

## **Death of Christian Canada? Do Canadian Church Statistics Support Callum Brown's Theory of Church Decline?**

STUART MACDONALD  
Knox College

---

The decline in church membership in all of Canada's major denominations has been making headlines. Our own statistics show that there were 2,373 fewer Presbyterian members in 1966 than in 1965, a decrease of more than one percent.

The situation calls for concern but it should not cause alarm. There have always been inactive people on communicants rolls . . .

The church and its members will never cease to evangelize, but the true strength of the Christian church cannot be measured by numbers. Pruning dead branches from the tree is just as necessary in the congregation as it is in the garden. The quality of witness is what counts in today's world (*Presbyterian Record* [1967]).<sup>1</sup>

DeCourcy H. Rayner, the editor of the *Presbyterian Record* was correct. Religion is about more than numbers; at the same time, however, statistics of church attendance or membership have become one of the ways in which churches have tested their health and vitality. Churches began to count their congregations in the nineteenth century because they believed these numbers told them something.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, historians have used statistics to advance various arguments and theories related to the changes that we believe have happened to the nature of religion and the strength of religious denominations within Canada and other countries.

While there are various questions we could ask concerning the

nature and practise of religion in Canada, this paper is concerned with discovering when certain measurable indicators of religious behaviour changed among three Protestant denominations that were traditionally dominant within Canada.<sup>3</sup> Influenced by Callum Brown's findings for Britain,<sup>4</sup> this paper examines indicators of religious decline among Anglicans, Presbyterians and the United Church of Canada and argues that the 1960s were the crucial decade in their declension. It was in the late 1950s or early 1960s that decades of uninterrupted growth suddenly shifted for these denominations, a trend that has continued to the present.

Callum Brown's *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (2001) has reframed arguments concerning the timing of religious decline in modern Britain. In dating the origins of religious declension to the 1960s, Brown notes:

For most scholars, Christian religion in Britain, Europe and North America has been in almost constant decay for at least a century, and for some sociologists for even longer – for between two hundred and five hundred years. They have imagined religious decline as one of the characteristics of the modern world, caused by the advance of reason through the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, and through the social and economic dislocation of the industrial revolution.<sup>5</sup>

Brown notes that between 1945 and 1958 British churches were growing and argues that “the dating of religious decline . . . [must be] shifted from the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century.”<sup>6</sup> This was not long term decline, but a sudden sharp turn downwards, sometime in the “long 1960s,” a period he defines as between 1956 and 1973.<sup>7</sup> Brown further suggests that while scholars have imagined a long gradual decline, they have not dissected the implications of a post-religious society.<sup>8</sup> As he states,

What emerges is a story not merely of church decline, but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of “self.” This breach in British history, starting in the 1960s, is something more fundamental than “failing churches.” What is explored and analysed is a short and sharp cultural revolution of the late twentieth century which makes the Britons of the year 2000 fundamentally different in character from those of 1950 or 1900 or 1800, or from people of many other

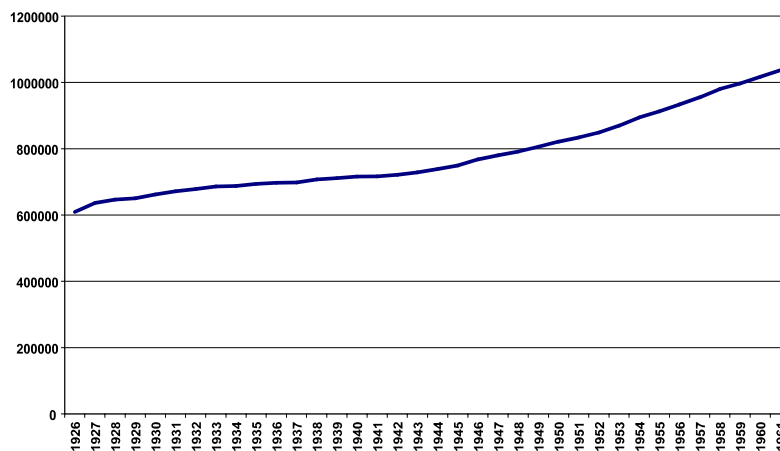
countries.<sup>9</sup>

Could similar arguments also hold true for Canada? To test this we need to turn to Canadian data. Statistics that exist on religion in Canada can be described in the following manner.<sup>10</sup> First, there are census statistics on religion. These are generated every ten years by the statistical bureau of the government of Canada as part of the overall census, of which religion is only one small concern. The responses are to the basic question, “What is your religion?” This question has been asked and the answers tabulated differently over the period of more than a century, but longitudinal comparisons – comparisons over time – are still possible and revealing.<sup>11</sup> What the census data reveals concerns religious identity – what people say or think they are – and not much more. We do not learn about attendance, or membership, or belief from the census data. A second broad category of statistics on religion in Canada is generated by the particular churches or denominations themselves. Most churches count. How and what they count – membership, baptisms, kinds of activities, and so on – varies from denomination to denomination. Some have stricter definitions of membership than others. Cross-denominational comparisons thus need to be undertaken very carefully. At the same time, the data a denomination generates is generally consistent and can be used in longitudinal studies within that denomination. A third category of statistics relates to worship attendance. How many people actually attended a worship service in the past week? These statistics have been collected by independent polling companies and, more recently, by Statistics Canada.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, there are the attitudinal surveys related to belief. Intense polling has been done of individuals as to their faith and religious behaviour. The crucial work of Reginald Bibby over the past decades – as articulated in *Fragmented Gods* (1987), *Unknown Gods* (1993), *Restless Gods* (2002) and other studies<sup>13</sup> – would fall into this category. At the same time, other research firms have also done intense studies on Canadian religious beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

Several introductory points need to be made. First, most of what has been written about religion in Canada in the last decades has relied primarily on attitudinal surveys related to belief. This is certainly true of Bibby’s work, where the focus is understandably on the results of the surveys he has conducted with other data being brought in to supplement and support his findings. While these attitudinal surveys give us important details, they are only available for the last several decades. This data does

not cover the period before the early 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Second, there are weaknesses and limitations to the data in each of these categories. For example, church attendance statistics may over-represent the number actually attending church on a given Sunday.<sup>16</sup> Church-generated statistics have come under criticism. Dean Kelley, in *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, expresses this cautionary concern while still noting their value.<sup>17</sup> It is also true that while some church-generated statistics (for example, membership numbers) can be easily inflated, other data (the number of baptisms, financial data) is much less prone to inflation or similar inaccuracies.

**United Church of Canada Membership, 1926-1961**

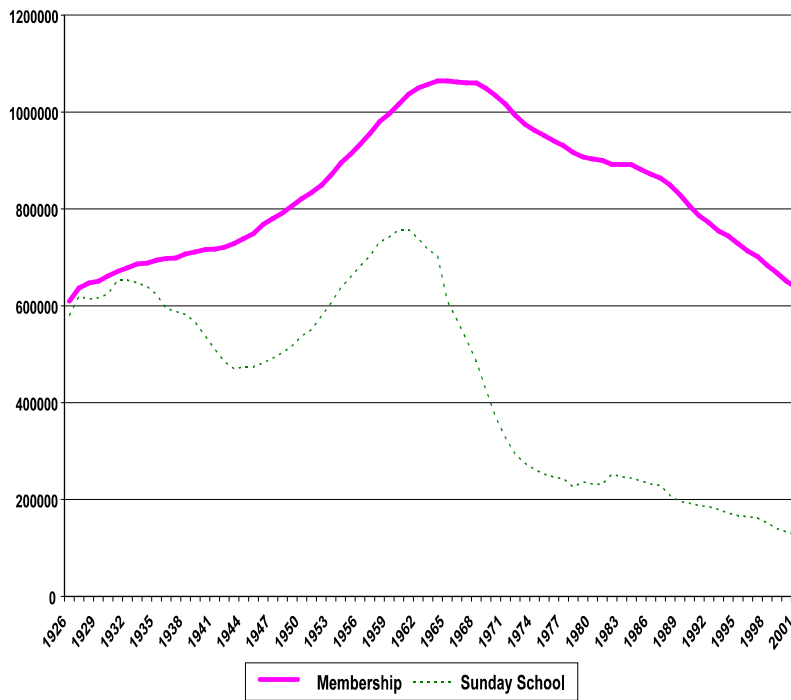


**Graph 1:** United Church of Canada Membership

Finally, a word of caution needs to be expressed in terms of cross-category comparisons. We need to ensure that any comparisons we use address the questions we are asking, and do not mislead us. Mathematical accuracy is not enough. The comparisons we generate must help us better understand the situation regarding religion in Canada. The approach of the political scientist Robert Putnam is helpful – that we consider statistics and use them to “triangulate”: that is, if several data sets all point in a similar direction, we should look closely at what they are telling us.<sup>18</sup> With these cautions in mind, we now turn to look at some of the statistics from each of the three denominations we are considering.

In 1961 if we were to have taken a look at the membership growth in the United Church in Canada over the nearly four decades since its foundation in 1925, the story we would tell would be one of consistent growth (see Graph 1).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, with a membership then standing at slightly over one million and with a Sunday school enrolment of over three quarters of a million, the future for the United Church of Canada looked strong. It is important to begin by noting this. The optimism and certainty that one would have had in 1961 within the United Church was reflected in this data. However, as Graph 2 illustrates, the subsequent story of the United Church has been quite different. Both membership and, even more so, Sunday school enrolment have consistently declined over the last

**United Church of Canada, 1926 - 2001**

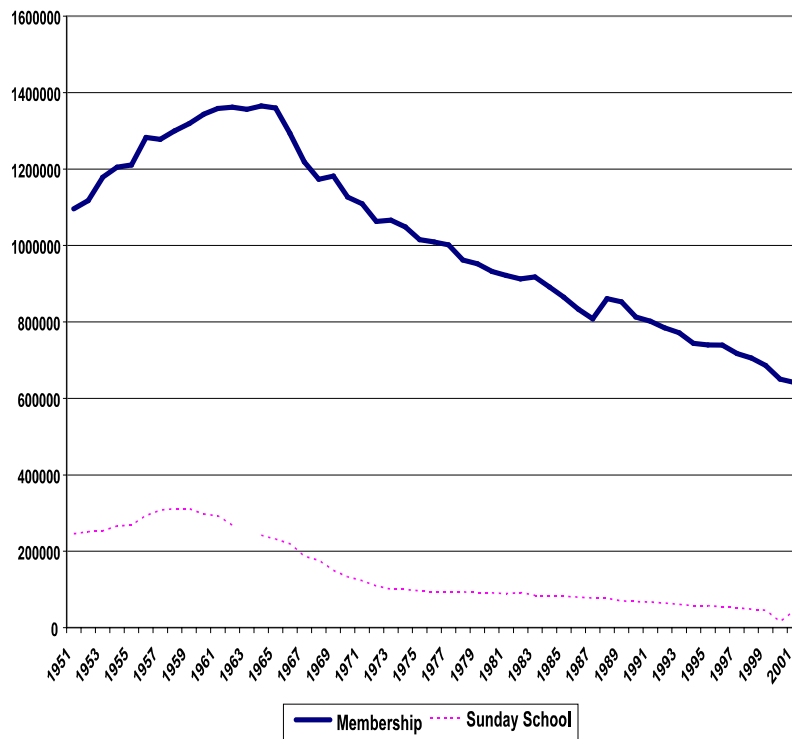


**Graph 2:** United Church of Canada Membership and Sunday School

decades. The peak year for the United Church of Canada’s membership was 1965 with 1,064,033 members, after which membership went into

decline. In 2001 the membership stood at 637,941. Following dramatic growth in the post-war period, Sunday school enrolment reached its peak year in 1961 (757,338), after which time it declined.<sup>20</sup> These trends were not unique to the United Church of Canada. Graph 3 illustrates the membership growth since 1951 of the Anglican Church of Canada until 1964 (1,204,601 members), after which it declined and fell by almost half to 641,845 by 2001. Anglican Sunday schools reached a peak membership in 1958 or 1959 – 311,859 members were recorded in each year – but membership declined after 1960 and stood at less than 45,000 in 2001. The Presbyterian Church in Canada (Graph 4) witnessed similar declines

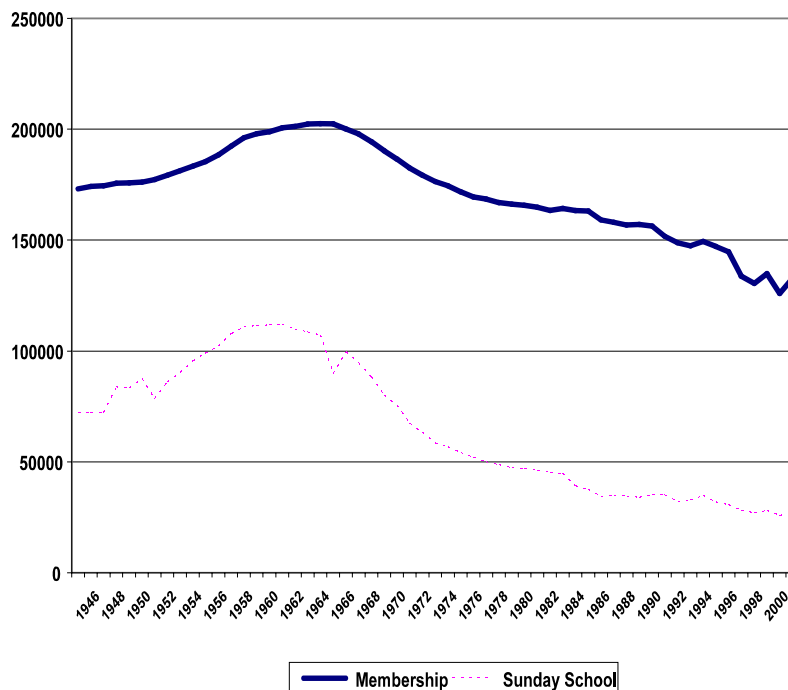
### **Anglican Church of Canada, 1951-2001**



**Graph 3:** Anglican Church of Canada Membership and Sunday School. No Sunday School data was reported for 1963.

during this period. Like the United Church and the Anglicans, the Presbyterians grew from 173,152 members in 1945 to a peak membership of 202,566 in 1964; in 1965 that number fell by sixty-eight members (the first decline since World War II), and by over 2,300 the following year (1966), which, as we noted, prompted comment by DeCourcy Rayner of the *Presbyterian Record*. In a pattern similar to the United Church, Sunday school membership peaked in 1961 (112,157) and has fallen steadily since. In 2001 the membership stood at 132,659 (some 40,000 fewer than in 1945) and Sunday school enrolment stood at slightly over 27,000.

**Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1945-2001**



**Graph 4:** Presbyterian Church in Canada Membership and Sunday School

On one level, there is little new in recognizing that many of these indicators, particularly church membership, declined in the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

What is new (or perhaps an older position that is being re-asserted) is the argument that we need to take these numbers as representative of a crucial turning point and not of a longer trend toward secularization that found its origins in the nineteenth century. In the first edition of *The Church in the Canadian Era* (1972), John Webster Grant pointed to the 1960s as a crucial turning point noting that “Few suspected when the 1960s began that the decade would bring notable surprises in Canadian church life.”<sup>22</sup> However, by the second edition in 1988 a more cautious appraisal of the 1960s as a turning point for change had appeared:

In retrospect we can recognize the warning signs were already there for the reading. Protestant Sunday school enrolment had begun a precipitous decline in the early 1960s that could not be explained altogether by a falling birthrate. Contrary to all appearance, and despite what has been said in a previous chapter, the Gallup poll had already begun to report declining attendance at Sunday services during the supposedly boom years of the 1950s.<sup>23</sup>

One statistic – Gallup poll data on church attendance – was thus given priority over church-generated statistics and, as a result, the growth in the 1950s was dismissed. Various theories concerning the declension of religion in the western world diverted attention away from the 1960s as a crucial turning point.<sup>24</sup> In Canada, the idea that the 1950s did not see growth and was not a golden age was noted in Reginald Bibby’s influential *Fragmented Gods* (1987).<sup>25</sup> As Bibby’s influence has been so important to our understanding of religion in Canada, it is worthwhile to examine his argument. For Protestants the key section began with a discussion of church attendance. According to Gallup poll data cited by Bibby, 60 per cent of Protestants in 1946 claimed to have gone to church in the previous week. By the 1950s, this had already been reduced to 45 per cent and by the middle of the next decade had declined further to 30 per cent. In the 1970s and 1980s this stabilized at about 25 per cent. In spite of this evidence, churches thought they were growing. Reginald Bibby poses the question, “why all the confusion?”<sup>26</sup> and notes: “The problem seems to lie, in part at least, with the failure to take the population increase into account.”<sup>27</sup> Bibby states that “The statistical truth of the matter is that most of Canada’s religious groups were essentially standing still when they thought they were enjoying tremendous growth.”<sup>28</sup> This Protestant illusion was well summed up in the phrase – “numbers up, proportions down.”<sup>29</sup> Bibby notes that the United Church of Canada



maintained a proportional membership of 6.2 per cent of the Canadian population in 1926, increased briefly through the 1930s, but was at 6 per cent in 1946 from which time it declined steadily, reaching 5.7 per cent in 1961 and only 3.5 per cent in 1985.<sup>30</sup> He summarizes this downward trend:

Even during the time of the alleged peak expansion in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, Canada's dominant religious groups saw their membership proportions shrink. No group – including the Pentecostals – increased their proportional share of the national population during religion's alleged golden era.<sup>31</sup>

While there have certainly been developments in Reginald Bibby's thought since the publication of *Fragmented Gods* in 1987, his advocacy of long term trends leading toward declension remains intact.<sup>32</sup>

Changes in the 1960s were thus portrayed as reflective of longer term trends. These three denominations had been in proportional decline throughout the twentieth century and thus decline in the 1960s was not seen as significant but merely the continuation of what was already going on within Canadian religion. This argument was based upon two sets of data as evidence: first, a decline in attendance; and second, the results of a comparison of denominational membership to total Canadian population. But was this latter comparison appropriate for the kinds of interpretations that passed judgement on the vitality and health of these denominations? Certainly it was not an uncommon comparison. The Presbyterian Church in Canada used the same comparison – denominational membership to total Canadian population – in its first report on membership decline in 1971. It too concluded that growth in the 1950s was insignificant.<sup>33</sup> But there is a problem with this comparison: what does it actually tell us? It gives us one more indicator – along with the census – of the way in which Canada was divided along religious lines. What it does not tell us is the vitality of a religious denomination. The reason for this is very simple: a denomination's share of the overall population can go down not based upon anything occurring within that denomination, but based upon other factors affecting the total population. One denomination's share can go down, if another religious denomination is growing. In particular, one of the fundamental realities of the immediate post-World War II period was the growth of the Roman Catholic population within Canada, through both natural increase and immigration. As W.E. Kalbach and W.W. McVey note:

The proportion of foreign born belonging to all Catholic denominations combined increased from 28 to 42 per cent during the twenty years following the 1951 census. Clearly, immigration during the 1950 and 1960s favoured the Catholic denominations.<sup>34</sup>

Roman Catholics went from 43 per cent of the Canadian population in 1941 to 46 per cent by 1961, and to 47 per cent by 1971. What happened in post-war Canada was that many denominations declined in their proportion to the overall population due to this growth among Roman Catholics. As such, the comparison of Anglican membership to total Canadian population tells us very little about Anglicans. We can, however, learn something about Anglicans and other Protestants by using a different comparison.

On the surface, a similar approach was taken by Dean Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald Luidens in *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers*.<sup>35</sup> The important difference is that Hoge, Johnson and Luidens did not compare membership of the traditions they studied to the total population of the United States, but to a baseline of what they believed the traditional strength of that tradition had been. A baseline was necessary for one simple reason – religious identification is not one of the questions asked by the American census. In their study, Hoge, Johnson and Luidens compared Presbyterian membership to a baseline of 2.03 per cent of the American population, while Methodists were compared to a baseline of 6.15 per cent of total population.<sup>36</sup> Scholars interested in Canadian religion have an advantage over their American counterparts due to the fact that the Canadian government asks a census question about religion. Unlike their American counterparts who must create a benchmark in order to do their comparison, Canadian scholars can use census results to compare those of a particular tradition as recorded in the census with those who appear on denominational membership rolls. If it is the religious vitality of particular denominations in which we are interested, this comparison – membership to census proportion<sup>37</sup> – will tell us far more than a comparison of membership to total population.

Table 1 illustrates this data for the three denominations. The 1941 census records 1.7 million Anglicans. Unfortunately, church statistics for that year are not as complete as they should be (membership and Sunday school rolls present in Table 1 draw upon data from 1942). As Table 1 illustrates, by 1951 this number had increased to 1,342,055, followed by

a further increase to 1,650,885 by 1961. During the same two decades the number of Anglicans recorded on the census rose to 2.06 million in 1951 and again to 2.4 million in 1961. The statistics for 1971 saw a dramatic change. Parish rolls listed only 1,232,748 compared to a continued increase in the number of census Anglicans to 2.5 million. As these numbers indicate, while there was a growth throughout of census Anglicans as part of the larger population growth of Canada in this period, the number on parish rolls increased up to 1961, then began to decline. But did the proportion on parish rolls increase in comparison to the number of census Anglicans? In 1942, 53 per cent of census Anglicans noted in the 1941 census appeared on parish rolls. By 1951, 65 per cent of census Anglicans appeared on a parish roll, a proportion which grew to 69 per cent in 1961, before plummeting to 48 per cent in 1971 – a level lower than the proportion in the middle of World War II. For Canadian Anglicans, the period from 1951 and even to 1961 was one of growth in terms of the number of census Anglicans who also appeared on parish rolls. The dramatic decline by 1971 is notable.

Year	Anglican			United Church			Presbyterian		
	Census	Membership and Sunday school	%	Census	Membership and Sunday school	%	Census	Membership & Sunday school	%
1941	1,754,368	928,474	53	2,208,658	1,227,522	56	830,597	254,607	31
1951	2,060,702	1,342,055	65	2,867,271	1,385,040	48	781,747	256,044	33
1961	2,409,068	1,650,885	69	3,664,008	1,794,324	49	818,558	312,797	38
1971	2,543,180	1,232,748	48	3,768,800	1,344,710	36	872,335	250,090	29
1981	2,436,375	1,010,450	41	3,758,015	1,131,755	30	812,105	211,458	26
1991	2,188,115	869,347	40	3,093,120	973,056	31	636,295	190,080	30
2001	2,035,500	686,532	34	2,839,125	764,023	27	409,830	156,940	38

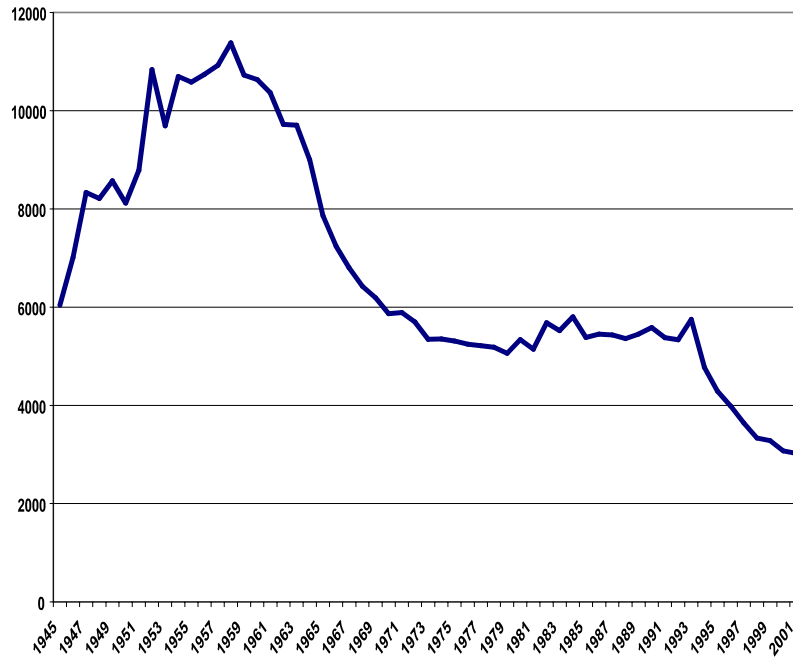
**Table 1:** Comparison of denominational membership and Sunday school enrolments to Census share of the specific denomination.<sup>38</sup>

Data from the United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada is also included in Table 1 and this data shows a similar trend. The United Church of Canada was only sixteen years old when the 1941 census was taken. A close look at its census share and that of the Presbyterian Church suggests that there was still some sorting out after church union. This may explain the very high percentage (56 per cent) of those who indicated on the census that they were United Church who also appeared on the membership and Sunday school rolls. This percentage declined to 48 per cent by 1951. Note that the number of census Pres-

byterians also declined from 1941 to 1951. This suggests that in 1941 there was an ongoing census identification by some individuals as "Presbyterians" even though they now appeared on United Church of Canada rolls. What is notable is that the United Church grew both in its census numbers and in terms of its membership through to 1961, at which point the membership and Sunday school rolls stood at nearly 1.8 million, and the census recorded 3.6 million. Although less dramatic, the membership and Sunday school rolls of the Presbyterian Church in Canada grew through this period, particularly from 1951 to 1961. In this same period the proportion of census Presbyterians on church rolls also increased from 33 per cent to 38 per cent.

The next decade told a dramatically different story for both denominations. The 1971 United Church census figures had increased only slightly to 3.76 million, but the Sunday school enrolment was halved to 327,810 and the membership had also declined to 1,016,900. United Church rolls included only 36 per cent of those who appeared as United Church on the census, a dramatic decline from 49 per cent in one decade. Similarly, census Presbyterians grew in the period from 1961 to 1971 while those on church membership and Sunday school rolls plummeted. The proportion of census Presbyterians on the rolls, not surprisingly, fell to only 29 per cent in 1971. For Presbyterians, as for the other two denominations, this proportion has fallen in each census since, with only one exception, which will be explained below. Thus only 32 per cent of census Anglicans appeared on church rolls in 2001, a decline from the 44 per cent who appeared in 1971, and an even more dramatic decline from the high water mark of 56 per cent in 1961. This occurred while the census numbers, as well as those on the church rolls, all consistently declined. This has been true since 1971 for all three traditions until 1991 to 2001, when the Presbyterian proportional share of census Presbyterians increased from 30 per cent to 38 per cent. This is not a positive trend. It merely shows that the number of census Presbyterians is falling at a more rapid rate (down over 35 per cent from the 1991 census) than the church membership and Sunday school rolls. A comparison of those on the church rolls with those who identified with each of these denominations on the census, displays a general pattern of growth through the post war period to the 1961 census, followed in the 1971 census by a notable decline that has continued.

### Baptisms in the Presbyterian Church in Canada

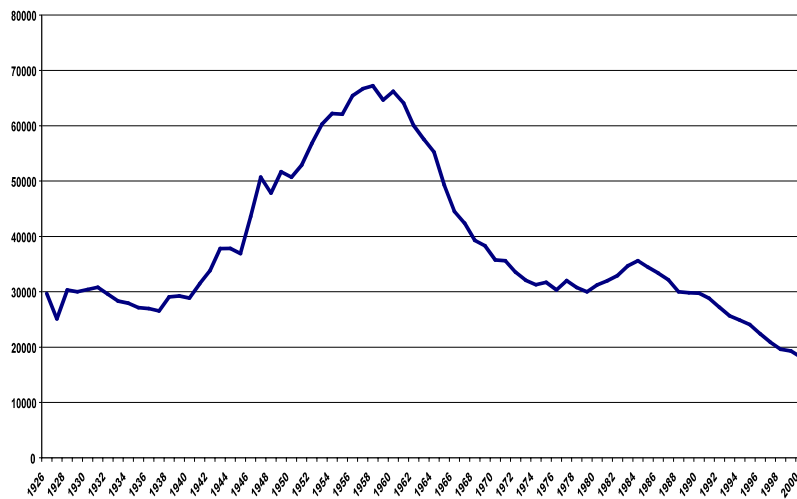


**Graph 5:** Baptisms in the Presbyterian Church in Canada

The data we have looked at so far from these three Protestant denominations tells a similar story of growth through the 1950s followed by decline. This has been noted before as historians and church officials have looked at membership and Sunday school numbers, but when these numbers have been compared to the total Canadian population the argument has been made that these denominations witnessed no real growth and that a pattern of long term decline was inaugurated. A different comparison – of Anglicans on the parish rolls to Anglicans on the census (and likewise for the other two denominations) – gives a different picture, one which affirms the original story of growth in the early post-World War II period, followed by decline. There are other church-generated statistics we can also use to test whether they support this pattern of growth followed by decline. For the purposes of this paper, we will use three other

statistics – baptismal numbers for the Presbyterian Church in Canada, baptismal numbers for the United Church of Canada, and a comparison of baptismal numbers to professions of faith within the United Church of Canada.

### Baptisms in the United Church of Canada

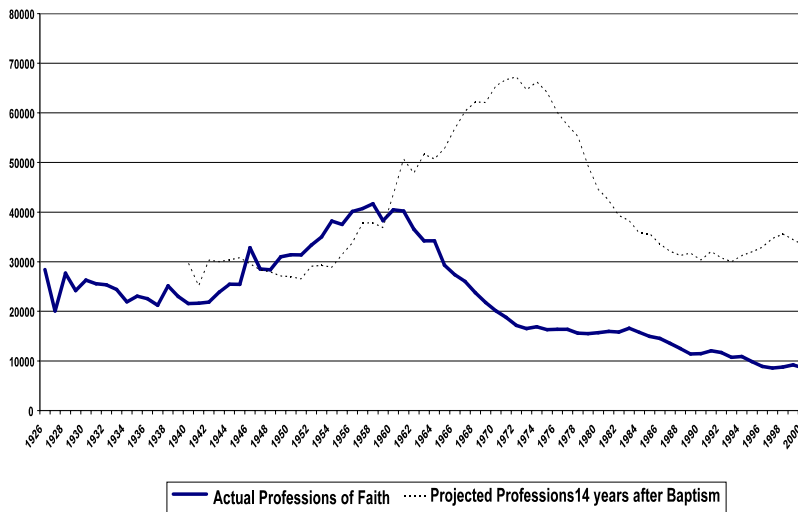


**Graph 6:** Baptisms in the United Church of Canada

One of the advantages of looking at the number of baptisms and the number of professions of faith is that these statistics represent religious events that occurred within the particular year. Unlike membership numbers, where a person may remain on a list long after they have stopped any active involvement in the organization, a child has to be presented for baptism, or a person has to appear to make a profession of faith. While we can not and should not use these numbers as indices of religious commitment or belief, they do tell us what happened in a particular year. Graph 5 represents the number of baptisms in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, of both adults and children. These increased throughout the post-World War II period reaching a peak in 1958, after which time they declined. Graph 6 represents the same data from the United Church of Canada. The growth peaked in 1958, declined briefly in 1959, recovered in 1960, but has declined steadily thereafter. The number of baptisms performed in

denominations that practice infant and child baptism is clearly related to the number of children born. In the years of the baby boom the growth of baptisms is not surprising. What is worth noting is that while both the number of baptisms after 1960 and the number of children born after 1959 declines,<sup>39</sup> the number of baptisms falls much faster. In other words, after about 1961 it seems that fewer of the children being born are being presented for baptism in the United Church. This is a preliminary suggestion only, but it is one where further research would be helpful. Another comparison we can make is of the number of children brought for baptism compared with the number who are confirmed at a later date. Graph 7 examines this comparison, beginning with the assumption that

**United Church of Canada: Anticipated Professions and Actual Baptisms**



**Graph 7:** The anticipated number of professions of faith in the United Church of Canada assuming that those baptized will make a profession of faith fourteen years after baptism, compared to the actual number of professions of faith.

in the United Church of Canada confirmation normally happens 14 years after baptism, or at approximately 15 years of age. Given the demographics of the baby boom and the number of children being presented to the

United Church for baptism, the number of professions of faith should have reached their peak in 1972. Instead, the peak year was 1958.<sup>40</sup> This finding should not, one assumes, be affected by the birth rate. Something else seems to have happened. Much of this data is suggestive rather than definitive. At the same time, the consistency with which we see the pattern of growth followed by decline should at the very least open us to the possibility that these numbers are reflecting a change in how people approached key religious institutions at this time.

As noted previously, this paper examines when certain key indices of three large Protestant denominations indicate they experienced religious decline. This was not a long gradual process. All of the indicators studied and discussed, with the exception of Gallup poll data on church attendance, illustrate a sudden change in direction beginning sometime in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The data presented is consistent with the findings of Callum Brown in relation to Great Britain, namely that church growth in the 1950s was followed by a sudden, sharp decline. Certainly within this same period each of these three denominations – Anglican, United Church, and Presbyterian – declined in their proportionate share within the overall Canadian population. At the same time, I have argued that this was due to a change within the larger Canadian population, namely the increase in the proportion of the total population who were Roman Catholic. When we compare those on denominational membership rolls with those who identified with themselves as Anglican, Presbyterian or United Church in the Canadian census, the picture we see is not one of decline of these denominations, but rather growth in the immediate post-war period (1946-1961). The only statistics that might counter this picture are those related to religious attendance. However, we need to be careful not to privilege one statistic – church attendance – while ignoring other data that might suggest varying conclusions.<sup>41</sup>

This reinvestigation of the various statistics for religion in Canada would suggest that we need to focus our attention on the late 1950s and early 1960s as a crucial period in the history of Christian religion in Canada. The original questions raised by earlier historians who noted this change need to be considered again. Interestingly some recent scholarship has talked about significant changes in this period, notably Catherine Gidney's *The Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University 1920-1970* (2004) and Gary Miedema's *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Remaking of Canada in the 1960s* (2005).<sup>42</sup> Both of these works move far



beyond the scope of this paper – which has concerned itself with church-generated statistics about various measures of involvement within those denominations – to the more salient features of Callum Brown’s argument, namely the change of cultural discourse from a Christian rhetoric to an entirely different reality.

The timing of religious decline in Canada needs to be reconsidered. This paper has tested Callum Brown’s findings for Great Britain using church-generated statistics, and has found similarities between the British and Canadian experiences. While certainly not all religious denominations have followed this pattern, three large Protestant denominations have.<sup>43</sup> Statistics from the Presbyterian, United Church and Anglican denominations indicate a sudden, dramatic move from growth to religious decline – a decline from which there is currently no evidence of recovery.

### **Endnotes**

1. DeCourcy H. Rayner, “No Cause for Alarm,” *Presbyterian Record* 92, no. 11 (November 1967): 4. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Brian Clarke and Andrew Irvine, for their assistance and feedback on the argument regarding how best to compare census and membership data; Peter Coutts for sharing his data and for his expertise on Presbyterian statistics; and Jeffrey Murray, who helped compile some of the statistics on the Presbyterian Church.
2. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 38.
3. In the period from 1941 through 1971, these were the three largest religious Protestant religious denominations, and have remained significant even since 1971.
4. Throughout this paper the phrase “religious decline” is used as a simple short form for those combined indices of falling numbers of baptisms, falling numbers of professions of faith, fewer members, and fewer Sunday school members. Other scholars, including Callum Brown, may define this term differently or raise questions about its value; however, for the purposes of this paper it will be used to refer to these indicators.
5. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 3.
6. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9.

7. Callum Brown, "The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the study of Religious History," in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31.
8. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 3.
9. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 2.
10. These are the categories as I define them. A slightly different categorization can be found in Reginald Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches Can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Toronto: Novalis, 2004), 11- 12.
11. This paper does not deal extensively with data from the census. My colleague Brian Clarke and I are currently working on a related research project using data from the census.
12. The General Social Survey has recently published some findings in this regard. Alain Baril and George A. Mori, "Leaving the Fold: Declining Church Attendance," *Canadian Social Trends* 22 (Autumn 1991): 21-24; Warren Clark, "Pockets of Belief: Religious Attendance Patterns in Canada," *Canadian Social Trends* 68 (Spring 2003): 2-5; Warren Clark, "Patterns of Religious Attendance," *Canadian Social Trends* 59 (Winter 2000): 23-27.
13. A selected list of works by Reginald Bibby would include *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987); *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1993); *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002); *Restless Churches: How Canada's Churches Can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Toronto: Novalis/Wood Lake, 2004); "Why Conservative Churches Really Are Growing: Kelley Revisited," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 2 (1978): 129-73; and various other published articles.
14. Vision TV/Enviroics Research Group, *Canada Ten Years Later – Still a Nation of Spiritual Seekers*, www.visiontv.ca, 2004. Don Posterski and Andrew Grenville, "The Complicated and Irrepressible Canadian Church," *World Vision Envision* (Spring 2004), 2-7.
15. Most of the data begins in the 1970s or later. This is the case of Reginald Bibby's work, and that of others. A survey of this data can be found in Kurt Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World: The Canadian Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), especially chapter 2.

16. The challenges of dealing with church attendance data were well covered in various articles which formed “A Symposium on Church Attendance in the United States,” *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 1 (February 1998): 111-45, which followed the publication of C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny Long Marler and Mark Chaves, “What the Polls Don’t Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance,” *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 6 (December 1993): 741-52.
17. Dean Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 14-16.
18. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 26-28.
19. For the data in this paper I chose not to use the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches* but the statistics of the denominations themselves, as published yearly in their statistical records. The data upon which the graphs are based, comes from the following sources. For Presbyterians, the data appears yearly in statistical tables in *The Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*. Data usually appears one year later (for example, 1945 statistics in 1946) and corrections may be made a year later. For the Anglican communion, see the *General Synod of the Church of England in Canada: Journal of Proceedings* (1943): 192; and (1952): 434-35. As well, the *General Synod of the Anglican Church in Canada: Journal of Proceedings*, and the *Anglican Church Directory*, were consulted for the statistics. For the United Church of Canada, a complete set of statistical data is updated each year and published in the *Yearbook*. The most recent edition consulted for the statistics on 2001 was the 2003 edition of the *Yearbook*.
20. Sunday school enrolment is clearly sensitive to alterations in the birth rate. Thus, it is not surprising that it dipped during the Great Depression or that it grew with the explosion of births after World War II. The sudden decline of enrolments beginning in the late 1950s does need to be looked at seriously as there were certainly many children in Canada of Sunday school age at that time. This is true of all three denominations in this study.
21. No precise dating of “secularization” – perhaps even an agreed upon definition of what we are even talking about when we use that term – exists in Canada. Generally, the notion that this process began in the late nineteenth or sometime in the twentieth century seems common. For a good discussion of this issue, see David Lyon “Introduction,” in *Rethinking Church, State & Modernity: Canada between Europe and America*, ed. David Lyons and Marguerite Van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), esp. 10.

22. John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), 184.
23. John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era: updated and Expanded* (Burlington, ON: Welch, 1988), 227.
24. It is beyond the scope of this brief paper to engage a thorough discussion of the various theories related to religious change in the period following the Reformation. Certainly by 1988 many researchers would have been aware of Dean Kelley's argument that conservative churches were growing (Kelley's argument, as many have noted, was related to strictness, not necessarily conservative theology). Popular versions of the secularization theory that anticipate that religions should decline as societies became more modern, industrial and urban, were also prevalent.
25. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 11-16.
26. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 12.
27. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 13.
28. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 13.
29. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 13.
30. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 15.
31. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 14.
32. In *Unknown Gods* the comparison between membership statistics and census data was not used; however, a similar portrait of long term decline was painted using attendance data, and a comparison of membership data, which was based upon the 1957 Gallup poll, and the 1975 and 1990 Project Canada surveys. See *Unknown Gods*, 6-8. Denominational statistics were not used. While *Restless Gods* (2002) represents a significant shift in Reginald Bibby's thinking, the idea of religious stagnation in the 1950s, and hence an advocacy of long-term trends of church membership decline, was reaffirmed: "Sheer numbers were up in this alleged peak period, but the proportion of people who were participating was actually declining" (see *Restless Gods*, 12).
33. "Declining Church Membership", *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, 1971, 289-301. Loren Mead in his important book *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1994), 8-11, also used this comparison.
34. W.E. Kalbach and W.W. McVey, "Religious Composition of the Canadian Population," in *Religion in Canadian Society*, ed. Stewart Crysdale and Les Wheatcroft (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), 236.

35. Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994).
36. Hoge, Johnson and Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries*, 5-6.
37. This comparison was first presented in May 2004 at a meeting of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religions in a paper presented by Dr. Brian Clarke and myself. I am indebted to Brian for his permission to use this data in the current paper. This comparison will also be included in a forthcoming paper on census Protestants.
38. It is difficult within each of these denominations to determine which is the best denominational statistic to compare to the census. Membership and Sunday school enrolment are combined for the comparison, as children would be counted as part of the census populations of each of these denominations. For both the United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, children would not be counted as members. The situation in the Anglican Church of Canada as to whether children were included in parish membership numbers is less clear. For consistency, I have used the same measure – membership and Sunday school combined – for all three denominations. While this may be an imperfect measure, it does give us a consistent comparator. The same basic trend, although obviously with different proportions, occurs for the Anglicans and Presbyterians if membership without Sunday school is used. The United Church of Canada is an exception here. Membership alone follows a different pattern, showing a gradual decline in the post-war period. Given the large size of the Sunday schools in the United Church of Canada in this period this is not surprising. The Sunday School enrolment in 1961 was larger (757,338 ) than the 2001 membership (637,941). Another statistic kept by the United Church of Canada, persons under pastoral care, is helpful. Its proportion to the census follows the same pattern as that of membership and Sunday school enrolment combined.
39. Statistics Canada data on number of live births in Canada, Statistics Canada, Historical Statistics, Vital Statistics, “B1-14, Live births, crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates, gross reproduction rate and percentage of births in hospital, Canada, 1921 to 1974” <[http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectionb/B1\\_14.csv](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-516-XIE/sectionb/B1_14.csv)> (accessed 27 September 2006).
40. If we assume instead that most young people make their profession of faith 16 years after baptism, the peak year should then be 1974.
41. Statistics related to religious attendance are infrequent in this period.

42. Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University 1920-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); and Gary Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).
43. More theologically conservative religious denominations seem to have fared better in the period since the 1960s. This might be strong evidence for the thesis advanced by Dean Kelley that strict churches were continuing to grow in the United States while mainline churches were losing members. See Dean Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*. This situation requires careful study in Canada. More recent census trends note the decline in the Salvation Army and the Pentecostals. See data from the 2001 Census or "2001 Census: analysis series – Religion in Canada" (Statistics Canada: catalogue 96F0030XIE2001015, released 13 May 2003). A conventional acceptance of either the secularization thesis or of Kelley's arguments, has not helped us in our research into how any of the Protestant denominations, mainline or conservative or evangelical or charismatic, have fared in Canada since 1960. My suspicion is that losses from the mainline tradition (including Anglican, United Church of Canada, and Presbyterian) have not been replaced by other kinds of Protestants, and instead the real growth has been in those with no connection to or interest in any institutional religious body. While we continue to hear stories about mega-churches and a general interest in spirituality, Canada strikes me as a less religious and far different culture now than it was in 1960. Further study would be enlightening, regardless of whether it confirms or disproves any theories or suspicions.