

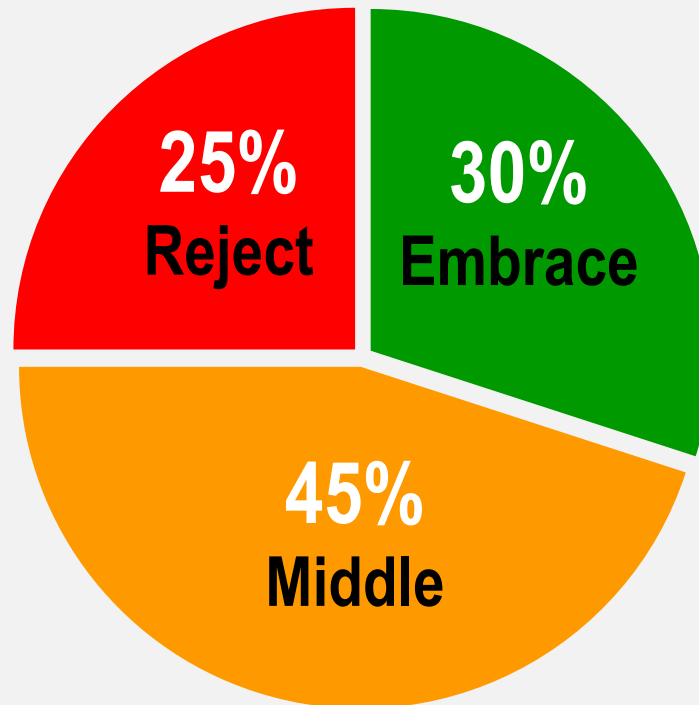
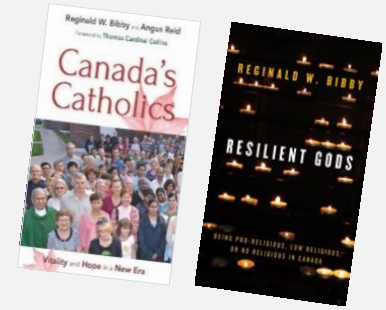
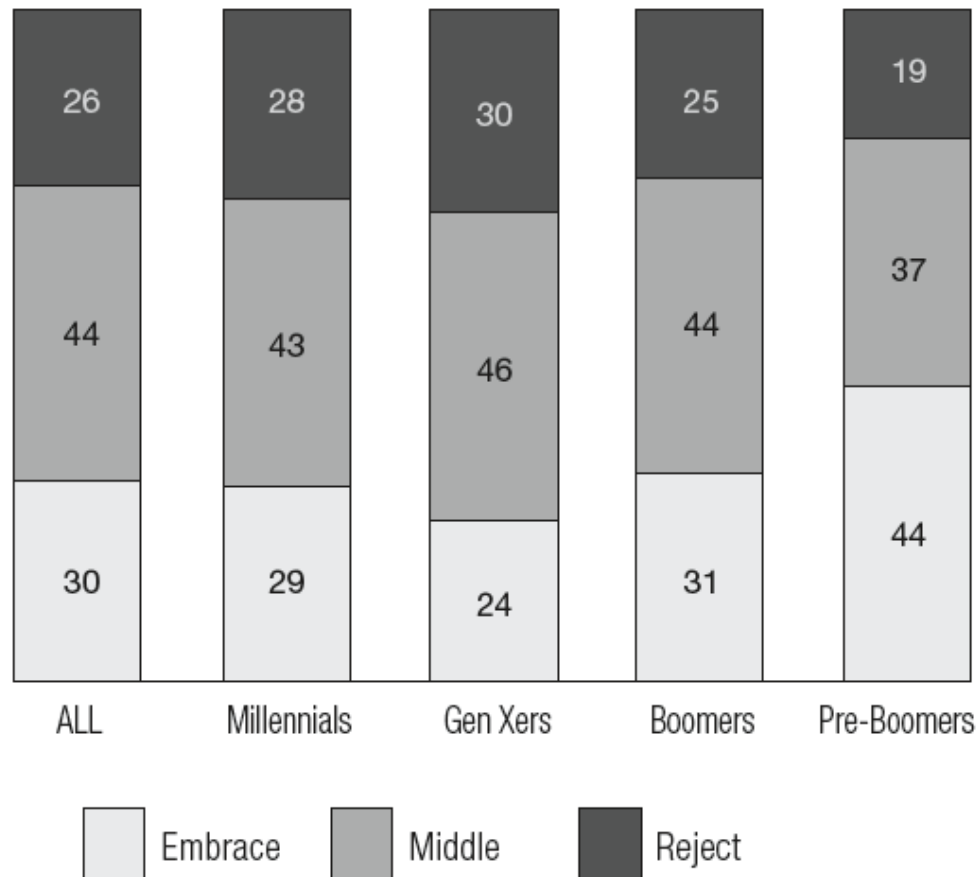


Figure 6.8 Religious Inclinations of Millennials and Other Adults (%)



# Conclusion

- ✓ Religion and spirituality continue to be present for large numbers of Millennials
- ✓ But things are different: a solid core have no use for religion or beliefs
- ✓ And those who do are perhaps more selective than any generation in history

# Suspect the Situation is Similar in the United States



## • Millennial Religion à la Carte

For large numbers of Millennials, religion and spirituality continue to be present, complete with beliefs, practices, involvement, and the expression of spiritual needs.

But that's only part of the picture. Things are different. A noteworthy core of about 1 in 3 Millennials frankly have little use for organized religion. Religious polarization is more blatant than perhaps at any time in Canadian history.

Further, today's emerging generation has all kinds of choices when it comes to religion and spirituality.

So it is that there is less consensus on conventional beliefs, a greater sense that organizational involvement is optional, and a recognition that spiritual needs can be met in extremely diverse ways – if they have to be met at all. Millennials have the choice of opting for faith, bypassing it, or drawing on some of its features when they find it is expedient to do so.

Overall, it is apparent that individualism, choice, and subjectivity are pervasive – regardless, incidentally – of religious tradition.

## THE MAGNIFIED MOSAIC

### Millennial Beliefs by Select Variables

	God or higher power exists	Communicate with dead	Attend monthly+	Have spiritual needs	Open to involvement	Embracing	Rejecting
NATIONAL	66%	44	26	60	42	29	28
Catholic	81	54	22	60	48	33	10
Protestant	83	35	54	77	49	51	10
Other world faith	67	67	32	74	37	33	9
No religion	32	31	2	34	33	3	66
Outside Quebec	67	40	30	59	49	31	27
Quebec	65	57	14	64	20	21	30
Urban	65	43	26	59	43	27	29
Rural	73	46	27	67	32	39	19
Women	67	47	23	66	39	26	28
Men	66	40	33	54	45	33	27
Degree-plus	66	40	19	58	47	15	29
Some post-secondary	65	41	25	66	36	28	30
High school or less	67	47	30	57	46	33	26
Born elsewhere	78	34	49	76	48	41	20
Born in Canada	65	45	22	58	41	27	29
Visible minority	75	47	36	63	48	34	22
Caucasian	62	43	22	59	39	27	30
Indigenous*	71	55	12	60	37	17	37
Non-Indigenous*	70	46	23	66	41	26	29
LGBTQ*	51	44	4	49	24	9	52
Heterosexual*	73	46	21	65	40	26	27

\*Millennials and Gen Xers combined because of small sample sizes.