

# Christian Communities in Dialogue with Secularity

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# 2021 Census data

Year	% claiming a Christian identity
2021	53%
2011	67%
2001	77%

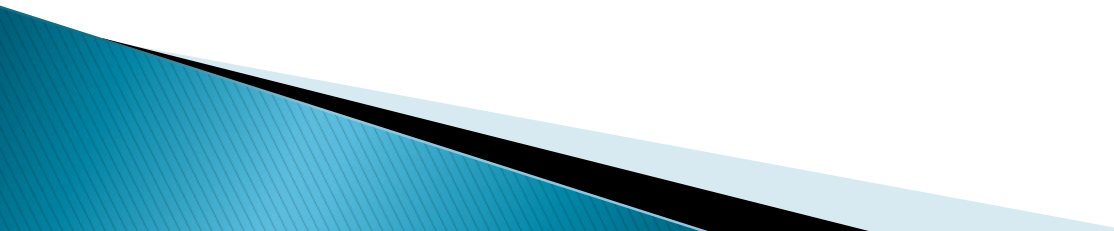
- ▶ Every Christian denomination decreased from 2011 to 2021 (with exception of Orthodox Christians and “generic” Christians)

Source: Statcan, [\*The Daily – The Canadian census: A comprehensive portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity\*](#)

# The fastest growing group

Year	% Religious Nones
2021	35%
2011	24%
2001	17%

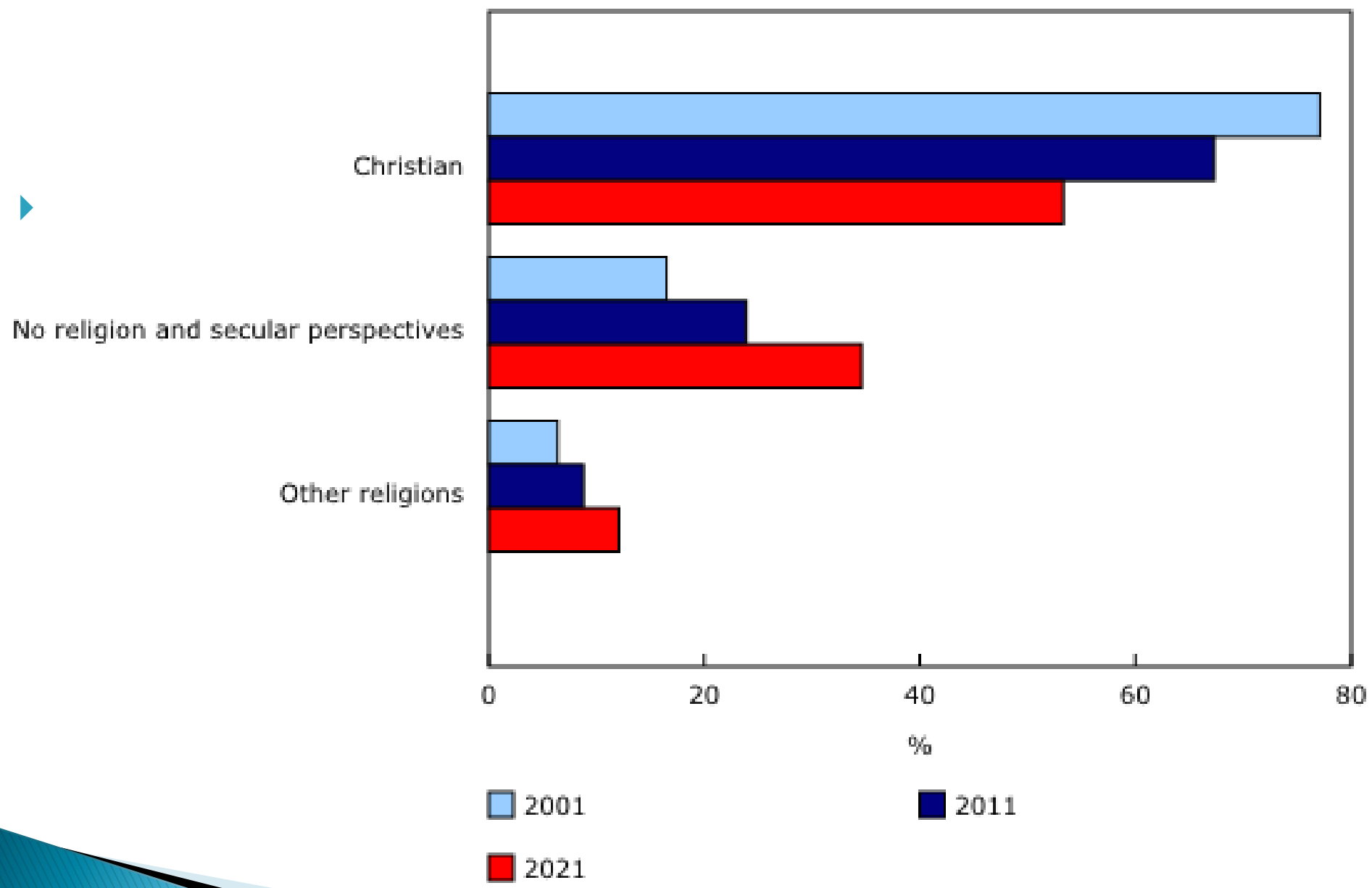
Part of growth is that the children of the “nonverts” (people who have left) grow up without religion



# Major minority religious communities

- Small but growing as proportion of general population

Religion	2001–2021
Muslims	2% to 5%
Hindu	1% to 2%
Sikhs	1% to 2%
Buddhists	1% to 1%
Jews	1% to 1%



	Millennials (b. 1986–2003)	Gen Xers (b. 1966– 1985)	Boomers (b. 1946– 1965)	Silent Generation and older (b. before 1946)
Catholic	19.8%	27.0%	37.5%	37.1%
Anglican	0.9%	2.5%	5.4%	7.3%
United Church	0.8%	1.8%	5.8%	8.7%
Baptist	0.6%	1.1%	1.8%	2.9%
Presbyterian	0.8%	0.8%	1.8%	2.3%
Orthodox Christian	0.7%	1.1%	1.2%	2.5%
Pentecostal	0.3%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Other Christian	18.2%	19.4%	17.0%	17.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials: The Generation Shaping American and Canadian Trends*. Routledge, 2023

	Millennials (b. 1986–2003)	Gen Xers (b. 1966–1985)	Boomers (b. 1946–1965)	Silent Generation and older (b. before 1946)
Jewish	0.6%	0.7%	0.8%	1.7%
Muslim	4.3%	4.3%	1.8%	1.1%
Buddhist	1.8%	1.2%	1.3%	1.5%
Hindu	2.0%	2.2%	1.4%	0.5%
No religion	42.9%	31.9%	20.1%	14.3%

Table 2.2 (p. 39): Religious affiliation by generation, General Social Survey 2018, Canada

Sarah Wilkins–Laflamme, *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials The Generation Shaping American and Canadian Trends.*

	Millennials (b. 1986–2003)	Gen Xers (b. 1966– 1985)	Boomers (b. 1946– 1965)	Silent Generation and older (b. before 1946)
At least once a week	11%	14%	14%	25%
At least once a month	6%	8%	8%	9%
Not at all	59%	54%	55%	46%

Table 2.4 (p. 43): Frequency of religious service attendance by generation, General Social Survey 2018, Canada



Table 2.8 (p. 44): Rates of religious affiliation and regular religious behaviour among 20–29 year-old respondents across generations, Canada

	Religiously affiliated	Monthly or more frequent religious service attendance
1986 General Social Survey: Late Boomers (born 1957 – 1966)	86%	32%
1998 General Social Survey: Gen X (born 1969–1978)	75%	19%
2008 General Social Survey: Late Gen X and Early Millennials (born 1979–1988)	66%	19%
2018 General Social Survey: Millennials (born 1989–1998)	55%	15%

# Religion as a social good 2025

- ▶ 34% of Canadians agreed “religion has a positive influence on societal values”
  - Compared to 53% of Americans
- ▶ Ontario 44%
- ▶ Atlantic provinces 38%
- ▶ British Columbia 28%
- ▶ Canadian newcomers (50%; same as US newcomers)
  - Leger poll, August 2025 for the Association of Canadian Studies
  - Ari David Blaff, “Canadians less likely than Americans to see religion as a social good: poll,” National Post: (Oct. 12, 2025)

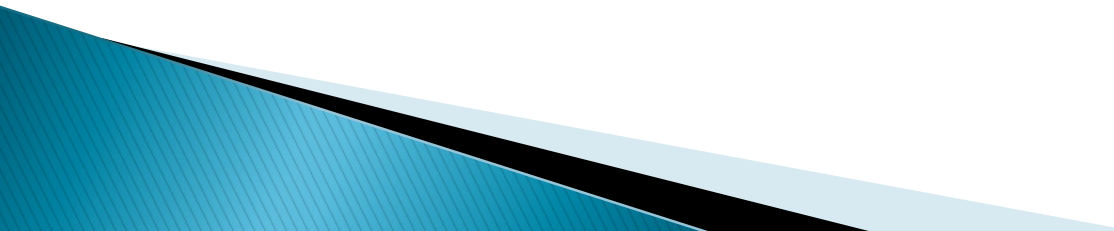
# Religion as a social good

- ▶ Quebec 20%
- ▶ Anglophones 31%
- ▶ Francophones 14%
- ▶ 34% of Canadians agreed “religion has a positive influence on societal values”
  - Compared to 53% of Americans

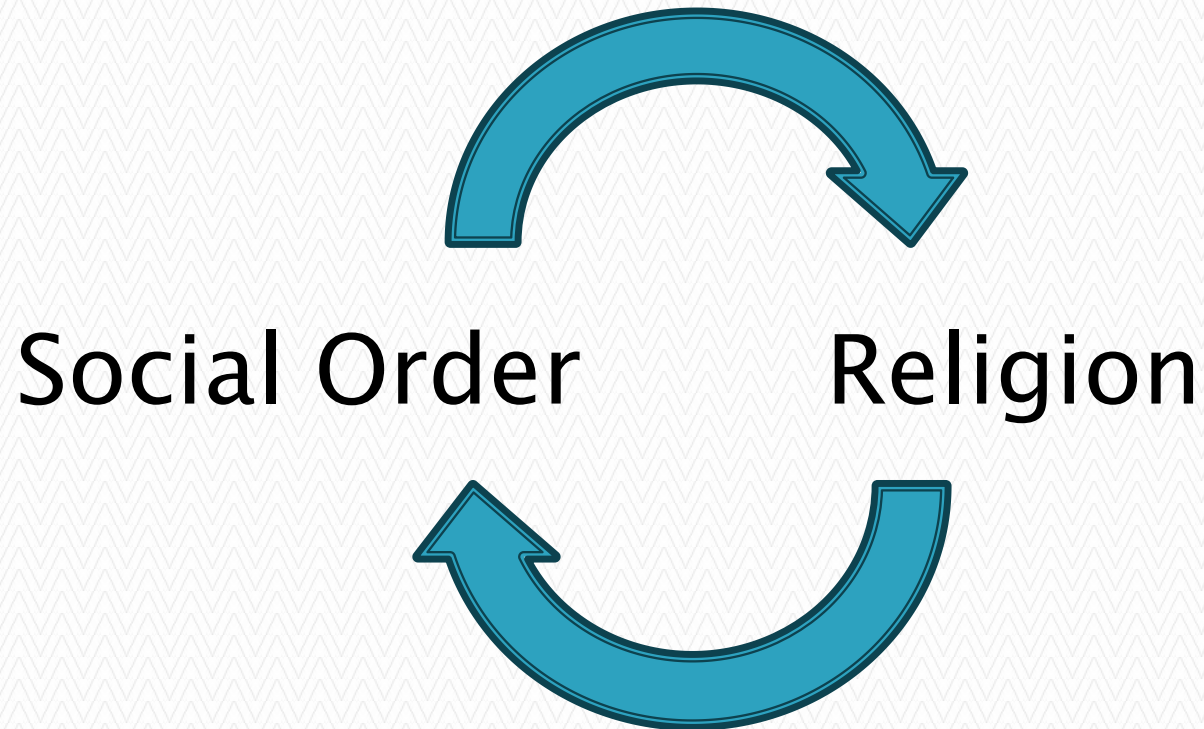
# What is driving Canadian secularism?

»» From established churches to permanent revolution

# Hartmut Rosa: Social acceleration

- ▶ Modernization systematically requires material growth, technological acceleration, and cultural innovation to reproduce its structure and to maintain the institutional status quo.
  - ▶ Dynamic stabilization: No matter how well you do this year, you have to do better next year.
  - ▶ Produces crisis of “de-synchronization” and “alienation” (burnout)
- 

# Religion and Society






- Who built the ship? For what purpose?
- What is our direction? Speed?
- Who is on the bridge? The engine room? The kitchen?
- Who is in first class? Second? Third?
- Who is excluded, i.e., not allowed on the boat?

# Capitalism and Globalization

- ▶ Late medieval and early modern England
  - English farmers were tenants not peasants
- ▶ Create market in leases: Leads to search for “improvement”, e.g, profitability
- ▶ Free market in leases extended to all trade, manufacture, and finance.
  - Ellen Meiksins Wood. 2017. *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, Verso Books.



# Capitalism and Globalization

- ▶ Leads to compulsion to minimize production costs, maximize profits
  - ▶ Owners are no more free than workers
  - ▶ Search for profits (cheap raw materials, cheap labour, new markets) leads to new form of colonization
  - ▶ Forced march into modernity: modernize or be colonized
- 

# Karl Polanyi on social dislocation

- ▶ The Market Society
- ▶ Unregulated market system
  - Supply–Demand–Price mechanism
    - Karl Polanyi, 2001. *The Great Transformation : The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

# “Disembedded” market is totalizing

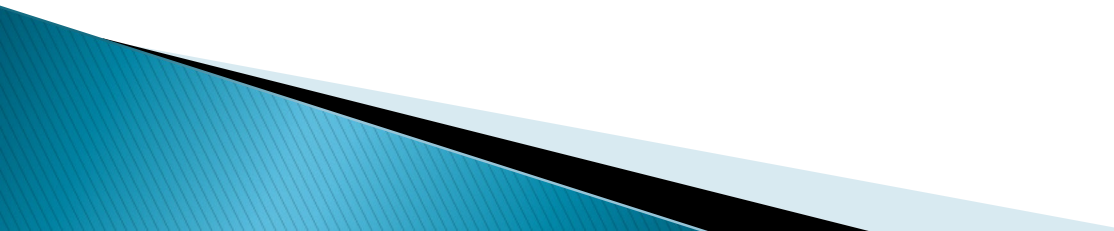
- ▶ But what makes a market economy is its **self-regulation character**. This springs from the inclusion of the factors of production, labour, and land into the system. No society before our own ever permitted the fate of labor and land to be decided by the supply-demand-price mechanism. Once this is the case, society is economically determined.
  - Karl Polanyi, “Economic History and the Problem of Freedom”, in *For a New West* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), p. 41.

# “Disembedded” market is totalizing

- ▶ Why? **Because labor is only another name for man, and land for nature.** Market economy amounts to the handing over of man and his natural habitat to the working of a blind mechanism running in its own grooves and following its own laws.

- Karl Polanyi, “Economic History and the Problem of Freedom”, in *For a New West* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), p. 41.

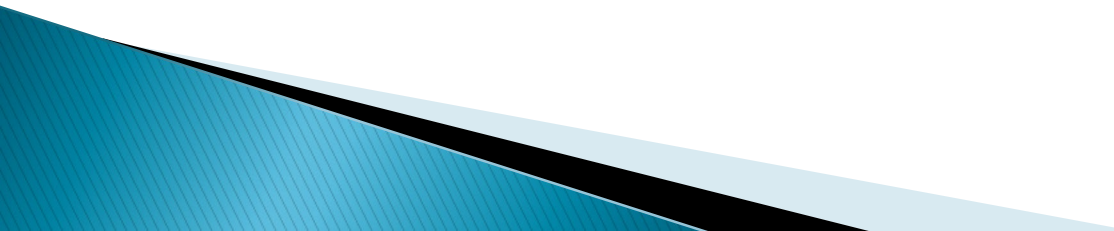
# Polanyi on social dislocation

- ▶ Because market is totalizing and self-regulating, everything is submitted to market discipline
  - ▶ Nothing should interfere with the Supply-Demand-Price mechanism.
  - ▶ Sacrifice culture, custom, tradition, family, religion, ethics, aesthetics, etc.
- 

# Social dislocation

- ▶ Social dislocation is a permanent, built-in feature of modernity
- ▶ Colonization means globalization of social dislocation
- ▶ Hartmut Rosa:
  - Societies experience this as “dynamic stabilization”
  - Individuals experience this as “alienation”

# Secularity is not neutral

- ▶ Absence of religion from public life does not create an “neutral” social order
  - ▶ There is a shape, purpose, direction of secularity
  - ▶ Secularism under communism, western liberal democracy, even within Western liberal democracies (David Martin, Veit Bader)
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# Religion and the evolving Canadian social order

»» From established churches to  
permanent revolution



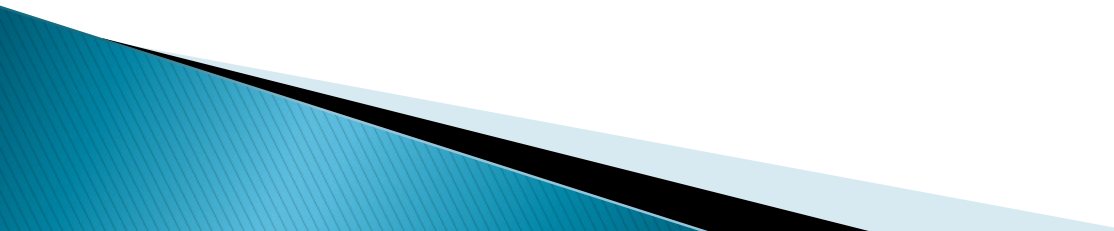
# Colonial Christendom

» Version française  
English Version

# A settler-colonial society founded on Establishment

- ▶ “Transplanting Christendom” (John Webster Grant)
  - European norm since Constantine
  - Religious monopoly by a state church
- ▶ Establishment as solution
  - problem = social chaos
  - solution = establishment

# The collapse of dreams of Christendom

- ▶ Lack of resources/dispersed population
    - Church of England cannot serve the whole population
  - ▶ French Catholics refuse to convert
  - ▶ New diversity among loyal Protestants
    - Baptists, Methodists, etc. provide “cheap religion”
  - ▶ Indigenous people
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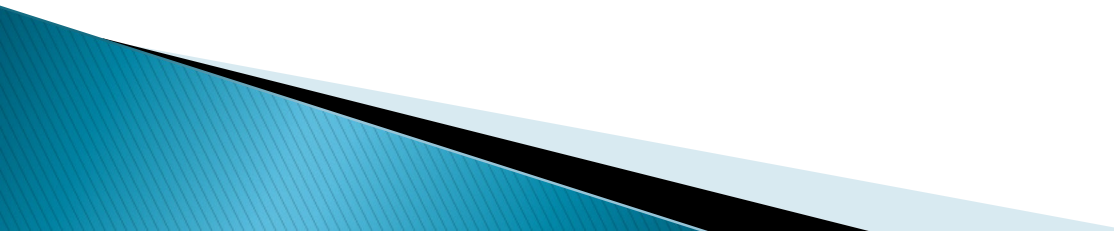
# Christian Canada

» Plural establishment,  
1854–1960

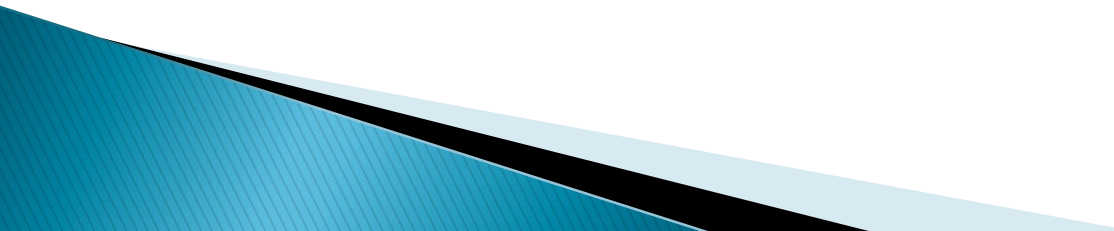
# Establishment became the problem

- ▶ Problem = Establishment
  - Failure to unify colony
  - Creates conflict and competition between socio-religious communities
  - Lack of resources
- ▶ Solution = “plural establishment”
  - Including the accommodation (often grudging) of French/Catholic communities

# Christian Canada and “Plural Establishment” (1840–1960)

- ▶ Institutionally, mainline churches are involved in the projects of the state
    - Education (including Residential Schools)
    - Health care
    - Social services
  - ▶ Christian social and moral values are foundational to public culture, public and private norms and law.
  - ▶ Christian privilege considered normal/natural
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# The evolving Canadian social order: liberal democracy and the market society

- ▶ Rapid expansion of the market economy
  - ▶ Massive immigration, industrialization, urbanization
  - ▶ Growth in state apparatus to encourage and promote it all
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# Christian Canada and conflict with the market society

- ▶ Results in expansion of spheres relegated to churches
  - Churches and charities cannot keep up with new demands for education, healthcare, social services
- ▶ Church agencies are seen as inefficient and ineffective and are increasingly replaced by state and market actors
  - Esp. education in Quebec, the Quiet Revolution



# Christian Canada and the conflict with liberal democracy

- ▶ Christian Canada promoted democracy, but violated many of its principles
- ▶ Christian Canada is anti-egalitarian
  - Secularism recognizes the “moral equality” of all citizens
- ▶ Christian Canada is undemocratic
  - Secularism allows all to participate in public life and not just Christians

# From 1960s on, public religion in Canada is now seen as:

## ▶ Inefficient

- Interferes with economy, science, medicine, etc.
- Scientific professionalism over amateur philanthropy

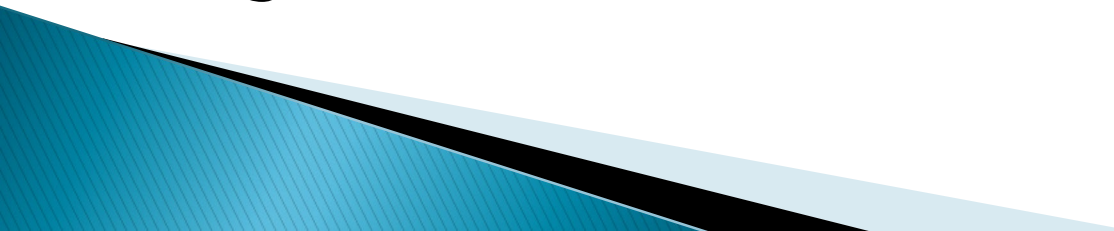
## ▶ Undemocratic

- Secularism allows all to participate in public life and not just Christians, frees individuals from church control (e.g., artists)
- Anti-egalitarian  
Violates the “moral equality” of all citizens

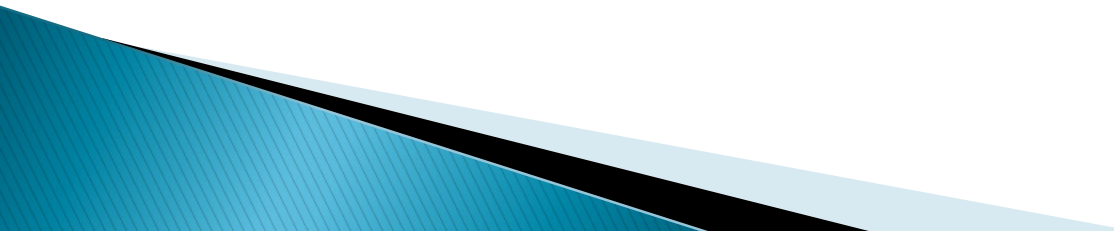
# Secular Canada

- » Multiculturalism, human rights, and secularism

# Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Secularism

- ▶ Just as state supports no single, official culture, it must not support any specific religion
  - ▶ State must demonstrate “equal access, equal distance, equal respect, or equal support to all the religions within its territory.” (Jose Casanova)
  - ▶ Secularism is seen as a natural part of human rights and multiculturalism
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# Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and Secularism

- ▶ Secularization (de-Christianization) of public schools (and other agencies)
  - ▶ Liberalization of laws regarding family life and sexual morality
  - ▶ Government intervention in education, social services and healthcare (institutional secularization)
  - ▶ Courts strike down all laws serving religious ends
    - E.g. Lord's Day Act 1905
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# A Post-Secular Canada?

»» The trouble with Canadian  
secularity

# Secular Canada as a problem

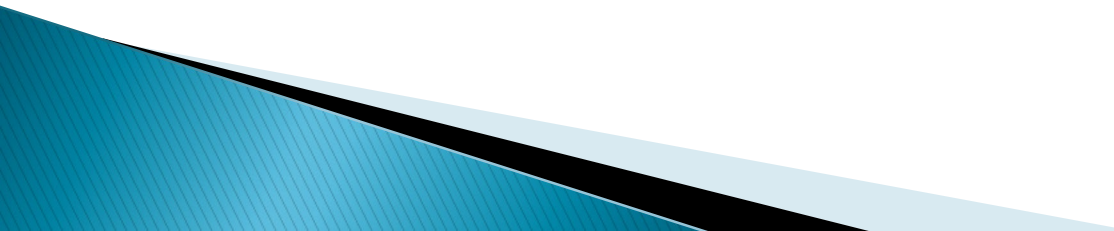
- ▶ Secularism does not equal equality
- ▶ Putatively–secular public sphere is in many ways residually and normatively Christian.
- ▶ Public life easily accommodates the needs of mainstream Christian communities.
  - Public holidays, Sunday worship, etc.

# Challenged by new religious diversity

- ▶ Increasing numbers of non-Christian Canadians
  - ▶ Increasing numbers of non-European Christians
  - ▶ Increasing activism among evangelical Christians
  - ▶ Persistence of public religion among the mainline churches
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# Resurgence and reconciliation

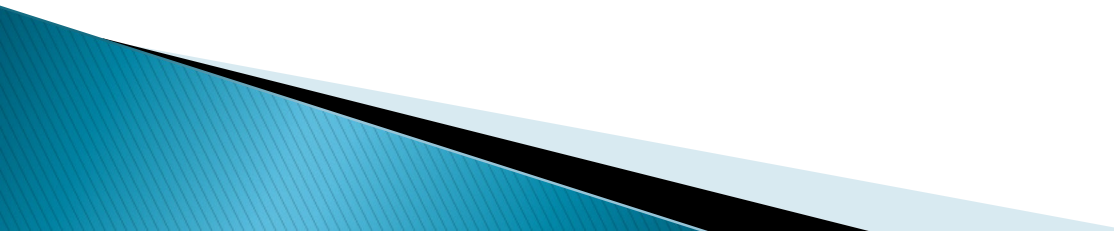
- ▶ Secular Canada's foundations set in the 1960s, did not address colonialism or reconciliation
  - ▶ Indigenous communities are demanding recognition of Indigenous spirituality
    - In land claims
    - Education
    - Healthcare
    - Social services
- 

# New forms of “religion”

## Spirituality and non-religion

- ▶ Spiritual but not religious
  - Paul Bramadat, *Yogalands: In Search of Practice on the Mat and in the World*
- ▶ Reverential naturalism (Paul Bramadat)
  - *Religion at the Edge: Nature, Spirituality, and Secularity in the Pacific Northwest*
- ▶ Lori Beaman, Non-religion in a Complex Future project


# Towards a post-secular Canada

- ▶ New diversity of religion and spirituality as well as project of reconciliation challenge secularism
  - ▶ All challenge the consensus that secularism is a necessary part of multiculturalism
  - ▶ New forms of spirituality and non-religion demand recognition and accommodation
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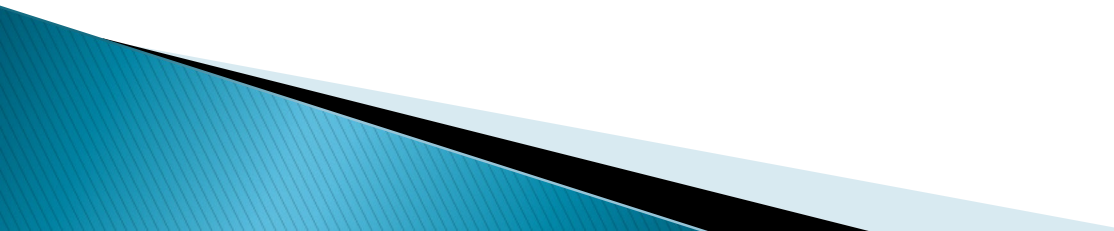
# The path forward

»» Three paths to a post-secular Canada

# Open secularism

- ▶ Tension among commitments to multiculturalism, human rights, and secularism ← “bricolage” approach
  - ▶ Alfred Stepan: “Twin tolerations”
    - Religious communities must tolerate autonomy of the democratically elected governments
    - Political authorities must tolerate religious communities’ right to freedom of worship and to participate in public debates.
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# Closed secularism

- ▶ Official culture model: La Laïcité
  - ▶ Quebec (parallels France): secular and democratic but includes attachment to a historically important religion
  - ▶ Ignores or mistrusts public religion of immigrants, Indigenous peoples, others.
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# Restorationism

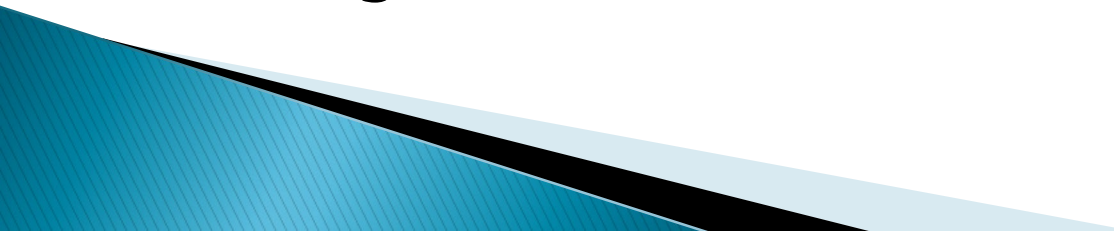
- ▶ MAGA, Dominionism, Project 2025, etc.
- ▶ Populist attacks on “Secular Canada” and “Secular America”
  - Multiculturalism
  - Human Rights
  - Secularism
- ▶ Attack on the Welfare State
  - In favour of what?

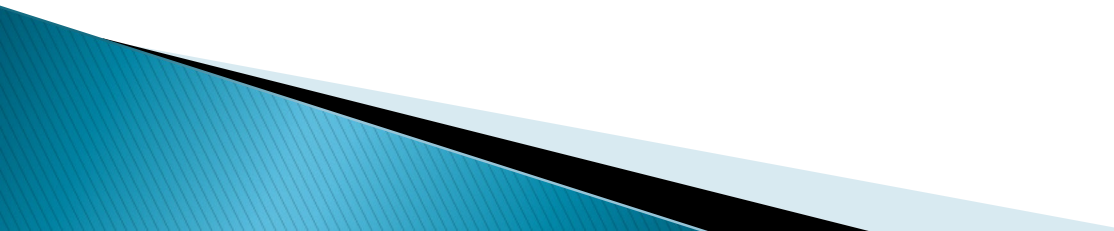
# Breakthrough groups

»» Topics to consider

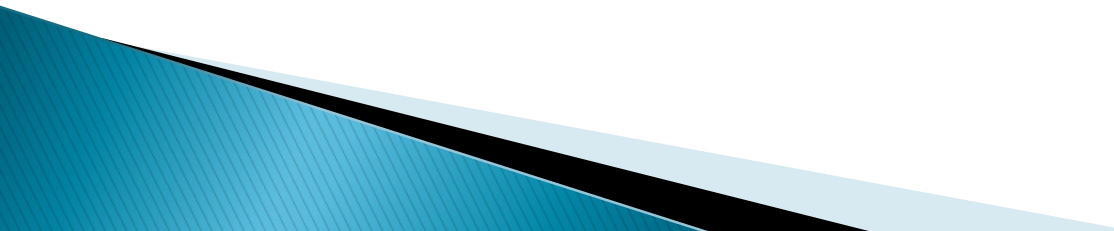


# Breakthrough groups

- ▶ What “ship” are we on? Where is it going? What is its purpose? What roles does religion and/or the churches play in this project?
  - ▶ What are the signs of “dynamic stabilization” (coerced economic growth, technological acceleration, and cultural innovation)
  - ▶ What are the signs of social dislocation (i.e., painful cultural, social, psychological changes) in Quebec?
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- ▶ How do we develop strategies of “resonance”, that is psycho–social integration?
  - ▶ What are examples of open/closed secularism in Quebec? What impact do they have?
  - ▶ Given suspicions about the societal value of religion, how can Christian churches and agencies engage with Quebec public life?
  - ▶ The Christian Churches, attendance, and membership: what are the challenges and opportunities?
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# Breakout groups

- ▶ What are examples of populist attacks on multiculturalism, human rights, and secularism (the pillars of “Secular Canada”) do we see in Quebec? Canada? The U.S.?
  - ▶ Given that young people are increasingly staying away from traditional Christian churches and agencies, how can your community or agency serve their needs?
  - ▶ The Christian Churches and property: how did we get it? What are we going to do with it?
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# Thank you!

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