



The Evangelical Fellowship
of Canada

CANADA WATCH

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What Are Canadians Saying to the Church?

by Aileen Van Ginkel

According to statistics, our neighbours are open to our message.

Survey Studies Evangelical Faith

A telephone survey conducted by the Ipsos-Reid Corporation between September 23rd and October 12th, 2003, described in several areas the landscape of evangelicalism in Canada. The survey was sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Focus on the Family Canada, Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and World Vision Canada.

The survey was conducted to update and compare results of a previous study done in 1993 by Angus-Reid and Dr. George Rawlyk, a professor of history at Queen's University. Its sponsors asked additional questions related to current issues and trends.

With 3000 Canadians polled, the margin of error was +/- 1.8 %, 19 times out of 20, and represents reliable results.

Sponsors drew conclusions about Evangelicals compared to non-Evangelicals and the involvement of Evangelicals in the broader Christian culture. The survey raised questions for Christian mission, ministry and witness in Canada.

How many are we?

The survey results demonstrate that 19% of Canadians (12% Protestant and

7% Catholic) are "Evangelicals," based on six indicators:

1. belief that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provides the way for the forgiveness of one's sins;
2. belief that the Bible is the Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy; and
3. commitment of one's life to Christ and self-identification as a "converted Christian";
4. disagreement with the statement that "the concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in these modern times";

5. disagreement with the statement, "Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God"; and
6. weekly church attendance.

When all six indicators were present in a response, the respondent was classified as an "Evangelical," either Protestant or Catholic. These respondents were compared to the rest of Canadians in terms of all the survey questions, providing a basis for insight into how Evangelicals think and act in several areas of life.

Although 19% of Canadians are Evangelical, a high percentage agreed with Evangelicals when responding to various statements of belief and practise.

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...the percentage of Canadians who agree with the statements *forgiveness through Christ*, and *committed life to Christ* is increasing.

Canadians and Evangelical Indicators

% of Canadians agree in 2003

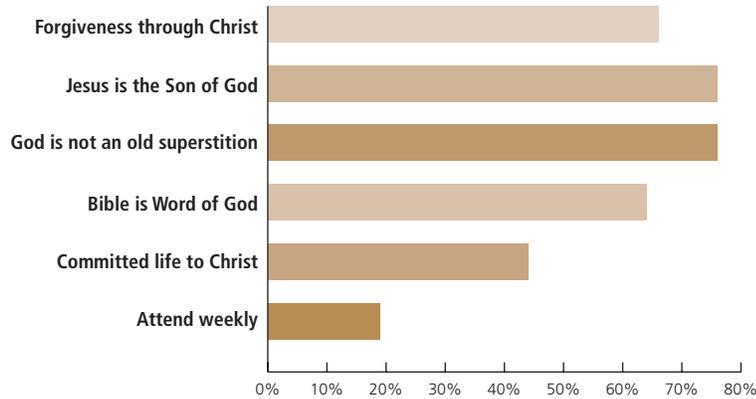


Table 1: Canadians Agree with Evangelicals in Several Areas of Belief and Practice

Responses in 1993 and 1996 indicate that the percentage of Canadians who agree with the statements *forgiveness through Christ*, and *committed life to Christ* is increasing. Yet the percentage who agree that *Jesus is the Son of God* and that *God is not an old superstition* is declining, as is the percentage of those who attend church weekly.

The ten-year comparison reveals that the number of Evangelicals is on the rise, up from 16% in 1993 (11% Protestant, 5% Catholic) to 19% in 2003 (12% Protestant, 7% Catholic). The ten-year comparison data also suggests a possibly increasing gap between those who believe that *Jesus is not God* and that *God is an old superstition*, and those who don't.

There is also a significant contrast between the increased percentages of those who believe that *God has provided a way of forgiveness* and have *committed their lives to Christ* with those who attend church weekly. This raises the question of whether churches are providing the kind of community that nurtures the faith and practise of all Canadians who claim they have committed their lives to Christ.

Canadians and Evangelical Indicators

% of Canadians agree

	1993	1996	2003
Forgiveness through Christ	61%	63%	66%
Jesus is the Son of God	84%	80%	76%
God is not an old superstition	78%	77%	76%
Committed life to Christ	29%	35%	44%
Attend weekly	23%	21%	19%

Table 2: Ten-year comparisons of percentages of Canadians who agree with selected belief and practise statements. Note that the question about the Bible as the Word of God was asked somewhat differently in 1993 and 1996, so tracking is not possible.

Who are we?

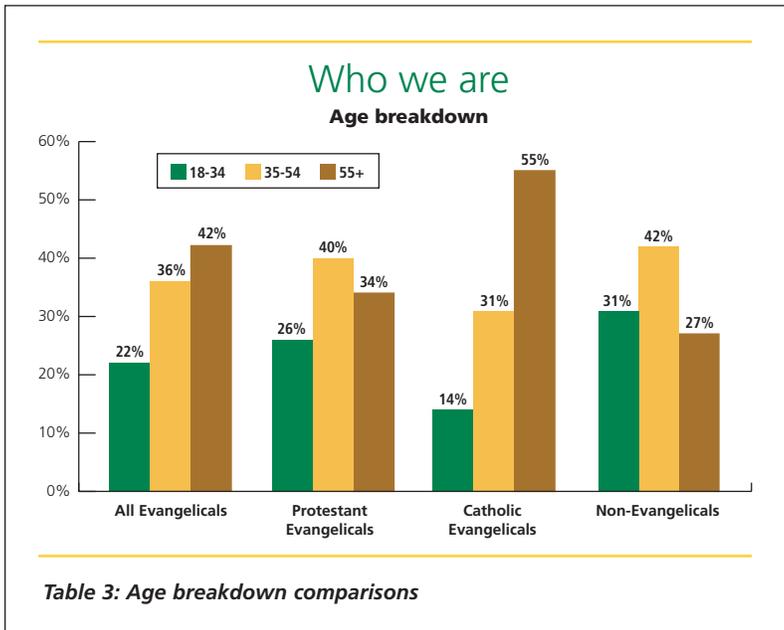
The survey offers a picture of Evangelicals in Canada as 44% male and 56% female compared to non-Evangelicals at 49% male and 51% female. More Evangelicals tend to be married at 64% than non-Evangelicals at 46%, but fewer Evangelicals are divorced (7% compared to 10%) or living common-law (3% compared to 14%). It was not clear whether the common-law situations occurred before respondents became Christians.

In terms of income, 30% of Evangelicals have an income under \$30,000, compared to 25% of non-Evangelicals. However, higher income levels are present in 31% of Evangelical households compared to 39% among non-Evangelicals, suggesting that overall the various income levels are distributed more evenly among Evangelicals than non-Evangelicals.



Where are we?

Differences between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals are significant in relation to age demographics. The survey results indicate that the Evangelical population is “graying” than the non-Evangelical population.



Where we are denominationally is also revealing. Protestant Evangelicals are found among both the historic denominations (29% worship in Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United churches) and the more predominantly Evangelical denominations (71%).

Several questions arise from this data:

1. Given our “graying” population, how well are we relating to youth and children within our midst?
2. How likely is it that they will call themselves “Evangelical” or, more important, remain practising Christians when they are in their middle and later years?
3. In relation to the denominational spread of survey respondents who present as “Evangelical,” do we operate with unwarranted stereotypes about where they worship?
4. Are we aware and supportive of those who may feel themselves to be in minority situations within their denominations?

What do we look like in our beliefs and practices?

	Total Population	All Evangelicals	Protestant Evangelicals	Catholic Evangelicals
The word marriage should apply exclusively to the legally recognized union of a man and a woman.	35%	54%	58%	47%
The word marriage should also apply to the legally recognized union of two men or two women.	28%	7%	6%	8%
The word marriage should apply exclusively to the legally recognized union of a man and a woman and there should be some other legal term for the legally recognized union between two men or women.	36%	38%	35%	45%

Table 4: Comparing Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals on attitudes toward the definition of marriage

Evangelicals are much more likely to attend religious services on a weekly or monthly basis than non-Evangelicals (91% compared to 21%), yet they are much closer to non-Evangelicals when it comes to the statement, *I don't think you need to go to church in order to be a good Christian*. While Evangelical respondents are regular church attenders (or else they wouldn't be in that category), a majority of them (59%) agreed strongly or moderately with this statement (85% of non-Evangelicals agreed also).

With respect to evangelism, almost 80% of Evangelicals were inclined to agree with the importance of encouraging non-Christians to become Christian. Most non-Evangelicals, however, were inclined to disagree (78%).

The expressions of belief and practise among Evangelicals and the total Canadian population also differ sharply in relation to the political issues around the definition of marriage and the prospect of same-sex couples being allowed to marry.



Priorities for the Church according to Evangelicals and all other Canadians

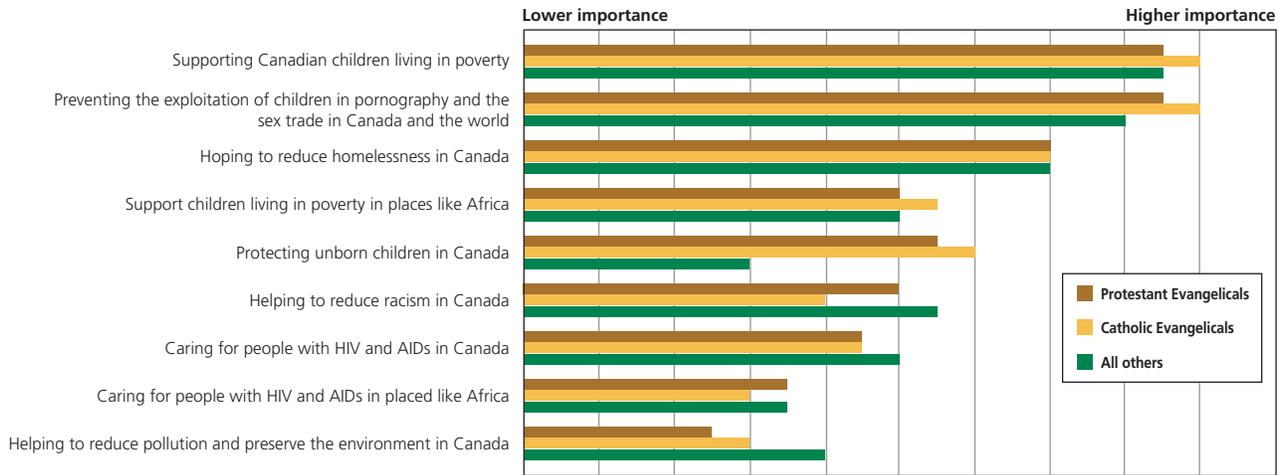


Table 5: Comparing Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals on ranking priorities for the Church in Canada

Evangelicals are much less likely to agree that the word “marriage” should apply to the legally recognized union of two men or two women. However, 38% closely agree with all Canadians that the word “marriage” should apply exclusively to a union between a man and a woman and that there should be another legal term for a legally recognized union of two men or two women. Interestingly, while 51% of all Canadians agreed that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, this support dropped to only 28% if some other legal term is used to recognize same-sex unions

The Ipsos-Reid survey respondents were asked to rank the relative importance of nine areas of social action on the part of the Church in Canada. The priorities that they were asked to rank included:

1. supporting Canadian children living in poverty
2. supporting children living in poverty in places like Africa
3. helping to reduce pollution and preserve the environment in Canada
4. helping to reduce racism in Canada
5. helping to reduce homelessness in Canada
6. caring for people with HIV and AIDS in Canada
7. caring for people with HIV and AIDS in places like Africa
8. protecting unborn children in Canada
9. preventing the exploitation of children in pornography and the sex trade in Canada and the world

The responses to the ranking questions resulted in Evangelicals placing highest importance on helping children in need and reducing homelessness. Protecting unborn children had a medium priority for Evangelicals and helping to reduce pollution scored lowest. Similarly non-Evangelicals placed highest emphasis on helping children and reducing homelessness. However, significant differences emerge in protecting the unborn: non-Evangelicals ranked this as the Church’s lowest priority. In contrast they ranked the reduction of pollution as third-lowest.

The statistics related to belief and practise indicate that while Evangelicals are regular church attenders themselves, they tend not to insist on church attendance as an indicator of whether or not a person is a good Christian. They believe strongly, however, in the importance of evangelism.

While they differ sharply on issues related to the definition of marriage, they see eye to eye on most points in ranking priorities for the Church in Canada.

Questions emerge:

1. Do our churches uphold the value of regular attendance while allowing for other ways of experiencing worship, either individually or with small groups?
2. What are Evangelicals who hold orthodox beliefs and have a strong relationship with God missing in their church experience?
3. How willing are we to work with non-Evangelical Canadians on issues of common concern?



Opportunities For Collaborative Impact

The survey results imply that six million Canadian adults participate in an orthodox and vibrant form of Christianity. They believe strongly in the need to protect vulnerable children (born and unborn) and in reducing homelessness. They are concerned about caring for people with HIV and AIDS in Canada and, to a lesser degree, in places like Africa. Yet are they contributing as actively as they could or are they holding back, hesitating to enter into the arenas of community life and public policy?

Given our numbers, ought we not to be having a greater impact on our culture?

Given our numbers, ought we not to be having a greater impact on our culture? Many non-Christians expect us to demonstrate our faith and “walk our talk” by protecting vulnerable children, ending homelessness and working with them to reduce pollution and protect the environment.

We are bearers of Good News that relates not only to us as individuals but also to our lives as communities of believers. In many instances, we can engage non-Christians in a common purpose, demonstrating that our actions are based on our hope for new life in Christ and that we are led by God, through the Holy Spirit, in all that we say and do.

We can gain some confidence that together we can do more than we can do alone. The implication is that now is the time for us to undertake Christian mission, ministry and witness – whether organized formally through denominations and agencies or informally in small groups – in the joy that we can have a positive impact on our culture and that, indeed, many Canadians are expecting us to do so.

A Look at the Data

We are doing something right but there’s still work to be done. by Bruce J. Clemenger

According to our survey, 44% of Canadians agree with the statement *I have committed my life to Christ and consider myself to be a converted Christian*. This represents a significant increase of 15% since 1993, and 9% since 1996 in response to the same question.

Evidently the Good News is being proclaimed and received, whether through television ministries, initiatives such as the *Jesus video* or Alpha, or by believers simply talking to their neighbours and colleagues.

Canadians also expressed high levels of agreement with other basic Christian beliefs.

More than two thirds believe that *through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God provided the way for the forgiveness of my sins*, up 5% from 1993. *God is understanding and forgiving*, according to 82%, up from 75% in 1993.

Since the majority of Canadians affirm these basic Christian tenets about God, the divinity of Jesus (76%), and His redemptive work, we have a lot in common with our neighbours – sufficient common ground for conversations about the implications of belief on daily life!

But what impact do these increases have in affirming basic Christian belief in Canada?

Fewer Canadians attend church on a regular basis – down to 19%. This is partially explained by the broad agreement that *my private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by the church*. Here, Evangelicals (68% agree strongly or moderately) are

not far behind other Canadians (72%). Likewise, 85% of Canadians say, *I don’t think you need to attend church to be a good Christian*, and 59% of Evangelicals agree. And Evangelicals are the ones who regularly attend church! If not in the local church, where do Christians find fellowship and community?

Commitment to faith without adherence to a church is usually termed “spirituality” rather than “religion,” but it is misleading when the beliefs of the majority are essentially Christian. Are these Christian affirmations an indication of a privatized

If not in the local church, where do Christians find fellowship and community?

faith, or the residual commitments of a generation that attended Sunday School and participated in Christmas plays in public school? Surprisingly though, the statistics show that a high number of young people agree in with the faith statements.

Personalized religion seems to be on the increase. This approach to Christianity is not foreign to the Protestant tradition that emphasizes the priesthood of all believers. But what happens when personalized faith becomes individualistic and believers find no merit in gathering together? What are the implications for the Body of Christ, which, as the term itself suggests, is contrary to the isolation of believers?

The data indicates that our efforts at evangelism have been successful. Perhaps our weakness has been discipleship and the importance of living out our faith in word and deed as part of a community of believers.

