

Evangelicals and the Canadian Census

By Rick Hiemstra, Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism

Have you ever wondered why the Canadian census says Canadian Pentecostalism is on the decline while the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada just planted another church in your neighbourhood? Did you look in vain for your denomination in the census data? Does the 121% growth between 1991 and 2001 in those identifying themselves as simply “Christian” mean that denominationalism has been in retreat?

The Canadian census that is conducted on a ten-year cycle includes a question on religious affiliation. In preparation for the 2011 census, Statistics Canada consulted with various groups in the fall of 2007. The Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism (CRCE) participated in a day of dialogue with the agency’s officials, and made a formal written submission.

What follows is the CRCE’s written submission on the content of the 2011 Canadian census, with a focus on the religious affiliation question. The document surveys how and why religious data have been collected while offering suggestions on how the collection of data on Canadian Evangelicals can be improved for 2011. This document has been designed to assist with understanding how to read the government’s numbers on religion both now and when the 2011 statistics are released.

1. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s Interest in the Religious Affiliation Question

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) is the national association of evangelical Christians, gathered together for influence, impact and identity in ministry and public witness. Since 1964 the EFC has provided a national forum for Evangelicals and a constructive voice for biblical principles in life and society.

In addition to 40 evangelical denominations, the EFC affiliates include ministry organizations, educational institutions and individual congregations, all of whom uphold a common statement of faith. The EFC is an active participant in the World Evangelical Alliance.

The EFC founded the Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism (CRCE) in 2006. The CRCE seeks to improve the accuracy of public and scholarly representations of Evangelicals in Canada; to prompt new research on Canadian Evangelicalism; to provide evangelical ministry leaders with information that will enhance the effectiveness of their work; and to act as a storehouse and clearinghouse for research on Evangelicals in Canada. The CRCE engages in high-quality research and research partnerships, and publishes the results in *Church & Faith Trends*.

The CRCE makes extensive use of Statistics Canada data on religious affiliation and religious participation in order to provide better understanding of Canadian Evangelicalism and general Canadian trends related to faith and spirituality.

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The EFC would like Statistics Canada to maintain the religious affiliation question with improvements in the way the 2011 question is asked and coded particularly with respect to evangelical Christian denominations and individuals. Further, we believe the usefulness of the religious affiliation data can be substantially improved if it is combined with a question measuring religious participation.

2. Religious Affiliation

The submission begins with an historical review of the census religious affiliation question. Statistics Canada has an interest in the historical comparability of its data, so it is important to understand how and why these data have been collected in the past.

2.1 Why the Government Collects Data on Religious Affiliation

A 1971 document described the government interest in religious affiliation this way:

The data are used by governments as a basis for determining denominational school grants. It is used extensively by religious and educational organizations, such as the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, to assess the need to construct churches and schools for various religious groups in areas where there are concentrations of people of a particular denomination. Studies of family size and fertility rates among different religious groups are also carried out by social researchers because these data are available. The data are also used by Members of Parliament in assessing the importance of different religious groups in their constituencies.¹

The 1971 document signalled that the census religious affiliation data gave the government guidance on what reasonable accommodation was necessary for different religious groups and what extent of accommodation was required in different parts of the country. In 1971 education funding was the principal way that religious groups were accommodated. Today the Canadian religious landscape exhibits more diversity and poses greater challenges in accommodating that diversity. The government has an even greater interest now in understanding the diversity of religion in Canada.

This document also signalled that religious affiliation data are useful for helping governments administer social programs. Currently this information helps us understand how to welcome and integrate new immigrants into Canadian society. It helps us to understand the diversity within different ethnic communities. It is an important factor in understanding the cultural mosaic and in discerning Canadian attitudes on a variety of social issues. Religious affiliation and participation are important indicators of people's intention to have children. Religious affiliation and participation rates also are important indicators of the strength and longevity of marriages.

¹Statistics Canada, *1971 Census of Canada – Questions and Answers*, 51.



2.2 An Historical Overview of the Census Religious Affiliation Question

The religious affiliation question on census forms has changed over time. In 1931 the census form simply asked for “Religious body, Denomination or Community to which this person adheres or belongs.” The accompanying *Instructions to Commissioners and Enumerators* directed that,

The religion of each person will be entered according as he or she professes, specifying the religious body, denomination, sect or community to which the person adheres or belongs, or which he or she favours. An entry MUST be made in this column regarding the religious belief or affiliation of each and every person enumerated in Column 3.²

In 1941, the census form read, “Religious body, denomination to which this person adheres or belongs. (Do not use indefinite terms such as Christian, Believer, or Protestant, etc.)” Clearly there was an attempt to capture the religious diversity represented by denominations in a country that was overwhelmingly Christian at the time.

In 1951, census forms were designed to be scored by automated readers once enumerators had filled in mark-in circles with soft lead pencils. Although there was still an option to write in the answers, there would have been a strong administrative impulse to use the categories provided on the form, categories that could be scored more easily. The new scoring technology resulted in the introduction of suggested lists of religions on the census forms. The lists continued after the scoring technology ceased to be used.

The 1951 census form simply had a “RELIGION” heading and 16 suggested religious groups each accompanied by a mark-in-circle. There was also a space provided where enumerators were directed, “if not listed, write below.” Enumerators were instructed, “Do not accept broad, general terms such as Christian, Protestant, or Believer.”³

The EFC sees this as an important change in how religious affiliation data are collected on the census. From this point forward the census has contained a suggested list of religions to accompany the religious affiliation question. *As will be argued later in this submission, these lists have tended to increase the reported affiliation for those religious groups contained on the list and decrease the reported affiliation for those excluded from the list.*

The 1961 census form was structured similarly to the 1951 form; however, this time in place of a heading, this question was added: “What is your religion?” With the exception of “Jewish,” all the options listed were groups that had Christian origins. Substantially then, religion meant denomination. This qualifying instruction was given to enumerators in 1961:

Also enumerators were instructed to accept without question the denomination reported by respondents. They were to enquire more fully when “Christian”, “Protestant”, “Believer”, etc., were reported but were to accept these if a specific denomination could not be given. Further, if a person stated he had no religion, the entry “none” was recorded.⁴

² Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Seventh Census of Canada 1933 – Instructions to Commissioners and Enumerators, 33.

³ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Enumeration Manual 9th Census of Canada 1951, 41. ⁴ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada 1961, vol. 1, part 2-6.

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Clearly an effort was made to avoid general answers that would not identify a denomination.

In 1971 Statistics Canada moved to self-enumeration. The form of the question remained the same. The suggested list of religions shrank by four and added a “no religion” option. The wording soliciting responses that were not suggested changed slightly from “If not listed, write here” to “Other, write here.” The list of suggested religions, however, continued to primarily list Christian denominations.

The write-in space or box on the 1971 census and all census forms going forward provides between 2.5 cm (1981) and 3.8 cm (2001) of writing space for responses. This space allows for responses in normal handwriting with a maximum of 6-9 characters. Denominational responses that exceed this length will tend to be abbreviated, making accurate coding more difficult.

In 1981 the form of the question was again substantially unaltered, with the following changes: 1) An instruction to “Mark one box only” was added; 2) A box for unlisted responses was provided; and 3) the instruction changed to “Other (specify).” This time the composition of the list changed to add “Islam” to the list. This was the first time a world religion other than Christianity or Judaism was represented on the suggested list of religions on the census form. This began to introduce some confusion about the meaning of the term “religion” in the question. Within Christianity, denominations are subgroups of one common religion. Within a substantially homogenous Christian culture, “religion” may be understood to be a term interchangeable with “denomination.” When Christian denominations are juxtaposed with world religions, however, it introduces confusion for Christians about what the term “religion” means and what type of response is being sought by the census. Do they want my world religion (which is Christian) or do they want my denomination within Christianity (which may be, for example, Baptist or Evangelical Free)?

In 1991 the question changed to “What is this person’s religion?” with the qualifying direction, “*Indicate a specific denomination or religion even if this person is not a practicing member of that group.*” This time the mark-in boxes were replaced by a box accompanied by the following instruction, “Specify one denomination or religion only.” A mark-in circle was retained only for the option “no religion.” The suggested list of religions included representative groups from six world religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism. In this case the instruction indicating that the list included both denominations and religions were acceptable answers was helpful. *However, the suggested list of religions combined both world religions and Christian denominations in the same list, thus reintroducing the confusion that the instruction tried to alleviate.*

2.3 The 2001 Census and Evangelical Responses

In 2001 the question remained substantially unchanged with the exception of the suggested list of religions (table 1). The change in the list was to have a significant effect on the way evangelical Christians answered the question.

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Table 1: Suggested List of Religions on Decennial Census Forms, 1951–2001⁵

1951	1961 ^c	1971 ^c	1981 ^c	1991 ^d	2001
1. Roman Catholic	1. Adventist^a	1. Anglican	1. Roman Catholic	1. Roman Catholic	1. Roman Catholic
2. United Church	2. Anglican	2. Baptist^a	2. United Church	2. Ukrainian Catholic	2. Ukrainian Catholic
3. Anglican	3. Baptist	3. Greek Orthodox	3. Anglican	3. United Church	3. United Church
4. Presbyterian	4. Christian Science	4. Jewish	4. Presbyterian	4. Anglican	4. Anglican
5. Baptist^a	5. Greek Orthodox	5. Lutheran	5. Lutheran	5. Presbyterian	5. Lutheran
6. Lutheran	6. Jehovah's Witnesses	6. Mennonite	6. Baptist^a	6. Lutheran	6. Baptist^a
7. Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic	7. Jewish	7. Pentecostal	7. Greek Orthodox	7. Baptist^a	7. Greek Orthodox
8. Jewish	8. Lutheran	8. Presbyterian	8. Jewish	8. Pentecostal	8. Jewish
9. Greek Orthodox	9. Mennonite	9. Roman Catholic	9. Ukrainian Catholic	9. Greek Orthodox	9. Islam
10. Mennonite	10. Mormon	10. Salvation Army	10. Pentecostal	10. Jewish	10. Buddhist
11. Pentecostal	11. Pentecostal	11. Ukrainian Catholic	11. Jehovah's Witnesses	11. Mennonite	11. Hindu
12. Evangelical Church	12. Presbyterian	12. United Church	12. Mennonite	12. Jehovah's Witnesses	12. Sikh
13. Salvation Army	13. Roman Catholic	13. No religion	13. Salvation Army	13. Salvation Army	13. etc. ^e
14. Mormon	14. Salvation Army		14. Islam	14. Islam	
15. Christian Science	15. Ukrainian Catholic		15. No religion ^d	15. Buddhist	
16. Adventist^b	16. United Church			16. Hindu	
				17. Sikh	

^a Groups traditionally understood to be Conservative Protestant are in bold.

^b Until recently, Seventh Day Adventists would not have considered themselves Evangelical and would not have been understood to be Evangelical, although they would be understood to be Conservative Protestants.

^c Groups are listed in the order in which they appeared. In 1961 and 1971 the suggested list of religions was alphabetically ordered. From 1981 on, the groups appeared in order dictated, at least in part, by their frequency from the previous census.

^d The format of the questions changed in 1991. In 1971 and 1981 each item on the list had its own mark-in box. Starting in 1991 there was a blank space to write in the respondent's religious affiliation, with a separate mark-in box retained for "no religion."

^e The year 2001 was the first in which "etc." was added to the list, thereby explicitly suggesting that the list was not exhaustive.

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In 1991 four evangelical denominations were listed: Baptist, Pentecostal, Mennonite, and Salvation Army. In 2001 this list shrank to include only the Baptists. Table 2 below compares the results for the 1991 and 2001 religious affiliation data for these evangelical denominations and several other categories.

Table 2: 1991 and 2001 Census Religious Affiliation Counts for Selected Denominations⁶

	1991 Census	2001 Census	Change
Included in the 1991 census religion question and dropped in 2001			
Pentecostal	436,435	369,480	-15.3%
Salvation Army	112,345	87,790	-21.9%
Mennonite	207,970	191,465	-7.9%
Included in both 1991 and 2001 census religion question			
Baptist	663,360	729,475	10.0%
Other			
Non-Denominational	32,005	40,545	26.7%
Protestant	628,945	549,205	-12.7%
Christian	353,040	780,450	121.1%

The denominations that are traditionally understood to be evangelical and were dropped from the suggested list of religions in the 2001 census form all saw a reported decline in religious affiliation, while Baptist, the only traditionally evangelical denomination to remain on the 2001 census form, saw an increase. Those reporting “Christian” as their religious affiliation grew 121.1% between 1991 and 2001. Compare these data with data reported by denominations on membership and attendance (table 3).

⁶Statistics Canada, “Religion (95A), Age Groups (7A) and Sex (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 1991 and 2001 Censuses – 20% Sample Data – Cat. No. 97F0022XCB2001002.” <http://www.statcam.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=97F0022XCB200102> (accessed August 20, 2007).

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Table 3: 1991 and 2001 Membership and Attendance Data Supplied by Denominations⁷

Religious Group	Members			Attendance		
	1991	2001	Change	1991	2001	
Baptist ^a	214,064	225,516	5.3%	187,345	218,483	16.6%
Mennonite (Evangelical) ^b	97,113	105,076	8.2%	98,410	113,288	15.1%
Mennonite (Other) ^c	10,356	14,098	36.1%	8,436	11,925	41.4%
Pentecostal ^d	328,432	404,916	23.3%	247,661	330,414	33.4%
Salvation Army in Canada	94,733	86,005	-9.2%	25,956	26,143	0.7%

^a Baptist includes: Association of Regular Baptist Churches; Atlantic Canada Association of Free Will Baptists; Baptist Convention of Ontario & Quebec; Baptist General Conference; Baptist Union of Western Canada; Canadian Convention of Southern Baptists; convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches; Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches; Gospel Missionary Association; North American Baptist Church; Sovereign Grace Fellowship; Union of French Baptist Churches of Canada.

^b Mennonite here includes those in the evangelical Mennonite family as opposed to non-evangelical Mennonites: Bergthaler Mennonite Churches; Brethren in Christ, Canadian Conference; Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; Chortizer Mennonite Conference; Christian Anishinabec Fellowship; Church of God in Christ (Mennonite); Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario; Conservative Mennonite Fellowship; Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church; Evangelical Mennonite Church; Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference; Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches; Markham-Waterloo Mennonite Conference; Mennonite Church Alberta; Mennonite Church British Columbia; Mennonite Church Eastern Canada; Mennonite Church Manitoba; Mennonite Church Saskatchewan; Mennonite Churches independent/unaffiliated; Midwest Mennonite Fellowship; Nationwide Fellowship of Churches (Mennonite); Northwest Mennonite Conference; Sommerfelder Mennonite Churches; United Brethren in Christ (Ontario); Western Conservative Mennonite Fellowship.

^c Mennonite (Other) includes: Beachy Amish Mennonite Church; New Reinland Mennonite Church of Ontario; Old Colony Mennonite Church; Old Order Amish Church; Old Order Mennonite Church; Reformed Mennonite Church; Reinland Fellowship Mennonite Church; Reinland Mennonite Church.

^d Pentecostal includes: Apostolic Church in Canada; Apostolic Church of Pentecost; Apostolic Faith Church; Association of Vineyard Churches Canada; Canadian Evangelical Christian Churches; Canadian Fellowship of Churches and Ministers; Church of Pentecost Canada, Inc.; Elim Fellowship of Evangelical Churches and Ministers; Fellowship of Christian Assemblies; Foursquare Gospel Church of Canada; Independent Assemblies of God; Italian Pentecostal Church; Open Bible Faith Fellowship; Partners in Harvest; Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada; Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland; Pentecostal Holiness Church of Canada; Sovereign Grace Ministries; United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic); United Pentecostal Church; Victory Churches International.

We believe that the 2001 census results can, at least in part, be explained by several factors. Evangelical Christians, reading the suggested list of religions, did not see their denominations listed. In scanning the list, however, they noticed several world religions listed. While there were several Christian groups listed they did not, for various historical and theological reasons, feel a strong enough affinity with them to chose any of these options. Therefore, many evangelical Christians would feel, based on the absence of suggested groups that represent their denominations, and the presence of six world religions, that what was being asked for was their *world religion*, not their *denomination*. Many, therefore, probably responded with “Christian.” We suspect that the majority of those included in “Christian” are in fact evangelical Christians because Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and mainline Protestants all find their denominations listed in the suggested list of religions and would therefore be more inclined to give their denomination as a response.

⁷From tables compiled by Bruce L. Guenther and the Research Department of Outreach Canada.

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The 2001 census religious affiliation findings are often at odds with the growth trajectory for membership and attendance statistics reported by the denominations themselves and researchers on religion in Canada. The finding of a 15.3% decrease in Pentecostal religious affiliation seems to be contradicted by what George Rawlyk wrote in 1996: “The fastest-growing segment of the evangelical population, it should be stressed, is the charismatic/Pentecostal one.”⁸ Pentecostal⁹ churches themselves reported a 33.4% increase in attendance. Mennonites were reported to have a 7.9% decrease in religious affiliation while evangelical Mennonite denominations reported a 15.1% growth in attendance. Not all of the denominational growth trajectories are at odds with what is found in the 1991 and 2001 census religious affiliation data. The 2001 census showed a 10.0% decadal growth rate for Baptists that was similar to the 16.6% reported decadal growth in attendance.

Table 4: Comparison of 1991 and 2001 Decadal Growth Rates for Selected Denominations

Religious Group or Denomination	Religious Affiliation			Attendance Reported by Denominations		
	1991 Census	2001 Census	Change	1991	2001	Change
Associated Gospel	8,620	7,730	-10.3%	15,658	20,477	30.8%
Baptist ^a	663,360	729,475	10.0%	187,345	218,483	16.6%
Christian and Missionary Alliance	59,235	66,285	11.9%	56,205	80,282	42.8%
Christian or Plymouth Brethren	8,735	5,480	-37.3%	52,000	60,000	15.4%
Church of the Nazarene	14,950	13,960	-6.6%	10,594	12,102	14.2%
Evangelical Free Church	9,170	9,110	-0.7%	13,299	18,718	40.7%
Mennonite (All) ^b	207,970	191,465	-7.9%	106,846	125,213	17.2%
Free Methodist	14,720	14,110	-4.1%	10,299	12,374	20.1%
Pentecostal ^c	436,435	369,480	-15.3%	247,661	330,414	33.4%
Christian Reformed Church	84,685	76,665	-9.5%	74,909	70,000	-6.6%
Wesleyan	11,260	11,630	3.3%	7,794	10,206	30.9%
Salvation Army	112,345	87,790	-21.9%	25,956	26,143	0.7%

^a Attendance figures include all groups listed in note a from table 3.

^b Attendance figures include all groups listed in notes b and c from table 3.

^c Attendance figures include all groups listed in note d from table 3.

Looking at table 4, the general pattern is for the census religious affiliation data to show either a decadal decrease in religious affiliation or a substantially reduced decadal growth rate, and for denominations to show a decadal increase in attendance. While religious affiliation and denominational attendance statistics are different measures and we would not expect their raw counts to be the same, they are still both measures of a denomination’s size. *All other things being equal, we would expect the growth trajectories of both measures to be in the same direction.*

⁸George Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour?: In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990's*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press): 14. ⁹See note c with table 3 for the list of denominations included in Pentecostal.

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3. Religious Participation

Table 4 highlights two kinds of differences in the religious affiliation data from the census and the reported denominational attendance. The first difference, considered above, is in decadal growth rates. The EFC believes that the difference in direction is substantially explained by the changes to the religious affiliation question on the 2001 census. The second difference is in the scale of the raw figures reported. Religious affiliation counts are usually much higher than the numbers reported by the churches for attendance. This difference highlights the distinction between religious affiliation and religious participation, a distinction that current census questions do not capture (table 5).

Table 5: Comparison of 2001 Census Religious Affiliation Data and 2001 Reported Attendance Data for Major Christian Groupings

	2001 Census ¹⁰	2001 Reported Attendance ¹¹	Percentage of Those Who Affiliate that Attend
Catholic	12,793,125	3,451,874	27.0%
Orthodox Christian	479,620	252,730	52.7%
Mainline Protestant	5,891,045 ^a	723,673	12.3%
Evangelical	3,210,235 ^b	1,130,237 ^d	49.8% ^e
Other Christian ^c		467,900	
Total Christian	22,374,025	6,026,414	26.9%

^a Mainline Protestant includes: Anglican; Lutheran; Presbyterian; United Church of Canada.

^b Evangelical includes those groups identified as evangelical by Outreach Canada: Adventist; Apostolic Christian; Associated Gospel; Baptist; Brethren in Christ; Charismatic Renewal; Christian and Missionary Alliance; Christian Assembly; Christian Congregation; Churches of Christ, Disciples; Church of God; Church of the Nazarene; Evangelical Free Church; Mennonite; Evangelical Methodist; Evangelical Missionary Church; Free Methodist; Methodist, n.o.s.; Mission de l'Esprit Saint; Moravian; New Apostolic; Pentecostal; People's Church; Plymouth or Christian Brethren; Christian Reformed; Canadian Reformed; Dutch Reformed; Reformed Church of America; Other Reformed; Salvation Army; Standard Church; Vineyard Christian Fellowship; Wesleyan; Worldwide Church of God; Protestant, n.o.s.; Other Christian; Non-denominational; Interdenominational; Christian, n.o.s.

^c The census religious code values do not correspond perfectly with Guenther and Outreach Canada's. The census evangelical figure (see note b) includes most of those included in the reported attendance figure for "Other Christian." Therefore the evangelical census figure could be understood as a composite figure for "Evangelical" and "Other Christian."

^d Evangelical includes all the denominations listed in notes a, b, and d from table 3 and the following: Armenian Evangelical Church; Christ Catholic Church International; Evangelical Covenant Church; Evangelical Free Church; Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches; Moravian Church in America – Canadian District; Associated Gospel Churches; Bible Holiness Movement; Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada; Church of God in Christ; Church of God of Prophecy in Canada; Church of God, Anderson; Church of God, Cleveland – All Districts; Church of the Nazarene; Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada – Canada East and Canada West; Free Methodist Church in Canada; Independent Holiness Churches; Salvation Army in Canada; Wesleyan Church of Canada; Association of Free Lutheran Churches; Christian Reformed Church; Church of the Lutheran Brethren; Free Reformed Church; Lutheran Church – Canada; Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod – Canada; American Evangelical Christian Church in Canada; Calvary Chapels; Canadian Sunday School Mission; Community Christian Fellowship Church of Canada; Dove Christian Fellowship; Every Nation Churches and Ministries; Life Links International Fellowship; Native Evangelical Fellowship; Salt and Light Ministries; Village Missions; World Wide Church of God in Canada; Christian Brethren; Churches of Christ, World Convention – Churches of Christ in Canada; Congregational Christian Church; Seventh-Day Adventist Church; United Church of God - Canada.

^e This is the proportion of the "Evangelical" census figure represented by the combined reported attendance of "Evangelical" and "Other Christian."

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, "Religion (95) and Sex (3) for Population, for Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2001 Census - 20% Sample data. Catalogue no. 97F0022XCB2001001." <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?Temporal=2001&PID=55821&APATH=3&GID=431515&METH=1&PTYPE=55440&THEME=56&FOCUS=0&AID=0&PLACENAME=0&PROVINCE=0&SEARCH=0&GC=0&GK=0&VID=0&VNAMEF=&VNAMEF=&FL=0&RI=0&FREE=0> (accessed November 12, 2007).

¹¹ From tables compiled by Bruce L. Guenther and the Research Department of Outreach Canada.

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There is a whole dimension of the Canadian religious landscape that the religious affiliation question does not capture. Weekly attendance at religious services in Canada has declined from 67% in 1946 to 20% in 1996.¹² However, on the 2001 census, 84% of Canadians reported a religious affiliation, and in 2001, 43% of Canadians reported that they had not attended religious services in the past 12 months.¹³ In 2003 an Ipsos Reid survey found that 81% of Canadians strongly or moderately agreed with the statement, “I don’t think you need to worship at church in order to be a good Christian.”¹⁴ The same Ipsos Reid survey found that 72% of Canadians strongly or moderately agreed with the statement, “My private beliefs about Christianity are more important than what is taught by any church.”¹⁵

Several things are happening with the denominational landscape in Canada. First, Canadians with a Christian religious affiliation are not participating at the same rates as they once did. At the same time they are tending not to defer to ecclesiastical bodies for their doctrine. *In the past, affiliation was a much better operationalization of participation. For the most part, people who affiliated also participated. When we measure affiliation today, we are not measuring participation.*

Religious participation, however, does make a difference in Canadian’s lives. In *Canadian Social Trends*, Statistics Canada has made the following observations about those who frequently participate in religious services:

- Weekly attenders of religious services have happier, longer-lasting marriages, and they experience less stress.¹⁶
- “Women who attend religious services every week are half as likely to experience a first common-law union as women who attend only occasionally.”¹⁷
- People who attend religious services weekly plan on average to have 0.5 more children than those who never attend religious services.¹⁸
- “People who attend religious services during the year, even if only several times, have between a 10% and 31% lower predicted risk of marital dissolution than those who do not attend at all. (This excludes attending services on special occasions like weddings, christenings and funerals.)”¹⁹

Statistics Canada has also recognized the difference that religious participation makes, including it in the following surveys:

- Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (n=20,832 in 2004)
- Canadian Community Health Survey (n=35,000 in 2007, biennial)
- National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (began in 1994, biennial, affiliation and participation)
- Ethnic Diversity Survey (one time, 2002)
- General Social Survey (for cycle 19, n=19,597).²⁰

¹²Warren Clark, “Religious Observance: Marriage and Family,” *Canadian Social Trends* (Autumn 1998): 6. ¹³Statistics Canada, “2001 Census Analysis Series: Religions in Canada” (May 13, 2003): 6. Catalogue: 96F0030XIE2001015.

¹⁴2003 Ipsos Reid Survey for The Evangelical Fellowship et al. (n=3000). ¹⁵2003 Ipsos Reid Survey for The Evangelical Fellowship et al. (n=3000). ¹⁶Warren Clark, “Religious Observance: Marriage and Family,” *Canadian Social Trends* (Autumn 1998): 5. ¹⁷Pierre Turcotte and Alain Belanger, “Moving in Together: The formation of first common-law unions,” *Canadian Social Trends* (Winter 1997): 8. ¹⁸Dave Dupuis, “What influences people’s plans to have children?” *Canadian Social Trends* (Spring 1998): 5. ¹⁹Warren Clark and Susan Crompton, “Till Death Do Us Part?: The risk of first and second marriage dissolution,” *Canadian Social Trends* (Summer 2006): 25. ²⁰Cycle 17 asked only, “In the past 12 months, were you a member or participant in: A religious-affiliated group (such as church youth group, choir?” In cycle 19, the survey asked, “What, if any, is your religion?” Only 16 responses were coded and only two of these represented evangelical denominations.

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The religious participation question most typically asked on Statistics Canada surveys is:

Not counting events such as weddings or funerals, during the past 12 months how often did you participate in religious activities or attend religious services or meetings? Do not include special events such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, bar mitzvahs, etc.

- Once a week or more
- Once a month
- 3 or 4 times a year
- Once a year
- Not at all
- Don't know, Refused

The EFC believes this is an excellent question. However, it could tell us so much more about Canada's many and diverse religious groups if combined with religious affiliation census data.

Most religious groups in Canada are small. This is especially true for evangelical Christian denominations. The largest evangelical group reported on in census documents is Baptist, which is itself an aggregate group representing dozens of religious affiliation code values. Most of Statistics Canada's surveys have sample sizes that range from 20,000 to 50,000. With a sample size of 20,000, one in 1,650 Canadians will be surveyed, and with a sample size of 50,000, one in 660 Canadians will be surveyed. Given that most evangelical denominations have both participation and affiliation counts of less than 10,000, this means that for most evangelical denominations, even Statistics Canada's most comprehensive survey will produce a sample size of only about 15, which will not yield any meaningful data.

The EFC believes that religious participation is an important measure of the religious landscape in Canada and that it can be applied far more meaningfully when it is used in a survey the size of the Canadian census.

The EFC is also aware that requests have been made for the census religious affiliation question to be changed to allow respondents to list more than one religious affiliation. We believe that this stated desire, in part, recognizes that there is a difference between religious affiliation and religious participation. Many Canadians may affiliate with a religious group for cultural or family reasons and yet participate in another religious group. We believe that the nature of religious belief is exclusive, that a person only truly participates in one religion at a time. However, *both those asking for the possibility of allowing respondents to list multiple religious affiliations and those seeking a religious participation question are recognizing the inadequacy of the religious affiliation question to accurately describe Canada's religious landscape.* Allowing respondents to list multiple religious affiliations will compromise the historical comparability of the census data. However, asking a religious participation question should go a long way to addressing the concerns of those who would like to have multiple religious affiliation questions listed, as it would distinguish between those who participate and those who are nominally affiliated.



4. Coding the Census Religious Affiliation Question

Canadians regularly offer hundreds of responses to the religious affiliation question on Canadian censuses. The *1961 Population Code Book* section on religion lists approximately 800 religious code values and the 1971 version lists approximately the same number. Canada's religious diversity is growing, not shrinking, as immigration changes the face of the religious landscape. In 2001 most census documents reported on only 53 religious code values, and several of those were aggregates of others. Over 90% of the diversity of the religious code values are obscured in the reporting and lost in the coding process. The EFC has particular interest in this diversity because the majority of evangelical denominations are small, and many of the religious code values listed in the various Population Code Books identify evangelical Christians or their denominations. Most of these are placed in an "Other" category or some other "not otherwise specified" category during the coding process.

In the past, coding assignments for evangelical denominations and identifying religious code values have been inaccurately made. For example, the *1971 Population Code Book* assigns to the United Church the following groups, of which a few are accurately assigned, but most could plausibly be understood to be evangelical:

All People's Church, All People's Mission, Bible Christian, Church of All Nations, Evangelical Association, Evangelical Church, Evangelical Free, Evangelical United Brethren, German United, Methodist Bible Student, Methodist Chapel, New Connection Methodist, Salem Church (Methodist), Swedish Methodist, United Brethren in Christ, United Church Mission, Zion Evangelical.

The "other" groups often combine religiously diverse groups such as this listing of those included in the "other" category in 1971 and broken out on their own in 1981:

Polish National Catholic Church, Apostolic Christian, Associated Gospel, Christadelphian, Christian Assembly, Christian Congregational, Christian n.o.s., Church of God, Interdenominational, Mission Covenant, Mission de l'Esprit Saint, Missionary Church, Moravian, New Apostolic, New Church, Non-Denominational, Other Christian, Other Reformed, People's Church, Quakers, Reformed Church of America, Spiritualist, Standard Church, Baha'i, Hindu, Islam, Other Eastern Non-Christian, Other Non-Christian, Sikh, Taoist, Pagan, Theosophical Groups, Agnostic, (New Thought-Unity-Metaphysical, Other Para-religious groups, other non-religious, other not elsewhere classified).²¹

The very diversity of the group limits its usefulness for understanding religion in Canada beyond understanding its aggregate size.

The EFC believes that evangelical Christians make up a distinct religious family within Protestantism with identifiable beliefs and practices. ²²We recommend that Statistics Canada create an "Evangelical Christian not otherwise specified" category and consult with Canadian church historians and theologians on how to make the coding assignments for this and other Protestant categories. We further recommend that Statistics Canada undertake a consultation with Canadian religious historians and theologians to improve accuracy of its religious affiliation coding. The EFC's Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism has a network of historians and theologians that it would be pleased to put Statistics Canada officials in contact with.

²¹Bracketed groups were variously assigned to "Other/Not included" or "Other/No religion" in 1971. See *1981 Census Dictionary*. ²²See John Stackhouse, "Defining 'Evangelical,'" *Church & Faith Trends* vol. 1, no. 1 (October 2007).



5. Privacy

The EFC understands that some groups have raised privacy concerns over the federal government's collection of religious affiliation data. We believe that the government has a material interest in collecting religious affiliation and religious participation data for the following reasons:

- *As demands for religious accommodation increase, the government needs to understand how large the groups are and what accommodating them will mean.*
- *Religious affiliation data are an important factor in administering government programs and making population projections.*

The EFC's Centre for Research on Canadian Evangelicalism is committed to improving the accuracy of representations of evangelical Christians, and therefore desires to have more accurate and more detailed information generated and disseminated about Canadian Evangelicals.

6. Recommendations

The EFC makes the following recommendations for changes on the 2011 census.

- 1) We recommend that the religious affiliation question be changed
 - a. To include two lists: a world religions list and a denominations list.
 - b. To include a direction that Statistics Canada is seeking the greatest specificity possible from respondents.
 - c. In light of the problems with the religious affiliation responses of evangelical Christians on the 2001 census, we recommend that Statistics Canada review the evangelical Christian religions included on their suggested list of religions (or denominations) in consultation with the CRCE and Canadian church historians and theologians.
- 2) We recommend that Statistics Canada add to the 2011 census a question on religious participation similar to the one used on some cycles of the General Social Survey.
- 3) We recommend that Statistics Canada create an "Evangelical Christian n.o.s." category and consult with Canadian church historians and theologians on how to make the coding assignments for this and other Protestant categories.
- 4) We recommend that Statistics Canada undertake a consultation with Canadian religious historians and theologians to improve accuracy of all its religious affiliation coding. 🌱