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The Social Authority of Religion in Canada: A Study of Contemporary Death Rituals

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December 2003

A thesis submitted to McGill University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-612-98456-7
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-612-98456-7

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for supporting me in this effort. Dr. Katherine Young for agreeing to be my thesis supervisor. Lynda McNeil for her guidance through the ethics review process. Pat O'Rouke for her initial inspiration. Mdme. Louise Mathieu-Primeau, Mr. Andy Sarrasin, Mr. Andy Roy, Mrs. Dawn Cushay, M. Andre Lepin, Ms. Jennifer Curry, Mr. Bashir Hussain, Reverend Richard Topping, Reverend Slattery, Reverend Chan, Reverend Bonnar, and Ms. Helen Krutz-Weils for graciously agreeing to participate in interviews. Matina Skalkogiannis for her editing skills. Andrés Duran for translation services. Ann Snider, Kim Brett, Jay-Cee Thibodeau, Sheila Oakley and Mary McCartney for their feedback. Lorraine Laurinaitis for her encouragement and childcare. Kay and Alf Lamoureux for believing in me. Zachary and Jaden Scholes for their patience and Doug Scholes for his ongoing love and support.

Abstract

The social authority of traditional organized Christian religion has changed dramatically over the twentieth century. In 2002, less than 25% of Canadians were members of a traditional faith community or regularly participated in formal or informal organized religious practices. Nonetheless, Reginald Bibby has claimed Christianity is making a comeback in Canada. He has argued that the continued reliance on religious rites of passage by nominal and non-affiliates represents the continued influence of traditional Christian religion on the lives of Canadians, and the return to traditional religious communities for rites of passage represents opportunities for those faith communities to bring the lost sheep back to the fold. This thesis tests Bibby's claim through an examination of the social authority of traditional organized religion over contemporary death rituals practiced in Canada. Although Bibby may be encouraged by the continued presence of traditional Christian religious leadership in many contemporary death rituals, the inclusion of religion is often a precarious one that is more often the result of a situational religious response to fulfill a cultural expectation than the desire to perform a sacred ritual that reinforces one's relationship with a traditional faith community or the transcendent being it worships.

Abrégé

L'influence sociale qu'exerçait la religion chrétienne de structure traditionnelle a considérablement changé au cours du vingtième siècle. En 2002, moins de 25 % des canadiens étaient membres d'une communauté religieuse traditionnelle ou participaient, de manière informelle ou concertée, à des pratiques religieuses structurées. Néanmoins, Reginald Bibby affirme que la chrétienté fait un retour au Canada. Il soutient que l'entretien de rites de passage religieux par des gens étant ou non affiliés à la religion chrétienne traditionnelle témoigne de l'influence continue de celle-ci sur la vie des canadiens. Bibby avance également que le retour vers les communautés religieuses traditionnelles pour la pratique de ces rites de passage constitue l'opportunité rêvée de ramener les brebis égarées vers le troupeau. La présente thèse vérifie les allégations de Bibby à travers un examen de l'influence sociale de la religion traditionnelle organisée par rapport aux rituels funéraires qui sont pratiqués au Canada. Bien que la position de Bibby semble être soutenue par la prépondérance des valeurs traditionnelles chrétiennes dans de nombreux rituels funéraires contemporains, l'inclusion des référents religieux est souvent accessoire et participe plus souvent des attentes culturelles du milieu plutôt que d'un réel besoin de rituel sacré renforçant l'appartenance à une communauté religieuse traditionnelle ou à l'être transcendant qu'elle vénère.

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Introduction

Since Confederation, Statistics Canada has been tracking the religious affiliation of Canadians through deca-annual census taking. The first hundred years recorded a stable statistical profile of the religious landscape with more than 97% of Canadians claiming affiliation with traditional organized Christian denominations, a figure split almost evenly between Catholicism and various Protestant sects (see Table 1).

Table 1: Religious Affiliation, Statistics Canada*

Religion	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001*
Catholic	41.6	41.7	39.4	38.7	41.3	43.4	44.7	46.7	47.3	47.3	45.7	43.2
Roman	41.6	41.7	39.4	38.7	39.5	41.8	43.3	45.7	46.2	46.5	45.2	
Ukrainian	--	--	--	--	1.8	1.6	1.4	1.0	1.1	0.8	0.5	
Protestant	56.5	55.6	55.9	56.0	54.4	52.2	50.9	48.9	44.4	41.2	36.2	29.2
United	–	–	–	0.1	19.5	19.2	20.5	20.1	17.5	15.6	11.5	9.5
Anglican	13.7	12.8	14.5	16.1	15.8	15.2	14.7	13.2	11.8	10.1	8.1	6.8
Presbyterian	15.9	15.8	15.6	16.1	8.4	7.2	5.6	4.5	4.0	3.4	2.4	1.3
Lutheran	1.4	1.8	3.2	3.3	3.8	3.5	3.2	3.6	3.3	2.9	2.4	2.1
Baptist	6.4	5.9	5.3	4.8	4.3	4.2	3.7	3.3	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.5
Pentecostal	–	–	–	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.0	1.4	1.6	1.2
Other	19.1	19.3	17.3	15.5	2.3	2.4	2.5	3.4	3.7	4.9	7.9	5.8
East Orthodox	–	0.3	1.2	1.9	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.6
Jewish	0.1	0.3	1.0	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.1
No Religion	--	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.5	4.3	7.3	12.3	16.2
Other	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.5	2.6	7.5

- Excerpt from *The Daily*, June 1, 1993. A publication of Statistics Canada, Catalogue Number 96-304E.
- 2001 Figures added from census results release in *The Daily*, May 13, 2003

In 1971, however, the statistical portrait started to change. Statistics Canada introduced a new option to the religious affiliation question — religion: none. Since then, this new category of religious affiliation has grown significantly: 3% in 1971; 8.3% in 1981; 13.7% in 1991 and 16.8% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Alongside this growth period of religious 'nones', statistical records have demonstrated a steady decline in the numbers of Canadians who have been active participants in traditional Christian faith communities (Catholic, and Protestant - United, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and evangelical sects), from 53% of the Canadian population attending worship on a weekly basis in 1957 to 21% in 2000 (See Table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of National Weekly Attendance and Membership Rates(%) - 1957 and 1990 (Bibby) and Religious Affiliation - 1961 and 1991 (Statistics Canada)

	Attend a	Member a	Affiliate b	Nominal c	Attend a	Member a	Affiliate b	Nominal c	Attend Only d
	1957	1957	1961	1961	1990	1990	1991	1991	2001
NATIONAL	53	82	99.5	46.5	23	29	87.6	64.6	21
ROMAN CATHOLIC	83	96	46.7	17	33	28	45.7	67	26
Out Que	75	91	na	25	43	38	86.0	57	32
Que	88	99	na	12	29	18	33.6	71	20
PROTESTANT	38	80	48.9	62	22	37	36.2	78	25
Anglican	24	74	13.2	76	15	30	8.1	85	15 e
United Church	40	84	20.1	60	15	35	11.5	85	
Lutheran	38	86	3.6	62	10	32	2.4	90	
Presbyterian	38	64	4.5	62	13	30	2.4	87	
Conservative	51	86	7.5	49	48	55	12.0	52	58
OTHER FAITHS	35	37	3.9	65	12	32	5.8	88	n/a

a - Excerpt from Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods*, 1993, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co, pg. 10

b - Percentage of population affiliated with a religious tradition from *The Daily*, June 1, 1993, a publication of Statistics Canada, Catalogue Number 96-304E.

c - Nominal membership national is the difference between religious attendance and religious affiliation, whereas nominal membership per religious affiliation represents non - attendance by affiliates.

d - Figures for attendance only from Bibby Project Canada surveys

e - Represents total percentage of attendance for all mainline protestant faith communities incvluding Anglican, United Church, Lutheran na Presbyterian

Decreasing participation/membership rates suggest that an ever increasing number of Canadians are only nominally affiliated with a specific organized religious tradition and rarely attend services except for high holy days, weddings, baptisms or funerals, or never attend at all (Emberly, 2002; Bibby, 2002; Olsen 1999). Growth in the numbers of Canadians who are nominally religious or without religion suggests that there has been a shift in the social authority of the traditional organized religion in the lives of contemporary Canadians.

For the purposes of this exploration, social authority refers to the authoritative framework of standards and norms that guide the social life of an individual. One method for assessing the social authority of traditional organized religion is to study the significance of the religious identity in the social lives of individuals. The religious identity reflects one's affiliation with a particular religious ideology. However, affiliation alone does not offer sufficient information for determining the social significance of the religious identity in an individual's life. To establish that, one also needs to determine the strength of commitment to the religious ideology. If one maintains a strong commitment to one's chosen religion, it is more likely that the religion will be recognized as a significant authority in social life. Conversely, if commitment to one's chosen religion is weak, the social authority of the religion will likely be diminished and the religious identity may become a marginalized to non-existent influence on one's life. With increasing numbers of Canadians adopting a nominal to non-existent relationship with a traditional organized religion, commitment to a chosen faith tradition may be significantly weaker than that of an active adherent, resulting in a significant variation in

the social authority of the religious tradition for the religiously active, the nominal or the non-affiliate person, a phenomenon explored within this thesis.

In any examination of religion in Canada, it is appropriate to review the work of Reginald Bibby, a sociologist who, since 1975, has dedicated much of his academic career to studying the influence of traditional organized religion on the lives of Canadians. Bibby has produced nine books, published numerous scholarly and popular articles, and has appeared on countless radio and television interview programs, all of which have contributed to his designation as an authoritative voice on religion in Canada. In 1975 Bibby began Project Canada, a research effort designed to track the status of religion in Canada. The initial results of his efforts confirmed a downward trend in Canadian practice of traditional Christian religions. His research highlighted the steady decline in church memberships and regular attendance at religious services (weekly or monthly); recorded increasing numbers of young people who were opting out of traditional religious practice; examined the ever-increasing median age of existing church members to numbers beyond child bearing years; documented significant growth in nominal affiliation of members who never attended religious services or only attended annual holy days or rites of passage activities; and recognized the growing affiliation rates of religious nones. Despite this rather grim outlook, Bibby was surprised and encouraged by findings that confirmed a continued interest in moral values, personal well-being, paranormal belief systems, and "ultimate questions" about life, findings he interpreted as grounded in traditional Christian teaching thus providing Canadian churches with some hope for collecting the lost sheep back into the fold.

Citing research collected throughout the 1990s, his more recent writings (1995, 1997, 1999, 2002), declared the downward trend had stopped, attendance and membership levels had stabilized and there were even signs of modest growth. In his latest book, *Restless Gods* (2002), Bibby was particularly intrigued with Canadians' persistently high levels of affiliation with traditional Christian religions, even by those who fell into the large nominally affiliated category (approximately 75% of affiliates). He explained the high retention rate was a result of many nominal members who had lost touch with the church due to a move or busy lifestyle, and were just waiting for churches to call (2002: 52). Bibby also recognized the growing religious "none" category as "more like a hotel than a home" for Canadians (2002: 41). Citing his own research, Bibby claimed the religion none category was a temporary stay for mostly young Canadians who were busy with other time commitments, but "when they want 'rites of passage' ... considerable numbers will 're-acquire' the Catholic and Protestant identities of their parents" (2002: 65).

It is appropriate for Bibby to have explored the role of ritual practice in assessing the religious life of Canadians, as many scholars have identified the significant role ritual plays in the maintenance of a religious identity (Durkheim, 1995; Fenn 1997; Fuller 2001; Mol, 1976; Olsen, 1993; Roberts, 1993; Roof, 1993, 1999; Van Gennep, 1960; Walter, 1996). Rituals provide individuals with the opportunity to communally reaffirm connections with each other by "strengthening the place of the individual in the group, or society, and vice versa by strengthening the bonds of a society *vis-à-vis* the individual" (Mol, 1976: 233). The more regular one's participation in shared religious rituals, the greater the opportunity for the reinforcement and social reproduction of one's religious

identity and the overall influence or social authority of religion in one's life. Therefore, examining religious ritual activity offers insight into the strength and influence of religious identity for members of a particular faith community and provides a framework to assess of the social authority of the religious ideology on the daily lives of Canadians. While rituals that mark major life passages – marriage, birth and death – provide opportunities for a collective experience that may reinforce the social authority of one's religious identity, these exercises are only performed sporadically over a lifetime. Without some form of continued lifetime participation in other collective ritual exercises, such as weekly communal worship services or informal fellowship activities, the religious identity fostered through these situational religious rites-of-passage events might lose significance or influence in one's life (Olsen, 1993, 1999; Moller 1990; Walter1996).

Yet Bibby maintains that nominal and non-religious Canadians who rely on traditional organized Christian religions only to perform rites of passage should nonetheless be categorized as having "re-acquired" their traditional Christian religious identity and are thus influenced by this re-acquisition in a permanent way. However, close scrutiny of Bibby's own findings offers an alternative interpretation. In *Restless Gods* (2002) Bibby examined desire for future religious rituals (see table 3).

Table 3: Desire for Religious Rites of Passage in the Future (in percentages) *

	Adults 25 & Over				15- to 24-year-olds			
	Birth	**Marriage**	**Death**	**Weekly Attend**	**Birth**	**Marriage**	**Death**	**Weekly Attend**
Nationally	26	29	60	23	75	82	85	17
Female	29	30	60	25	77	81	86	n/a
Male	24	28	59	22	73	82	24	n/a
25-34/15-19**	40	34	56	14	76	88	87	18
35-54/20-24**	19	22	67	30	74	76	83	14
55 & over	18	20	59	43	--	--	--	--

* Excerpt from Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods*, 1993, Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., pg. 148.

** Refers to 15- to 24-year-olds side of the table.

Although the results did suggest a desire for rites-of passage in excess of the current level of formal membership and practice, there remained a significant number of Canadians who did not anticipate future religious rituals. In response to the lower figures associated with the desire for future marriage and birth rituals (29% and 26% respectively), Bibby explained the desire for those particular rituals declines with age, and many of the respondents in his sample had already performed those rituals (2002, 89). Still that explanation did not account for the results of interest in future religious death rituals. Bibby claimed 60% of all Canadians anticipate the future need for a religious death ritual – a statistic that leaves one wondering if Canadians are so influenced by traditional organized religions, why do 40% not want a religious funeral service? If death, a momentous event of life, is not enough to inspire the need for traditional religious ritual, what influence does traditional religion have in the everyday life of Canadians?

Reflecting on these questions it seemed appropriate to test Bibby's claim that participation in religious rites of passage demonstrates the ongoing social authority of traditional organized Christian religion in the lives of Canadians, especially in the lives of those who provide the negative space of the Canadian religious landscape, the nominally religious or religious "nones". The test was performed through a study of the last rite of passage -- the death ritual. Why death rituals? According to David Moller, a sociologist at Indiana University and expert on contemporary death rituals, death rituals are social facts that embody and reflect the "social life in a given time, place and culture" (Moller, 1996: 79). As well, Canadians who are non-religious or are nominally affiliated with a religious tradition could forego birth rituals and could choose not to marry or be married by the Justice of the Peace. But the Justice of the Peace will not bury them. Thus, the most difficult major life rite of passage to perform without a traditional religious ritual would seem to be the death ritual. Or is it?

The social authority of traditional organized religion in contemporary death rituals was examined through a survey of historical and current services performed for dying, dead and bereaved Canadians. The research began with an extensive review of both scholarly and popular culture literature about religion and death rituals. A significant trend explored in many writings was the increasing social authority of non-religious professionals and the declining influence of traditional organized religion in contemporary society. This trend was especially evident in studies of contemporary attitudes toward dying, death and the subsequent performance of death rituals. To examine the extent to which this trend is evident in Canada, a special case study of contemporary death ritual practices was conducted in Montreal and Toronto. The data

was collected through participant observations of ten contemporary death rituals and a series of thirty interviews with religious and non-religious professionals who service the dying, dead and bereaved. The small sample size of interviews and observations obviously does not constitute a thorough assessment of death ritual activity in Canada. Nonetheless, this data did reflect themes explored throughout the literature, namely, the increasing trend in social attitudes that support the increased social authority of non-religious professionals and the waning social authority of traditional organized religious authority in society, both of which are increasingly evident in death rituals performed within the Canadian context.

The following thesis thus offers an analysis of the social authority of traditional organized religion in Canada and death rituals in particular. Chapter 1 considers literature that explores the social authority of religion in contemporary culture. A number of voices and perspectives are examined beginning with an overview of Bibby's analysis of religion in contemporary Canadian culture. Alternative positions offered by scholars, both international and Canadian, are also considered. Chapter 2 offers a closer investigation of the influence practice plays in determining the social authority of the religious identity. Chapter 3 examines changing social attitudes about death and the increased social authority of non-religious professionals in the care of dying, dead and bereaved Canadians. Chapter 4 surveys developments in contemporary death rituals including the changing role of traditional organized religion and the trend toward non-religious rituals.

Ultimately I conclude that the social authority of religion in Canadian death rituals has changed, for some, and the degree of change is directly related to the amount

of time committed to active participation within a faith community. Individuals who maintain an active traditional religious practice, tend to have a strong religious identity and recognized the religious ideology as a significant social authority in life and in rituals that mark the death of a loved one. However, for many Canadians the funeral director has usurped the traditional religious leader as the social authority over death rituals. Individuals whose affiliation with liberal religious traditions where participation is not mandatory, increasingly consult the funeral director to facilitate many services related to death rituals. Canadians whose religious affiliation is nominal to non-existent tend to rely exclusively on the expertise of the funeral director in fulfilling obligations to their dead. And while Bibby may be encouraged by the large number of religious funeral services performed for nominally and non-religious Canadians, I will argue that the decision to have a religious leader perform the death ritual does not necessarily mean that the participants want to reaffirm the social authority of the religious tradition for the dead or the bereaved/living, but might instead be motivated by a situational religious identity that limits the social authority of the religion to the provision of a ready-made ritual format for fulfilling cultural obligations to the dead and to the extended community.

Chapter 1 – Social Authority of Religion In Contemporary Culture

1.1 The Story From A Popular Culture Point Of View

Popular media accounts of religion in contemporary culture paint a confusing picture of the present and future role of religion in society. At one end of the spectrum there are voices asserting that traditional religion continues to be a significant influence in the lives of many people. Increasing numbers of magazines attract readers with cover stories such as "Soul Searchers" (Macleans, December 2000), "Returning to Religion" (Macleans, April 2002), "Finding God On The Web"(*Time*, December 1996), and "One Nation Under Gods" (Time, December 1993). A recent article in *The Gazette* (Montreal), described the growing number of adults who are making career changes and choosing the Christian ministry (Schwartz, 2002: D1). In 2002, a *National Post* editorial by Andy Lamey highlighted the continued influence of Christianity on the social framework of Canada. From the Constitution, to statutory holidays, to state funding of religious education, Lamey argued that instead of Christian leaders claiming our politics involve "the establishment of non-religion as the official religion of Canada", it would be better for them to openly admit the conspicuous and long-standing privilege of Christianity (Lamey, 2002: A18). Many news reports in the summer of 2002 highlighted the fact that Pope John Paul II drew a crowd of over 200,000 young people for World Youth Day held in Toronto. A recent *Atlantic Monthly* article by Toby Lester suggested "the new century will probably see religion explode – in both intensity and variety" (Lester, 2002: 37).

At the other end of the spectrum, there are many who declare the decreasing significance of religion in contemporary society. It is not uncommon to read or hear popular media references to contemporary North America society as a place where the institution of traditional religion has deteriorated to a marginal influence. Reflecting on

Easter celebrations for 2003, *The Gazette* (Montreal) included several articles about the changing influence of religion on social attitudes. An article by Mark Abley, entitled "Once this was no ordinary Friday", discussed how in the 1950s Montreal would shut down for Good Friday, but the increased secularization of social attitudes has changed this holy day to just another holiday when Wal-mart can enjoy increased sales (Abley, 2002). In a recent *New York Times* article, Clifford Krauss discussed the secularization trend in Canada, highlighting the very different role religion has in the United States and Canada, describing the former as "an almost puritanical country" and the latter as "a society where religion no longer wields cultural authority" (Krauss, 2003). This sentiment was supported through his account of plummeting attendance rates and closure of churches in city centers and rural environments across Canada. Krauss also noted that Canadian author Yann Martel, fearing Canadians would be offended by the religious content of his Booker Prize award winning novel "Life of Pi", rearranged chapters in the Canadian edition[1] because "in Canada, secularism is triumphant, and to talk noncynically, nonironically about religion is strange".

The spectrum of views about the influence of religion in society offered through popular culture media range from whole-hearted embrace to out-right rejection. These contrasting perspectives provide important resources for measuring contemporary attitudes about the social authority of religion, but they lack the depth of analysis required to confirm trends. To substantiate the views offered through popular culture media it is helpful to consult research by social scientists. Social scientists study a phenomenon, such as the social authority of religion in society, using various quantitative and

qualitative methods. Nonetheless, their results can sometimes be as diverse and contradictory as those expressed through popular culture.

1.2 The Case Presented By Reginald Bibby

Bibby started his academic career as a seminary student in the 1960s, receiving his Ph.D. in sociology from Washington State University in the early 1970s. His doctoral studies on religion in society were greatly influenced by the writings of Peter Berger, a sociologist of religion who, along with his contemporaries Rodney Stark, Charles Glock, Harvey Cox, and Thomas Luckman, predicted that continued secularization of social institutions would lead to the eventual demise of the social authority of religion. At the time Bibby was as convinced as these authors were by their prognosis (Bibby, 2002: 1-2). However, instead of accepting their prognosis *carte blanche*, he decided to initiate a research project that would test whether this was really the case in Canada. Thus, in 1975 Project Canada was born. Since then, Bibby has conducted six national surveys on religion in Canada and three teen surveys with religion as a theme. The result of these efforts has been the development of a significant body of research on social attitudes about religion in Canada, research that has been made available through nine books (four focused exclusively on religion[2]), over seventy articles and multiple appearances in the popular media as an authority on religion in Canada.[3]

In his early writings, the survey results appeared to confirm the prognosis of Berger et. al. that secularization was having a negative impact on the social authority of religion in Canada. In his first book *Fragmented Gods: the Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (1987), Bibby confirmed religion had "ceased to be life-informing at

the level of the average Canadian.... [and] for most it is extremely specialized in content and influence" (1987:5). The text highlighted decreased attendance rates, lack of involvement by the youth, the growing influence of secularism and increased individual consumption of religion, all factors that pointed toward the fragmentation of spiritual and social authority offered by traditional religious communities. The second book *Unknown Gods* (1993) confirmed a continued decline in participation rates, an alarming increase in the median age of church members beyond childrearing (replacement) age, and identified the trend for Canadians to search for meaning outside traditional religious institutions. Using language more suited to an advertising firm, Bibby described the Canadian approach to religion as a "Religious Market" where the providers (i.e. traditional Christian churches) were experiencing "product, promotion and distribution problems" (Bibby, 1993: 125).

The use of marketing language to describe religion reflects not only themes explored by Rodney Stark and Roger Fink (1992), but also sheds light on another aim of Bibby's research – to provide Canadian churches with resources that would allow them to better serve the religious needs of Canadians. This strategy is particularly evident in his book *There's Got to Be More: Connecting Churches and Canadians* (1995), where Bibby provides the reader, church leaders being the most obvious target audience, with data to support and encourage efforts to bring lost affiliates and religious "nones" back into the fold. *There's Got to Be More* offered findings that confirmed declining attendance/ membership rates at traditional organized religious institutions in Canada, and highlighted Canadians' continued tendency toward individualism where personal authority outweighs external authority; an attitude that encourages a highly personalized

selective approach to religion so that fragments of religious and non-religious doctrine or spiritual understanding are drawn together to form unique religious identities, an approach Bibby termed "religion *à la carte*" (1995:20). But Bibby's analysis also offered encouragement for Canadian churches. Surveys confirmed Canadian receptivity to matters of spirituality and, most importantly, recorded high retention rates of religious identity by non-practicing affiliates. The optimistic interpretation of the future for traditional churches in Canada offered in this book was a position Bibby developed through his subsequent writings.

In 1997, Bibby declared the persistence of Christian religious identification in Canada in an article that examined the "paradox of religious affiliation in the absence of religious involvement", through a study of the role that family and assimilation plays in the perpetuation of religious identification (Bibby, 1997: 24). Bibby studied the religious affiliation rates of Canadian couples (including common law) and found that over 85% of couples chose partners who belonged to the same religious tradition, including couples who professed no religion. The study also compared the religious identification of children living at home with that of their parents and found between 94-99% of children identified with the same religion as their parents (see Table 4).

Table 4: Percentage of Children Who Share Their Parents' Religion When Partners Have the Same Faith

	Married Partners	Common-law Partners
Catholic	99	95
Protestant	95	87
Eastern Orthodox	98	98
Jewish	99	97
Other Faiths*	94	89
No Religion	98	97

* Eastern non-Christian religions and para-religious groups.
* Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991

Table adapted from Bibby, 1997 "The Persistence of Christian religious Identification in Canada" Statistics Canada Catalogue 1-008-XPE, Sprint 1997: page 25.

The few children who did not share the same religious affiliation as their parents were most often described as having no religion. The article also included a discussion that suggested the religious identification of children was most influenced by the religion of the mother. To support this position, Bibby offered his analysis of interfaith marriages (15% of the population). Children from these families most often identified with the religious affiliation of the mother; no religion was the most frequent alternative reported, even over the tradition of the father.[4] A conspicuous omission in the analysis of intergenerational affiliation rates was the lack of reference to participation rates within each religious tradition or whether the transfer of religious identity from one generation to the next also included a transfer of inclination for practice. For instance, there was no reference to the fact that almost 80% of Christians maintain a nominal affiliation with participation limited to high holy days or rites of passage exercises. Bibby did not discuss whether the children of nominal affiliates maintain a nominal or active religious identity. Also omitted was any discussion of the tendency for children who do not follow the religion of their parents to choose no religion. The lack of discussion as to the impact

of these factors was all the more obvious given the inclusion of a sub-article within the paper (author unknown), that highlighted "no religion" as the fastest growing religious affiliation in Canada, and Bibby's own recognition that the social influence of "secularization may have drastically reduced personal participation and the influence of the Christian churches in Canada". Instead, he chose to highlight the ongoing intergenerational religious identification as a positive indicator that traditional Christian Churches continue to attract large numbers of Canadians.

The strength of Christianity in Canada was a theme further explored in his 1999 essay "Multiculturalism in Canada". Here Bibby claimed the concept of Canada as a multi-religious mosaic was in fact a myth. He suggested a more accurate description of Canada would be "a culturally-diverse Christian monopoly" (1999:1). The argument for "Christian monopoly" stemmed from a study of affiliation rates collected through Statistics Canada surveys and Project Canada results, which demonstrated non-Christian religions collectively make up less than 6% of the population and 84% of Canadians identify with a Christian tradition (the remaining were religious "nones") (1999: 4). As with the previous paper, a noticeable omission in this paper was the absence of any discussion about the declining participation rates within Christian traditions, the increasing rates of nominal affiliation and the growing trend for Canadians to choose "no religion".

The strength of traditional organized Christianity in Canada was a theme Bibby promoted in his most recent book *Restless Gods* (2002). In the preface, Bibby recognized that he was taking a chance with the position offered in the text that "organized religion is making something of a comeback" (2002:xii). The book opened with an update on "The

Old Story of What's Happening in the Churches", which included analysis of his most recent Project Canada survey. The results confirmed the significant decline in participation / membership rates for Canadian Christian traditions over the past fifty years: from 53% of the Canadian population in 1957 to 21% in 2000. However, later in the book Bibby offered figures that suggested the decline had stabilized for some religious traditions and even showed signs of an increase for others (see Table 5).

Table 5 * : Weekly Service Attenders in Canada, 1957 – 2000.

	1957	1975	1990	2000
NATIONALLY	53%	31%	24%	21%
Protestant	38	27	22	25
Conservative	51	41	49	58
Mainline	35	23	14	15
Roman Catholic	83	45	33	26
Outside Quebec	75	48	37	32
Quebec	88	42	28	20
Sources: 1957: March Gallup poll; 1975, 1990, 2000: Bibby, Project Canada surveys				

* -- Table from Reginald Bibby, 2002. *Restless Gods.* Toronto: Stoddart. Page 73.

As the table demonstrates, overall, participation rates continue to decline with conservative Protestants—religious organizations that emphasize participation as a significant element of the religious doctrine—showing the only significant increase in participation rates. Nonetheless, Bibby built upon his theory of stabilized participation rates in his subsequent analysis of three "myths" about religion in Canada: 1—people were switching; 2—people were dropping out; and 3—people were not receptive to greater involvement. Bibby countered the first myth with his study of intergenerational switching patterns between 1975 and 1995; a study that demonstrated between 80 to 90%

of Christians stayed in their religious family, whereas only 63% of individuals from Other Faiths and 39% of religious nones stayed (see Table 6).

Table 6* : Intergenerational Identification by Religious Families: Panel, 1975 and 1995

1975 Identification	Number	Stayed	MLProt	CProt	RC	Other	None
Mainline Protestant	196	88%		4	3	2	3
Conservative Protestant	31	83	11		<1	6	0
Roman Catholic	102	90	3	4	5		5
Other Faith	15	63	5	22	5		5
No Religion	19	39	33	<1	28	<1	
Totals#	363	85	4	4	3	2	2

 # Identification data for 1975 or 1995 missing for 37 respondents.
Source: Bibby, 1999: 157

* – Table from Reginald Bibby, 2002. *Restless Gods.* Toronto: Stoddart. Page 43.

The second myth was discounted with his analysis of affiliation rates demonstrating that while only 21% of Canadians attend church regularly, over 60% of Canadians maintained a nominal identification with Christian traditions (see Table 7).

Table 7 * : Approximate Affiliate Pools and Weekly Attendees, Mid-1950s and 2000 in 1,000s

	Affiliate Pool		Weekly Attendees	
	Mid-50s	2000	Mid-50s	2000
NATIONALLY	18,000	25,000	10,000	6,300
Protestants	9,000	9,000	3,300	2,500
Conservative	1,500	2,500	700	1,500
Mainline	7,500	6,500	2,600	1,000
Roman Catholics	8,000	14,000	6,600	3,700
Outside Quebec	4,000	8,000	3,000	2,500
Quebec	4,000	6,000	3,600	1,200
Other Faiths	350	1,200	120	85

Sources: Affiliates: Statistics Canada census data. Attendance: 1957: March Gallup poll; 2000 = Bibby, Project Canada 2000.

* – Table from Reginald Bibby, 2002. *Restless Gods.* Toronto: Stoddart. Page 80.

In tackling the third myth, Bibby offered findings from his 2000 Project Canada survey that indicated nominal affiliates and even religious "nones" have an interest in becoming more involved in organized religion if the respondent "found it to be worthwhile" (2002:50) (see Table 8).

Table 8 *: Receptivity to Greater Involvement: People Attending Less Than Monthly, 2000

	ADULTS	TEENS
NATIONALLY	55%	39%
Protestant	64	47
Conservative	73 #	55
Mainline	63	44
Roman Catholic	56	46
Outside Quebec	56	51
Quebec	55	41
Other Faiths	67 #	48
No Religion	34	21

Numbers only 16 and 33, respectively; percentages unstable. Included here for heuristic purposes.

Sources: Bibby, Project Canada 2000 and Project Teen Canada 2000.

* -- Table from Reginald Bibby, 2002. *Restless Gods.* Toronto: Stoddart. Page 50.

The results suggested upwards of 55% were receptive to greater involvement, including 34% of people with no religion (figures for interest expressed by teens were at least 15% less than adults). While these figures may seem impressive, there was little discussion about the caveat for participation *only if the experience were worthwhile*, an exception that suggests nominal affiliates or religious "nones" consider religious practice not worthwhile or meaningful.

In *Restless Gods,* Bibby reiterated his claim that the desire for rites of passage in the future was another significant indicator of Canadian interest in organized religion (see Table 3). As indicated in the introduction, Bibby's continued optimism about the potential for Canadians to perform religious rites of passage sometime in the future did

not adequately account for the significant percentage of Canadians who do not anticipate having traditional religious rites of passage services performed.

Other themes Bibby explored through his surveys included interest in "ultimate questions" (about the meaning/purpose of life/death), mystical experiences and social values. Bibby's analysis suggests that Canadians continue to express a belief in God, maintain knowledge of traditional Christian religious history, and embrace social values—like honesty, trust, friendship, family and freedom, values Bibby associated with foundational teachings offered through traditional Christian religions. However, the questions were too general. There was no opportunity for the respondent to describe which "God" they believed in, whether the knowledge of Christian religious history was driven by cultural understanding or belief, or whether the agreement with certain social values was due to religious conviction. As a result, Bibby did not clearly demonstrate how those findings necessarily indicate the continued social authority of traditional Christian religions in the lives of Canadians.

It is significant to note the emphasis Bibby placed on the role of both nominal affiliates and the temporary status of religious nones, and their *potential* future involvement as strong indicators of religious interest in Canada. Although his observation of religious identity retention is important, as are his theories about the temporary status of *some* religious nones, he may be overly optimistic in his claims that this potential interest translates into significant social authority of traditional Christian churches in the lives of Canadians. The optimism may be due in part to Bibby's own commitment to Christianity and his vested interest in supporting the traditional Christian ministry and its efforts to respond to the changes in the social authority of traditional

organized religion in Canada. He clearly declares this bias at the outset of *Restless Gods,* stating that his research was conducted through "theistic eyes" (2002:5).

In *Restless Gods*, Bibby recognized the important social and cultural dimensions of maintaining a religious identity, and the role practice plays in fostering the social authority of religion in one's life. Yet *Restless Gods* did not offer any significant discussion about the considerable percentage of nominal affiliates who do not want to be involved in organized religion (see Table 7); or the high numbers of people who do not want traditional religious rites of passage. Thus we are left wondering how traditional organized religion informs their lives. Fortunately there are other authors who offer insight for this question.

1.3 An American View

Several sociologists have studied religion in contemporary society. In the United States, we can look to the extensive work (selected) of Robert Bellah (1970, 1976, 1985, 1987, 1991), David Bromley (1979, 1988), Robert C. Fuller (1982,1986,1989, 2001), Charles Glock (1965, 1976), Dean Hoge (1988, 1994), Wade Clarke Roof (1979, 1988, 1993, 1999), Rodney Stark (1968, 1985, 1992, 1993, 2000, 2002), and Robert Wuthnow (1976, 1992, 1994, 1997, 1998). Each have studied the declining membership and participation rates of various traditional organized religious institutions and examined the impact of this trend on those institutions and American culture in general. And even though the U.S. is generally understood to be a more pious nation than Canada, a familiar theme recognized by all authors was the trend toward more individualized forms of

religious expression, which often, but not always, include a rejection of traditional religions as a social authority in life.

Wade Clarke Roof has studied religion in the U.S. over the same period as Reginald Bibby. Like Bibby, Roof was impressed by the secularization theory early on in his career and set out to examine religious identity. He directed much of his research efforts toward tracking the development of non-traditional, multi-layered belief systems and practices in the U.S. (1979; 1988; 1993; 1999). Some of his findings mirrored those of Bibby. Roof recognized that the apostasy rate and decline in involvement at the weekly religious services had not only stabilized, but the national average had actually increased from 36% in 1988-89 to 39% in 1999 (1988: 44; 1999: 125). Roof also confirmed that 90% of Americans claimed affiliation with a religious tradition (1999:123), and 25% of the unchurched/drop-outs (Bibby defines these as nominal affiliates/religious nones), eventually return to the Church (1993:155), a return that often corresponded with child-rearing years. However, Roof clearly acknowledged that a large number of these unchurched/drop-outs (42%) do not go back (1993:155) and that approximately 10% of Americans are permanent non-joiners (1999:125). As well, his research identified a significant trend: for the unchurched to adopt a religious practice that rejects traditional religions as a social authority, in favour of a more personalized approach to religion, one that reflects a multi-layered religious belief system and practice (ibid). Roof explained how many baby boomer Americans "move freely in, out, and across religious boundaries... [and] combine elements from various traditions to create their own personal, tailor-made meaning systems" (1993:5). The concept of personalized religious expression or religious fluidity was explored at length in *Spiritual*

Marketplace (1999). Roof even referenced Bibby's concept of religious fragments or the consumption of religious symbols, beliefs and practices in a selective manner, as a trend that will continue to shape religious expression in the U.S. (1999: 138).

A notable exploration of the idea of personalized religion is also found in *Habits of the Heart* (1985), where Robert Bellah et. al., introduced the concept of "Sheilaism". Sheilaism was born from an interview Bellah had with a young nurse named Sheila Larson who offered her definition of religion. Ms. Larson had described religion as a very personal experience, independent of any involvement with organized religion and informed by her own "little voice" that provided her with guidance about "ultimate questions" in life. The concept of religion offered by Ms. Larson appeared to dismiss the social authority of traditional religion as declared by God or the church community. The authors expressed concern that Sheilaism was "a kind of radical individualism that tends to elevate the self to a cosmic principle" (Bellah, et.al, 1985: 236), an ideology that could potentially have negative affects on the social authority of traditional theistic centered, community based religions and society at large. However, in *Spiritual Marketplace,* Roof interpreted Sheilaism in a more positive light. He suggested the definition offered by Ms. Larson could instead be interpreted as one's individual quest for spiritual understanding of a religious identity, a quest that does not have to be informed by traditional religion, but nonetheless could be understood as a valid expression of religiosity.

The declining influence of the social authority of traditional organized religion was a theme also explored in *Spiritual, But Not Religious* (2001), a book by Robert C. Fuller. In his introduction entitled "Unchurched Spirituality", Fuller explained how almost 40% of Americans have no connection with organized religion" (Fuller, 2001: 1).

Yet despite the lack of connection, many of the "unchurched" exhibit fulfilling spiritual lives. The religiosity expressed by this substantial portion of the population is rich and varied spanning the spectrum from complete rejection of the supernatural to precarious connection with traditional religious institutions to multiple expressions in between. Unfortunately, it has been very difficult to study this population because they do not neatly fit into traditional categories that sociologists use to measure religiosity in society. In an attempt to rectify that discrepancy Fuller offered a typology of three types of unchurched Americans. Fuller's first type includes those 8-10% of Americans who are completely indifferent to religion, a group most often described as "secular humanists" due to their rejection of the supernatural in favour of reliance on reason and common sense alone (ibid: 2). The second type refers to the approximately 10% of Americans "who belong to a church but rarely attend and those who often attend church but choose not to join" (ibid: 3). The third type focuses on the up to 21% of Americans who are completely unaffiliated with a church, but "should nonetheless be considered religious in some broad sense of the term" (ibid: 4). It is this third group that Fuller examined through the remainder of his book, offering analysis of the eclectic approach to religion practiced by this segment of the population. This approach may be shaped through individual practice alone or developed with others through small study groups/workshops. It might include weekend retreats or spiritual pilgrimages and might be inspired by alternative health therapies, ancient mystery cults, new age channeling or the guidance offered through a myriad of self-help books on the market. Although there is not a single religious practice to which all members of this group devote themselves, what does identify them as a cohesive group is their rejection of the social authority of

traditional organized religions. As Fuller explained, "these persons find themselves so emotionally or intellectually disenfranchised from institutional religion that they are not choosing between conventional and alternative spirituality. They are instead choosing between alternative spiritual philosophies or going without any spiritual outlook whatsoever" (Fuller, 2001:12). Recognizing that 20% of Americans approach religiosity without any acknowledgment of the social authority of traditional religions, Fuller considered the potential influence that this approach might have on individuals who identify with more traditional religious communities. One look at the increasing number of bookstore shelves dedicated to books about alternative spiritual practices suggests that more than 20% of the population are being influenced by this material (Fuller, 2001: 155). In fact, throughout his book Fuller provided numerous examples of how the non-traditional, eclectic approach to religion or unchurched spirituality has not only changed the traditional boundaries of the social authority of religion in America, but has also shaped "the personal piety of many who attend our nation's established churches" (2001:155). Fuller thus concluded that there is a need for scholars to broaden the parameters for studying religion to include several new categories that will allow for more thorough analysis of spiritual styles (2001:177).

1.4 Additional Views From Canada

Many scholars in Canada confirm that the diverse expressions of religiosity recorded in the U.S. also exist here.

In his 1976 book *Identity and the Sacred,* Hans Mol, a professor at McMaster University from 1970 to 1987, identified the need for broader categories in the study of religion. Mol offered a general definition of religion as the "sacralization of identity", a definition that could accommodate the religious and non-religious symbols one may draw upon in the development of religious identity. Mol explained that his use of such a far-reaching definition was necessary in contemporary culture due to the diverse religious expressions available in society.

Diverse paths to the sacred as a characteristic of Canadian culture was a theme explored by Peter Emberley in his book *Divine Hunger: Canadians on Spiritual Walkabout* (2002). Early in the text, Emberley declared his research was not an institutional analysis but a study of Canadians' spiritual searches for meaning that attempt to "restore a mytho-poetic way of life" (Emberley, 2002: 22). Through participant observation techniques and formal and informal interviews with thousands of Canadians, Emberley confirmed that the individualized nature of Canadian religious practice was widespread, whether grounded in a traditional world religion or more eclectic views of the sacred. He also noted that Canadians rely on a spectrum of religious practices spanning five categories including traditional orthodox practice of Christianity or Judaism; born-again Christianity; mainline Christianity; various paths that follow Eastern traditions; and the eclectic non-traditional approach adopted by "new agers" (individuals without formal connection with a traditional faith community).

Broadening the scope of religious categories is a theme echoed by William Closson James, a Canadian scholar of religion at Queen's university. In a recent article entitled "Dimorphs and Cobblers: Ways of Being Religious in Canada", James argued the

need for new terminology and more sophisticated analyses that better reflect the diverse approaches to religion currently practiced in Canada. Too often scholarship has been preoccupied with trying to categorize religious practice using a Western monotheistic framework that demands religious exclusivity. However, James noted that Canadians are increasingly adopting an approach to religion that does not follow an exclusive path but instead draws from diverse traditional and non-traditional ideas of the sacred depending on the situation. For example, James noted that Japanese Canadians might opt for a traditional Christian funeral service to honour the eternal soul of the dead, followed by a Buddhist cremation service that "removes death's impurities and transforms the corpse into a purified ancestral spirit" (James, 1999: 278). This approach is not to be confused with syncretism where religious practices outside of one tradition are reinterpreted and absorbed into a central framework, for as the above case demonstrates, both ceremonies served distinctive and justifiable ends. Instead, James defined this new approach as religious dimorphism whereby an individual chooses among the religious options available and cobbles together two or more distinct religious identities to form a personal and individualized religion practiced without the experience of contradiction. However, this apparent piecemeal or eclectic approach to religion does not lend itself to the current monotheistic framework of religious exclusivity, and as a result, it is at best recognized as a marginal practice or at worse goes unrecorded (James, 1999: 291). James considers this an unfortunate failing of contemporary research because religious dimorphism is not only an inevitable by-product of religious pluralism, but a defining feature of it (ibid).

Daniel V. A. Olson and C. Kirk Hadaway confirmed the impact of religious pluralism on Canadian religiosity in their 1999 article entitled "Religious Pluralism and

Affiliation Among Canadian Counties and Cities". Using data collected through the 1991 census, Olson and Hadaway tested the theory offered by Finke and Stark (1988, 1992) that "rather than damaging religion, pluralism generates far higher levels of religious participation than do religious monopolies" (Olson, et. al., 1999: 490). Contrary to Finke and Stark, Olsen and Hadaway found religious pluralism had a negative impact on religious affiliation and practice. "With fewer connections to coreligionists, individuals receive less social reinforcement for religious participation and belief, leading to lower levels of religious involvement" (1999: 491). Further, citing a long tradition of sociological thought going back to Simmel and Durkhiem, Olsen and Hadaway acknowledged decreased participation can also "have a major effect on one's religious self-identity and behaviour" (1999: 504). An important limitation to their research was their reliance on census data that, according to James, does not adequately measure alternative forms of religiosity or multi-religious practices. However, what is clear in their study is the important role religious practice plays in establishing and reinforcing religious identity.

1.5 Measuring the Social Authority of Religion

As noted above, religious identity can be developed from many traditional and non-traditional religious sources and likewise can take on many forms. Sociological surveys studying the relationship between affiliation and practice do not always accommodate the diverse practices or sources of religious identity, which leads to incomplete portraits. The emphasis on practice is often measured through the framework of weekly, monthly, and yearly attendance to formal worship services, but often does not

include attendance at informal fellowship activities, personal worship activities or attendance at rites of passage events such as marriages, baptisms or funerals. As the above research demonstrates, such limitations in data collection give rise to simplistic connections between practice and affiliation that are not always meaningful. This is particularly evident given the tendency for much research to rely on statistical data structured in religiously exclusive categories, categories that often do not account for the increasing presence of alternative approaches to religion. However, even those who study alternative forms of religiosity (including Roof, Fuller, James, and Emberley), support the theory that the more consistent and frequent the practice of any religion (traditional to non-traditional), the stronger the commitment to the religious identity and the greater the social authority of religion will be in the life of the adherent. And while Bibby also recognizes the important role of practice in religious identity maintenance, he continues to claim that participation in rites of passage, however infrequent, still constitutes a categorical religious identity within the tradition where the ritual is performed, and this identity, in turn, is a social authority in that person's life.

My question is how authoritative can a religious identity be in one's life if acknowledgement is limited to rites-of-passage only? Chapter 2 offers a closer investigation into the influence of practice in determining the social authority of the religious identity, with special attention directed to participation in rites of passage.

[1] Early in the novel, the main character, Pi described his influential encounters with a Christian, Muslim, Hindu and atheist. In the Canadian version, the reader encounters the atheist first.

[2] The other five books explored a number of societal trends and included research on religion as just one of many themes studied in each book. They include: *The Emerging Generation (1985)*, *Teen Trends (1992)*, *Canada's Teen's: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow (2001)*, *Mosaic Madness (1990)* and *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style (1995)*.

[3] Dr. Bibby's website states that he "is one of the country's better-known academics. His work has been covered in virtually all of Canada's major dailies including front cover treatment by *Maclean's*. His numerous media appearances over the years have included the CBC and CTV national news, *Canada AM*, *As It Happens*, *Morningside*, *Cross Country Check-Up*, *Midday*, *Question Period*, *Sunday Edition*, *TSN*, and *Pamela Wallin Live*. In the United States, his work has been given exposure by such news outlets as CNN, *The New York Times*, the *USAToday*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Los Angeles Times*." http://people.uleth.ca/~bibby/

[4] The notable exception was for children of mixed marriages in which one parent was Jewish. The children of these marriages most often identified themselves as Jewish. See "Christian Religious Identification in Canada". In Canadian Social Trends (Spring): 24-28.

Chapter 2 – Religious Identity

2.1 The Social Authority of Religious Identity: Sacred or Situational?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there has been an ongoing debate about the value of attendance statistics in determining the influence of religion on the lives of individuals. Nonetheless, many scholars agree that a key element in determining the social authority of the religious identity is the level of commitment to participation in and practice of ritualized activities, particularly group activities that uphold the religious doctrine which informs the religious identity. The more extensive the practice, the stronger the commitment to the doctrine and thus the greater authority the religious identity has in the life of the adherent. As Daniel V. A. Olson remarked, "religious identity, belief, and commitment depend for their vitality upon the frequency and character of social interaction among persons sharing a common belief" (Olson, 1993: 32). But what is religious identity?

2.1.1 The Sacralized Religious Identity

In his 1976 book *Identity and the Sacred,* Hans Mol defined religion as the "sacralization of identity" (Mol, 1976: 1). For Mol sacralization was understood as "the inevitable process that safeguards identity when it is endangered by the disadvantages of the infinite adaptability of symbol-systems. Sacralization protects identity, a system of meaning, or a definition of reality, and modifies, obstructs or (if necessary) legitimates change" (Mol, 1976: 6). Central to his definition was the concept that sacralization is an on-going process, particularly in contemporary culture in which individuals are continually exposed to alternative symbol-systems that test their sacralized conceptions

of "values and norms, common interpretation of existence and the common cathectic stake in [those] interpretations" (Mol, 1976: 8). Mol further argued that the development of religious identity is greatly enhanced through participation in religious activities that support the chosen sacralized religious symbol-systems as valid and normative and reinforce concepts of the sacred. As well, time dedicated to a religious practice means less time available for exploration of alternative belief systems. Religious ritual practices become even more effective tools for reinforcing the authority of one's religious identity when they are performed with others who appeal to the same religious ideology (Mol, 1976; Olson, 1993, 1999; Roof, 1993; Wuthnow, 1997, 1998). Regular participation in shared formal religious exercises or less-formal fellowship activities not only affirms the wide spread appeal of a religious ideology, validating one's belief system, but also provides opportunities for interaction with others who share the religious ideology, strengthening the religious conviction of all who participate. As the level of involvement increases, so does the likelihood for one's sacralized religious identity to have more authoritative influence in the life of the adherent.

Increased social authority of the sacralized religious identity is particularly evident in traditional religious communities in which the strict observation of participation in formal and informal group activities are expected, for example within many conservative Protestant denominations or Orthodox religious traditions (Bibby, 2002; Iannaccone, 1998; Olsen, 1993). In his study Laurence R. Iannaccone confirmed that "members of stricter denominations [conservative or orthodox] devote more time and money to their religions and are more likely to describe themselves as strong members of their faith. They socialize more extensively with fellow members and are less involved

in secular organizations" (Iannaccone, 1998: 286). Thus, dedicated commitment to ongoing practice within a faith community increases the social authority of the religious tradition in the life of the adherent.

Conversely, as involvement with group activities decreases, so do the opportunities to reaffirm the sacralized authority of traditional religious symbol-systems. Less time devoted to group practice also provides more time to explore alternative symbol-systems, religious or non-religious, influences that may modify the social authority of one's traditional sacralized religious identity, relegating it to a less influential or non-existent status. Again we can look to the words of Olson, "without regular contact with others who share one's beliefs, a person slowly forgets the vitality of his or her religious experience, religious identity begins to blur, and beliefs lose much of their plausibility and relevance for life" (Olson, 1993: 32).

When this happens the religious identity might continue to exist and might even appear to play a significant role in certain events of one's life, such as rites of passage. For some nominal or non-affiliates, the sporadic acknowledgment of one's religious identity might be sufficient for them to reinforce their personal relationship with, and obligation to, a transcendent being/concept, fortifying their commitment to the authoritative religious framework that guides social life. However, for other nominal and non-affiliates, the religious identity called upon for these occasions might be a "situational" one.

2.1.2 The Situational Religious Identity

The situational religious identity is one that is defined by the temporary reacquisition of a traditional religious identity for the purposes of mediating a particular situation, for example rites of passage. Nominal or non-affiliates who maintain a situational religious identity might acknowledge traditional religious rituals as a forum where they can reconnect with the transcendent nature of their religious identity. However, the social authority of the religious identity is more often centered on the fulfillment of cultural obligations to family and friends than the performance of a sacralized ritual before God. In other words, while individuals may continue to identity themselves as believers, the motivation to participate in religious rites of passage may be influenced more by nostalgia (heritage connections), aesthetics (setting/décor of the religious site), convenience (ready-made rituals) or family expectations (rituals and religious leaders will appeal to the more religious members of the family or community), than the personal desire to reconfirm a connection with the sacred.

For example, many contemporary people continue to participate in marriage rituals performed by clergy from a traditional organized religious faith community. Often one or both members of the couple or of either set of parents have some affiliation with the religious tradition. However, while many continue to call upon the clergy to perform the marriage ritual, the couple may not know the clergy personally due to infrequent or non-existent attendance prior to planning the wedding. Sometimes the choice of religious site or clergy may be based on convenience, the result of a ritual leader being available for the selected date or that the faith community offers an aesthetically appealing environment. As Bibby's quote by a Calgary clergyman states,

"his church was a wedding favourite because it has one of the widest centre aisles in town." (Bibby 1993:149).

Likewise, the situational religious identity can be recognized in the preparation and performance of many contemporary death rituals. As formal participation and affiliation with traditional organized religion continues to decline in Canada, identification with a traditional faith community is more precarious, often grounded in an historic connection only. Thus, increasing numbers of Canadians rely on the funeral director to not only facilitate body preparations, visitations, and public announcements, but also to arrange for a ritual leader from a traditional organized religious faith community, who is unknown to the family or the deceased, to perform the death ritual (Fulton, 1988; Irion, 1966, 1990; Moller, 1996; Stephenson, 1989; Walter, 1996). For them, having a religious leader preside over the death ritual does not necessarily mean there is a strong desire to fulfill any traditional sacralized religious concerns for the spiritual well-being of the deceased or survivors, or to reconnect with a faith community. Instead, the situational reacquisition of the traditional religious identity facilitates access to a convenient, ready-made ritual through which social obligations to the deceased and the bereaved community can be fulfilled.

2.1.3 Religious Identity in Contemporary Death Rituals: Sacred or Situational?

The emphasis on fulfillment of social expectations over sacralized, traditional religious motivations in planning funeral arrangements has been a trend recognized by clergy for many years. In 1966 Paul Irion wrote *The Funeral: Vesitge or Value*, in which he explored the meaningfulness of the funeral ritual in contemporary society. As a

theologian and practicing Presbyterian minister, Irion questioned the social value of the funeral as a ritual performed by traditional organized religion. His query resulted in a survey of over 160 mainline Protestant ministers from various regions in the United States. A significant trend Irion recognized was the primary role of the funeral director in orchestrating care of the dead.

> Often the first step is the calling of a funeral director who removes the body of the deceased to his establishment. Families which have a meaningful relationship to a church will notify the pastor of the death. As soon as is convenient, members of the family will meet with the funeral director to make the arrangements for the funeral. In the case of families without strong church connections it is usually at this point that a minister is contacted and requested to conduct the funeral. Sometimes this request is made through the funeral home rather than the family of the deceased (Irion, 1966:15).

Irion also identified other trends in contemporary funeral practices that moved away from traditional religious themes including: the decreased role of corporate acts in services such as hymn-singing or collective recitation of The Lord's Prayer; decreased incidence of funerals held in churches (only 1/3 of his sample); increased observance of the non-religious visitation activity with decreased participation at the funeral; and the increased interest in holding personalized memorial services, particularly by the clergy themselves (Irion, 1966: 15-19). Perhaps one of the more significant trends identified by Irion was the steady increase of requests for religious leaders to conduct funeral services for families unrelated to the church. Irion recognized this as problematic for both the minister and the family. On the one hand, the minister wants to perform a meaningful service using traditional religious liturgy and symbolism that may be irrelevant to the families. On the other hand, the family recognizes the need to mark the death of their loved one and even though traditional religion is not a central influence in daily life, organized religion provides a culturally recognized framework for fulfilling this need --

the traditional religious funeral. Irion recognized that the clergy and the family appeared to be using more than one definition of the funeral. Irion offered clarification through his definitions of three distinct types of funerals: the religious funeral, the conventional funeral and the humanistic funeral.

The religious funeral is marked by its orientation to a specific, active religious community, Christian or non Christian. As Irion explained, "it assumes the deceased was part of the religious community in which the service takes place and that the mourners have a basic regard to that community of faith" (Irion, 1966: 128).

In contrast, the conventional funeral is performed to fulfill a cultural obligation.

> On the surface, it may seem very little different from the [religious] service described above. However, it is arranged and conducted largely because in our society it is customary to have some 'religious' rites when death occurs. There is no viable relationship between the deceased or his family and a community of faith. So in order to meet the social expectations a representative of the church and some of its ritual elements need to be imported. For the people involved, this is a pseudo-religious ceremony which is symptomatic of religion-in-general in its most superficial form. It employs ritual acts which are devoid of meaning for the mourners because they are foreign to the community which invests that ritual meaning. It may be motivated only by a desire to find the help which traditionally comes through the ritual of a people, to bring a sense of meaning into a crisis situation. But the ritual fails the mourners because they are alien to the structure of meaning and to the community which propounds it (Irion, 1966: 129).

Although Irion recognized that in 1966, the occurrence of the third funeral, the humanistic funeral, was limited, he identified it as the more honest format for clergy members to follow in servicing the funeral needs of people unaffiliated with the church. The humanist funeral is nontheistic in both structure and content. "Rather than reflecting the ritual and meaning of a community of faith in the religious sense, it seeks to reflect the faith of the secular community in man's nature and capability" (Irion, 1966: 129).

Irion argued that for the sake of integrity it would be more appropriate for clergy to discontinue offering the conventional funeral and instead develop humanist funeral rituals to service the pastoral needs of non-affiliates or the non-religious.

In a more recent article, Irion (1991) discontinued his call for distinct religious and non-religious death rituals. Instead he recognized how contemporary social attitudes about death have not only resulted in further erosion of the social authority of traditional organized religion over death rituals, but have also contributed to a softening of the often rigid rules for the performance of traditional religious death rituals. Irion noted that many traditional organized religions express a new respect for pluralism (e.g.Vatican ll); experience a general loosening of authority structures (for example, they no longer expel divorced pastors); and increasingly recognize the growing social authority of secularism. Faith communities have been forced to "acknowledge that many persons no longer explain life in terms of a religious worldview nor do they seek the solution to all their problems in religion or look for direct divine intervention to smooth the difficulties of life" (Irion, 1991: 163). In response to the revised social role of religion, faith communities have adapted death rituals to better respond to the diverse religious and non-religious needs of people in times of crisis, to recognize that pastoral support can be met through religious and non-religious institutions (i.e. healthcare establishments and funeral homes), and that it is appropriate to work with those institutions than against them.

Another author who offers a more cynical perspective of the changing social authority of traditional organized religion in contemporary death rituals is Kenneth W. Stevenson. In his book *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church* (1989), Stevenson argued that the role of the clergy has changed from the once central figure of authority

who offered guidance to families in their time of grief, to someone who "takes a funeral" only after having been consulted at a late stage in the planning; is expected to keep the service under twenty minutes, "the stipulated maximum"; is given only "two points in the service to 'reach' the family directly"; and despite the limitations recognizes the occasion will be one in which the attendees will "never forget how they have been treated by the Church, whatever their state of faith" (Stevenson, 1989: 88-89).

A common theme of the above authors was the desire for traditional organized religions to maintain the social authority over death rituals by performing meaningful rituals that meet both the diverse religious needs of the faith community and the situational "cultural" needs of the increasing numbers of people who are unaffiliated or non-religious. However, the means for achieving this aim are complicated, especially for the latter group, the situationally religious, whose lack of engagement with the symbol-systems endorsed by the religious tradition make it increasing difficult for the clergy to assess the religious capacity of those who request their services.

In determining the location of religious identity on the spectrum from the sacralization of religious doctrine, to situational religion as a cultural commodity grounded in heritage and tradition, to complete disinterest, tracking individual commitment to religious practice can offer insight. Although it is possible that individuals who have a situational religious identity and only participate in sporadic rites of passage rituals may have a genuine religious experience of a transcendent nature that reinforces commitment to the social authority of the religious identity, it is likely the influence of the experience will lose its significance over time unless some effort is made to reinforce the authority of the experience. By contrast, regular participation in formal

or non-formal religious practices bolsters commitment to the community and improves the opportunity for religious experiences of the sacred that reinforce the social authority of the sacralized religious identity on one's overall life.

In contemporary culture, commitment to regular attendance at formal religious activities has declined dramatically, which suggests that the traditional sacralized religious identity has become less significant in the lives of more people. There are even signs that commitment to the sporadic situational religious identity has weakened with increasing numbers of people declaring no religious affiliation and opting for non-religious rites of passage. Scholars have identified a number of social factors that have contributed to this waning shift in social authority of traditional organized religion including multiculturalism, religious pluralism, breakdown of the traditional family model, urbanization, and the ongoing secularization of social institutions such as education, social services and government.

2.2 Social Changes and the Social Authority of Religious Identity

Up until the 1950s, Christian religious communities formed the heart and soul of Canadian society due in large part to the religious homogeneity of the population; over 97% of Canadians affiliated with either a Catholic or Protestant denominations (see Table 1). The homogenous nature of society meant that there were limited competing worldviews from which individuals could develop a religious identity. Although international communication by radio did occur, the majority of broadcasts came from Western nations with predominantly Christian populations. As well, communications technology was not as sophisticated or prolific as today, which further limited wide-

spread exposure to alternative voices or competing worldviews. Active participation with religious communities was also quite high. In 1957, 51% of Canadians attended services weekly. Weekly attendance was especially high for Catholics who at the time, attracted 83% of the national population and 88% of the Quebec population to services (see Table 5). The Christian monopoly in Canada supported a social expectation for regular attendance at formal church services, especially in smaller communities where many social functions centered around church sponsored activities (Mol, 1976b: 249). The emphasis on church centered activities contributed to the social expectation for participation in religious rites of passage within a faith community and for children to attend religious education classes. The latter two religious obligations were endorsed in part by the government which supported and funded education systems managed by religious organizations and recognized clergy as licensed officiates who could fulfill the legal requirements of the state to register the births, marriages or deaths of Canadians.[1] The high social expectation for participation coupled with the lack of competition contributed to a reasonably stable environment where one's sacralized and cultural traditional Christian religious identities were indistinguishable from each other and wielded significant authority in one's life.

Social changes in contemporary Canadian society have negatively affected the ability of the Christian religion, or any other traditional organized religion, to maintain hegemonic influence over its members or society at large. Although there remain large segments of the population for which the traditional sacralized religious identity maintains a social authority that informs all aspects of life, there are also significant numbers of people for whom the influence of the religious identity has become

increasingly marginalized to a situational influence only or is non-existent (Fuller 2001; Mol 1976; Olson 1997; Roof, 1999; Wuthnow 1998). As Wuthnow remarked, "churches don't seem to be making much of a difference in lives anymore" (Wuthnow, 1998: 68).

The family has been long recognized as an important social institution in the formation and maintenance of one's religious identity. Several studies have demonstrated the influence that a stable family life has on the transmission of a religious identity to offspring (Bibby, 1997; Hoge, 1994; Roof 1993, 1999; Wuthnow 1997). As Roof explained, "historically, the two institutions [religion and family] have enjoyed a mutually supportive relationship: religion provided legitimacy for marriage, as well as support and guidance strengthening family life; and, in turn, families as the primary units of society functioned as an extension of the religious community, inculcating its beliefs, values, and practices" (Roof, 1999: 217).

However, the traditional family model has changed over the last century. Divorce rates have skyrocketed from approximately 10 % of all marriages in 1969 ending in divorce to over 48% of marriages in 1998 (Statistics Canada, 1998). In Canada, almost one third of all couples with children have forgone the rite of marriage altogether and instead choose to live as common-law couples, a choice that suggests the legitimacy of the religious institution of marriage is considered unnecessary for a considerable number of Canadians, even those who claim affiliation with traditional Christian religious denomination (Bibby, 1997:25) (see table 4).

And while Bibby's analysis of transgenerational religious affiliation rates in Canada confirms over 95% of children sharing the religious affiliation of the parents, regardless of marital status, the study did not discuss what type of religious identity was

transmitted from one generation to the next (Bibby, 1997: 23-28). For example, Dean Hoge and Roof also found similar correlations in their studies of Americans (Hoge, 1994: 154-158; Roof, 1999: 217-253). However, unlike Bibby, both Hoge and Roof looked at the degree of commitment to traditional religions expressed by the parents and children. In families where the parents expressed strong commitment to the social authority of a traditional religion (that is, maintained a sacralized religious identity that informed their lives), commitment to the social authority of that religious tradition in the lives of the children was high. Conversely, children of parents who expressed low levels of commitment to a traditional religion (that is, maintained a situational religious identity), had children with even lower levels of commitment to the religious faith. Both studies also found that in families with no traditional religious affiliation both the parents and children shared the same high-level commitment to non-participation in religious activities.

Urbanization has also been identified as a significant factor in the negative development of religious identity (Olsen, 1999; Livezey, 2000; Wuthnow 1979, 1995, 1998; Hadaway and Roof, 1988; Bromely, 1988; Hoge, 1988, 1994; Mol, 1976b; Luckman, 1967). In urban environments people have the opportunity to maintain a more autonomous identity where they can avoid social pressures to join a religious community and attend religious services (Mol, 1976b; Fulton, 1988; Northcotte, 2001). Moreover, in large urban centers there is greater exposure to multiculturalism and religious pluralism that offer access to alternative worldviews which may challenge traditional conceptions of commitment to one monotheistic religious doctrine over all others (Irion, 1991; Walter, 1996). As Wuthnow explained in *After Heaven,* one of his informants, Betsy

Swedborg, remarked that she stopped going to church because she "couldn't see any difference between the way church people lived their lives and those who did not attend church" (Wuthnow, 1997: 69).

Since the 1950s, urbanization has been occurring at ever increasing rates in Canada. The 2001 census identifies 79.4% of all Canadians as living in urban centers with a population of over 10,000, and with 65% living in the twenty-seven largest urban centers.

Secularism has also presented significant challenges for the development of religious identity. Again we can look to Mol who argued that secularization "is the outcome of differentiations [in symbol-systems found within contemporary society] exceeding the capacity of religious organizations to integrate them in the traditional frame of reference, with the result that, on all levels, identities and systems of meaning are becoming sacralized by agencies other than these organizations" (Mol, 1976a: 5). Notable examples of the impact of secularism can be seen in the fact that many social institutions that were previously governed by traditional organized Christian religious communities have been replaced over the last century by secularized models including education, social services and healthcare.

Over the past few decades, public education systems administered by provincial governments have been systematically reducing religious education in the classroom.[2] Formal religious education in public school systems reinforced the sacralized religious identity through repetitive exposure to symbol-systems sanctioned by the church. The absence of religious education in the public education system has meant that children are exposed to alternative non-religious symbol-systems which may complement but more

often compete with the traditional organized religion symbol-systems that inform the religious identity.

Another religious practice that has been negatively affected by secularism is the historic role of religion in encouraging individuals to offer charity to the poor or the downtrodden who are in need of financial, material or moral support. Even though many religious communities continue to encourage charitable activities (through soup kitchens, recycled clothing, etc.), governments have increasingly taken on the responsibility of providing financial and material support for its citizens in need regardless of religious affiliation.[3] Although some might argue that the development of the Canadian social safety net stems from Christian values of charity and "caring for your neighbour", humanists would argue that caring for humanity is a human condition, not a religiously motivated one.

Even rites of passage, where religion traditionally held an authoritative position, have been affected by secularization. Governments have endowed non-religious professionals with the authority to officiate over records of births, marriages and deaths. Whereas baptism records had previously been accepted as legal birth records, individuals must now have government issued birth certificates to declare legal identity. Religious leaders continue to have the legal right to officiate marriages; however, other non-religious people can also obtain that legal status. Even the legal role of religious leaders in death has changed. Only medical professionals can officially declare a person dead and issue a death certificate and funeral directors hold the monopoly for legally registering a death and are the only legal recipients of burial permits as in Quebec (Quebec civil code, 1994).

With greater numbers of people living in urban settings, the increased influence of secularized social institutions and the increasingly ubiquitous access to communications technology, individuals are exposed to greater numbers of alternative symbol systems that inform individual identity. The result of these changes in the social framework has been that traditional organized religious beliefs and affirmations have lost much of their plausibility in contemporary society (Carroll and Roof, 1993: 20). Although some people continue to hold rigidly to a traditional organized religion symbol systems that informs all activities in life, increasing numbers of people are instead choosing to adapt and integrate alternative religious and non-religious symbol systems into a sacralized religious identity, one that may or may not be grounded in traditional organized religion. For these people, the social authority of traditional organized religious symbol-system may be marginal, invoked on a situational needs basis only.

Even though significant numbers of people in contemporary culture are not strongly committed to a traditional organized faith community, many continue to look to the institution because of its historical role in providing a framework to fulfill a situational need. In such cases, the social authority of traditional organized religion may be limited to the provision of a convenient, culturally recognized framework, with alternative symbol-systems maintaining the central authority in daily life.

The trend toward the marginalization of the social authority of traditional organized religion is particularly evident in contemporary attitudes toward death and death rituals, concepts explored in the next two chapters.

1 Up until the 1970s, in Quebec, the clergy held almost exclusive authority to perform these legal duties.
2 In 1994 the Quebec government replaced the previous Catholic and Protestant school boards with English and French language school boards with optional religious education programs (Catholic, Protestant or moral). Newfoundland recently did the same (1997).
3 In the secular system, a portion of taxes collected are used to maintain numerous social services for all citizens, regardless of religion, including welfare, subsidized housing, unemployment insurance, counseling services, etc.

Chapter 3 – Social Attitudes About Death

3.1 An Historical Account of Death Rituals in Canada

In the early days of confederation, care for the dying, dead and bereaved was a service performed by various members of traditional Christian religious communities. Whether the result of an illness, accident, or other causes, a visit by the grim reaper was almost always accompanied by a visit from the clergy. Death most often occurred at home. Whenever possible a clergy member would be present with the extended family members and friends in the final hours of life. During this time the clergy would comfort the dying, and if Catholic, hear the final confession of the dying and administer the last rites. Upon death, the clergy would offer prayers to God, comfort to the survivors, and register the death for the state. Family members or close friends would wash and dress the body in preparation for the death rituals. The clergy, or members of the church community, would assist the survivors in making the necessary arrangements, which often included a standard three-day visitation period in the home; collective morning and evening prayers; transportation of the body to the church for the funeral service; and burial at the church cemetery. The clergy also accompanied the family in making arrangements with the undertaker to prepare the coffin and the gravedigger to dig the grave. After the funeral, the religious community would continue to support the survivors by ensuring their physical and spiritual needs were met.

In contemporary Canadian society, care for the dying, dead and bereaved has changed. Over 75% of Canadians die in hospitals after extended illnesses (Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 29).[1] Individuals facing the final hours of life are often surrounded by medical personnel—with whom they have no personal relationship beyond their medical

needs—who administer life-saving medical procedures up to and even after death occurs. If requested, medical staff assign a non-denominational chaplain from the pastoral care department of the hospital, often unknown to the patient or family, who attends to the spiritual needs of the patient. Once an individual has been declared dead, immediate family members might have a brief time to sit with the body before it is removed to make room for another patient. After the doctor has issued the death certificate the medical care of the dead is complete, leaving the surviving relatives with the responsibility to choose which method they will employ to mark the death.

The family can call any number of people to assist them in this effort. They might call other family members or their personal religious leader. But almost without exception, there will be a call to the funeral director. The funeral director offers a broad spectrum of services to facilitate the diverse needs of survivors. From basic legal requirements through to step-by-step support for every detail related to the death of a loved one including spiritual needs, Canadians have many options. They could choose to have the body embalmed or simply cleaned, presented in a simple or elaborate casket, cremated or buried. The body could be prepared and buried within twenty-four hours or stored until a later date when friends and family are available for the service. A traditional Christian religious leader known to the deceased or survivors could conduct death rituals, or the funeral director could be asked to secure a religious leader to conduct a funeral service. Some might chose to conduct personalized non-religious death rituals with or without the assistance and guidance of the funeral director; and others might not perform any ritual at all. Funeral rituals could be held at the funeral home where facilities exist for open-casket visitations, elaborate funerals, and after-service luncheons; or could

be performed off-site in religious or non-religious settings. The body or ashes could be interned in an on-site mausoleum, columbarium, or gravesite, or the ashes could be taken home and stored or scattered at an off-site location. The funeral director even provides bereavement counseling support through in-house services or referral programs.

In a span of just over one hundred years there has been a significant shift in the social response to dying, death and death ritual. An obvious difference between the historical and contemporary approach has been a change in authority figures who guide the family through this period of transition. Professionals from the fields of medicine and funeral practices have replaced the authoritative social role of religious leaders. Although religious leaders continue to participate in many contemporary activities related to dying, death and bereavement, increasingly their contribution is as a minor player on a team of professionals. What contributed to this shift from the historical to the contemporary death ritual in Canada?

3.2 Several Perspectives on Contemporary Social Attitudes About Death

3.2.1 Three Death Types

Tony Walter (1996) offers guidance to this question with his model of three ideal types of death: traditional death, modern death and postmodern death (see Table 9). By ideal types, Walter recognizes them not as desirable or even as real, but as abstract pure types that allow for understanding of "the complexity of dying in the twentieth century" (Walter, 1996: 194). The three types of death represent the historical development of our contemporary attitudes, not as distinct time periods but as overlapping developments in a

progressive direction with the postmodern death being the future trend of death awareness.

Table 9 : Tony Walter Model of Death Types

	Traditional death	*Modern death*	*Postmodern death*
Authority	Tradition	Professional expertise	Personal choice
Authority figure	Priest	Doctor	The self
Dominant discourse	Theology	Medicine	Psychology
Coping through	Prayer	Silence	Expressing feelings
The traveler	Soul	Body	Personality
Bodily context	Living with death	Death controlled	Living with dying
Social context	Community	Hospital	Family

(Source: Walter, 1996: 195)

In the traditional death type, the authority on issues of death is tradition, often grounded in a religious culture with religious figures holding positions of authority. Death is a common occurrence and people look to their religious tradition and religious rituals to honour their dead and support the living. The historical ritual described above would be a type of traditional death.

Likewise, the above example of a contemporary death experience reflects the modern death type of Walter's model. The authority in dying and death is professional expertise, most notably the doctor. Death is understood as a medical condition, a solitary process that happens to the body which must be controlled and often occurs in the hospital. In modern death, "the rise of the individual and the collapse of community have undermined the authority of tradition; we no longer know how to deal with death when it comes, so we pay professionals (either directly or through taxation) to handle it for us. In a de-traditionalized society, the expert rules" (Walter, 1996: 196).

The third death type, the postmodern death, reflects a more recent trend that better reflects societal attitudes of individualism where the key themes are "personal choice and

the celebration of personality" (Walter, 1996: 197). In this third death type, Walter recognizes the expressed desire for individuals to take control of their dying and death experiences. "If the traditional human condition is that of living with death, and the modern condition one of death denied, the postmodern condition is more one of living with dying – embodied in the motto of one cancer relief agency *Living with* Cancer and the similar motto *Living with HIV"* (Walter, 1996: 198). In the postmodern death context, individuals choose the treatments they want and learn to live with their illness, often for extended periods of time (i.e. years). As Lofland (1978) put it, "ours is no longer a brief encounter with death but a prolonged affair" (Walter, 1996: 198). Walters also notes that within the postmodern death there is a revival of the traditional death model; however, it is not a "back to our roots" movement. Rather, there is an expressed desire for the traditional attributes of shared rituals that are meaningful, not a return to traditional religion as an authority. In the postmodern death context, people reference the traditional model in highly selective ways, picking and choosing bits and pieces that are meaningful and repackaging them in a personalized form (Walters, 1996: 199).

3.2.2 Factors Contributing to Social Attitudes About Death

Whereas Walters offers a model for identifying the different death types that influence our contemporary understanding of death, Herbert C. Northcott and Donna M. Wilson (2001) offer insight into historical developments in Canada that contributed to change in social attitudes about death. Northcott and Wilson suggest changes are best understood through an exploration of the various social institutions most relevant to dying and death such as the family, religion, the health system, the legal system and the

funeral industry (Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 59). Of the social institutions identified, advancements in medicine that led to the development of the current health system have had the greatest impact.

Prior to World War II, death was a more common event in the everyday lives of most Canadians. In those times infant mortality rates were high and accidents or infectious disease could take a life quickly. The implementation of various measures to improve sanitation, hygiene and food safety, instituted through the late 1800s and the early 1900s, allowed Canada to dramatically improve public health and increase life expectancy. In the 1930s, vaccinations were developed that greatly reduced the death rate from infectious diseases. By the 1940s, mass immunizations for diphtheria, smallpox, whooping cough and tetanus were administered across Canada, all but eliminating deaths from those diseases (Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 29). The introduction of antibiotics in the 1940s also dramatically reduced the number of deaths due to infections. Developments in diagnostic capabilities and advancements in surgical procedures contributed to a growing faith in medicine to forestall death. As Northcott and Wilson noted, "faith in health care increased, justified to a degree, as the efficacy of health care grew quickly and substantially" (Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 28).

The advancements in medicine effected many other social institutions. Increased life expectancy meant that more and more families went longer and longer periods without experiencing the death of someone close to them. As Robert Fulton explained, we essentially live in a 'death-free' society where statistically, a family can "expect not to have a death occur among its immediate members for 20 years or one generation" (Fulton, 1988: 265). The increasingly effective removal of death as a common event in

daily life has corresponded with the steady decline of participation in traditional organized religion, a social institution that offers solace in times of crisis, such as death. With death occurring less often, the need for solace has become less pronounced, contributing to the decline in participation by both lay-people and religious professionals. As Northcott and Wilson argued, with scientific developments increasingly saving lives, "the influence of religion on dying and death declined considerably" (Northcott and Wilson, 2001:62).

3.2.3 The Modern Death Type: A Professional Approach

The increasing authority of medicine and deceasing significance of religion in care of the dying, attributes of Walter's modern death type, are evident in the review of many recent texts on the treatment of dying and death in contemporary society.

In 1969 E. Kübler-Ross wrote *On Death and Dying,* the pioneering text that present the subject as a natural medical process. Kübler-Ross identified five psychological stages people go through in coming to terms with death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although the text was intended for a broad audience, it was clearly directed toward the medical community. It offered the medical community an alternative view of death as a natural process, not something to be fought. Her model was descriptive, based on observations she had made as a nurse. Within descriptions of each stage of the dying process, Kübler-Ross recognized the influence of principles and symbols associated with traditional organized religion; however, the influence was not the exclusive focus of the individual. For example, the second stage, anger, could be directed toward a transcendent God but could also be directed toward

loved ones or medical staff offering support. As well, stage three, bargaining, was often associated with a transcendent being but could also be directed toward the medical staff who were perceived as capable of providing a cure if only the individual followed their directions.

Kenneth Iserson, a practicing M.D., has written a popular text entitled *Death to Dust* (2001). As its title suggests, the book offers guidance about the physical aspects of death from how to determine when death has occurred, to the various legal disposal methods available, to the decomposition process. Although the eight-hundred page text includes extensive information about many aspects of death, there are only a few pages that discuss the influence of traditional organized religion in understanding the death process. The focus of those pages was directed to the physical social responses to death performed by various faith communities, that is, the funeral, rather than the theological reasons for those rituals (Iserson, 2001: 334). In contrast, more space was dedicated to descriptions of non-traditional funeral practices and the increased role of the funeral industry in servicing disposal needs. As Iserson observed, "an increasing number of Americans confront death with no inherited faith or liturgy for support. As a result the funeral director has become by default the weaver of instant rituals" (Iserson, 2001: 546).

A Canadian text entitled *When All the Friends have Gone: A Guide for AfterCare Providers* (2001), was part of the *Death, Value and Meaning Series* of the Baywood Publishing Company. A review of the seventeen essays included in the text demonstrates that the key interest of the authors was to promote the professional approach towards bereavement, a condition best understood through the medical lens with the most appropriate treatment offered by health care professionals. Traditional organized

religious institutions in bereavement support were either trivialized as historic providers, or as institutions that require more formal bereavement education training to be better prepared to provide affective, aftercare support.

Another text, *End of Life Issues: Interdisciplinary and Multidimensional Perspectives* (1999), included eighteen essays from a cross-section of research grounded in the social sciences and medical sciences. The themes explored through these essays also suggested that the primary target audience for considering end of life issues were health-care professionals. As with the previous text, the only article in this book that explored the role of organized religious institutions (the historical authority on end of life issues), discussed the professional need to engage religious leaders in the development of affective death education strategies (Braun and Kayashima, 2001). In other words, healthcare professionals perceived a need to better inform religious institutions about appropriate approaches to end of life issues.

The above texts offer a small sample of the extensive literature on contemporary approaches to dying and death; however, they reflect the common application of Walter's modern death type in which the health care professional is portrayed as the social authority in death care.

3.2.4 Critique of the Modern Death Type: the Professional Approach

Recently, modern medical treatment of the dying or near dead has become a subject of criticism. The modern approach of the medical profession to the sometimes excessive treatment of the dying reflects an attitude toward death as something to be avoided or defeated at all costs, a position that contradicts the reality of death as the

natural end of the life cycle. There are numerous examples of individuals who have been kept alive on life support systems for periods long after their own natural life support has failed. Sometimes individuals are kept on life support systems to accommodate family members who live far from the individual but nonetheless want to "be there" for the death (Auger, 2000: 51). Other times people are kept on life support for extended periods of time, sometimes for years, with little hope for recovery. Peter Singer noted in his 1995 text *Rethinking Life and Death,* that "in America in 1994 there were between 10,000 and 25,000 adults in a persistent vegetative state as well as between 4,000 and 10,000 children who were kept alive with life support systems even though there is no chance for their recovery" (Singer, 1995: 59).

David Moller offered a particularly biting criticism of the extreme nature of technological approaches to dying in his text *On Death Without Dignity* (1990).

> The image of a person dying in a hospital room, surrounded by tubes, machines, and professional staff, is logically consistent with the broader American framework of bureaucratization, specialization, technologization, individualism and alienation. . . .
>
> In the first place, the individuals who largely shape, define and dominate the process of dying, namely physicians, are generally not capable of providing and participating in support systems of intimacy and fellowship for the dying person (Moller, 1990: 41).

Other criticisms are less harsh, but still reflective of the desire for medical personnel to treat patients with terminal diseases as people, not as medical conditions that must be cured, and to treat deaths as natural and meaningful for the dying individuals and surviving family members.

Mary Bradbury (2000) has studied medical professionals and death for many years. She recognized that although death can be a very spiritual event for people, too many healthcare professionals are "married to descriptions of medical interventions and

of the medical good death, . . . in which the dying patient was unconscious, and free of pain" (Bradbury, 2000: 60). Bradbury reminds professionals of their responsibility to recognize that not everyone shares their representation of the "good" death and that less-medicalized deaths can be good deaths too. A sentiment also expressed by Jennifer Hockey (1990).

The above criticisms stem from the post-modern death type of Walter's model that encourages personal authority over the professional in developing approaches to dying that are meaningful to the individual. The limited consideration given to traditional organized religion was not as a social authority to return to but as an historic model to draw elements from. In recent years the healthcare profession shows signs that this new model is gaining acceptance. Medical training programs now dedicate time to instruction on alternative approaches to death, albeit limited time of less than nine hours throughout four years of study.[2] Nonetheless, the following example demonstrates that social attitudes about dying and death in Canada are changing.

3.2.5 Signs of the Postmodern Approach to Death

A direct response to this call for less-medicalized care of the dying was the introduction of palliative care programs. Northcott and Wilson describe palliative care as "the supportive, non-curative care of persons who are dying" (2001: 65). The first palliative care program in Canada began in 1975 at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Since then the program has been expanded. In 1985, over 300 hospitals have instituted similar programs with over 1,000 hospital beds (Northcott and Wilson, 2001:66). Although the program administrators, patients and their families praise the

palliative care initiative, it is obvious the palliative care movement has not made significant in-roads in altering the medical approaches to death. With over 75% of Canadians dying in hospitals and only 300 out of 2,000 hospitals in Canada dedicating 1,000 out of 135,000 hospital beds to this approach, coupled with the ongoing threat of government funding cutbacks to existing programs, the future impact of this professional approach to caring for dying patients may well be as a marginal player in the health care strategy.

Louise Mathieu-Primeau, the coordinator of bereavement support for the Palliative Care Unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, suggested in an interview that there does seem to be some light on the horizon. Although Mathieu-Primeau recognized that the care offered to patients in the palliative care unit was not readily available to patients outside the unit, the palliative care movement is making progress in redefining the medical approach to the care of dying patients. Mathieu-Primeau identified several regional, national and international organizations dedicated to developments in palliative care, organizations that are growing every year including the National Council on Palliative Care Units, Canadian Association for Palliative and Pastoral Care, L'Association de Palliative, International Congress for the Care of the Terminally Ill, the London Bereavement Conference and the International Congress on Bereavement. These organizations hold annual conferences and workshops for members to share new techniques. A key theme explored in many conferences is caring for the spiritual needs of patients and their families. The palliative care program takes a holistic approach to patient care, offering services that tend to the body, mind and spirit. To achieve this, a palliative care team includes the usual healthcare staff members who

oversee the patient's medical needs but also includes bereavement counselors, volunteers and non-denominational chaplains from the hospital's pastoral services department. The combined efforts of these people aim to make the final days of the patient's life as comfortable and meaningful as possible.

Each member of the palliative care team provides specialized services as required. However, attending to the spiritual needs of the patient and family is not the sole responsibility of the chaplain. Although the chaplain does make him/herself available for the patients when required, should a patient die when the chaplain is not available, the nursing staff are prepared to administer a "universal prayer" to respectfully mark the moment of death. As Mathieu-Primeau explained:

> With the reality of our multicultural population, what we do is ... There isn't a reference to God, but there's a reference to remembering the person that has died and also taking a moment of silence to remember how important that person has been to us. So it's a moment of closure for the staff and its also a time to mark the change that has begun. As you are probably aware, there is a lot of investment that the families will have in their loved ones. Sometimes even we might say over-invest. But that isn't a judgment. It's just to say that it is a time when they are offering a lot of love and care to their wife, their child, their mother, their friend that is dying. So this is a time when we are marking the moment [of death] with a spiritual moment, a moment when we are in silence and when we are united around that person's bed.
>
> The nurse who is responsible for the patient that day is the one who comes up to the family member, the key person, and asks the person if they [the nurse and staff] may say this universal prayer, saying this is *our* ritual. It is our ritual but it isn't just for the staff. The ownership is ours and we want the family members to feel free to accept or refuse the prayer. (Mathieu Primeau Interview 2002)

At the Royal Victoria Hospital palliative care unit more than half of the patient's families agree to participate in this universal prayer whose design reflects the postmodern

approach to death where traditional religious symbols or expressions are reorganized into a meaningful expression for the participants. The postmodern approach is also evident in the expression of ownership by the palliative care staff members. The reference to "*our* ritual" suggests that the staff recognize death as a process that should be respected and marked in a distinctive way. The reference to a "spiritual moment' without a specific reference to God may reflect the desire for the prayer to be religiously neutral for the patient. But it may also reflect the desire for healthcare workers whose own religious identity is informed more by a scientific or syncretistic "spiritual" worldview than a traditional religious one. Nonetheless the universal prayer allows all participants to participate in a ritual that recognizes, as Margaret Somerville describes in *The Ethical Canary*, "the awe and wonder of life and the need to protect the human spirit" (Sommerville, 2000: 9).

Another regular activity of the palliative care unit that obviously addresses spiritual needs is the monthly memorial service. Families of patients who have died in the unit are invited to attend the monthly memorial service held in the atrium of the unit. The families receive an invitation sent by Ms. Mathieu-Primeau usually three weeks after the person had died. Approximately thirty percent of families attend the service. In addition, the families are invited to attend the memorial service in the month that marks the death anniversary, a date that can be difficult for the bereaved. Like the universal prayer, the memorial service is a non-denominational, universal activity that centers on the theme of "remembering, of continuing bonds, of being able to find a space inside of oneself to continue a relationship with someone who has died" (Mathieu-Primeau, Interview 2002).

The memorial service provides a vehicle from which the palliative care unit can service the spiritual needs of the patients and their families using religious symbols and actions that have been repackaged to speak to the specialized needs of the participants, without the restrictive authority of a single religion. In this way, the palliative care program demonstrates the influence of Walter's postmodern death type in the healthcare field. However, the influence of the modern death social attitude remains central to the palliative care program due to the emphasis on healthcare professionals to perform all services. Even the chaplains who participate in the professional care of the patient are expected to do so without promoting any specific religious theology, including their own. As Reverend Arlen Bonnar, a long-term chaplain in palliative care explained, "I am not here to be your priest or minister but as a non-denominational chaplain who is a health care professional" (Bonnar Interview 2003).

The influence of the professional in the contemporary care of the dying does not stop with death, for once death has occurred the professional authority shifts from healthcare providers to the funeral director.

3.3 Changing Social Attitudes and the Funeral Industry

The same shift in social attitude that embraced professionalism over traditional organized religion and contributed to the designation of the healthcare professional as the social authority over the dying process, also contributed to the development of the funeral director as the professional authority for servicing death ritual needs.

As the above description of the historical response to death indicates, the historical role of the contemporary funeral director was as the undertaker or the person

who arranged for the casket and the grave to be dug. At the time of Confederation, being the undertaker was often a sideline job of the local carpenter or cabinet maker and supplying coffins was the primary task; all other activities were handled by the family and the church (Puckle, 1926; Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 61). The customs of the day encouraged survivors to wear black clothing and to mark the home where a death had occurred with black curtains, etc. Such items were not always on hand and often too expensive to purchase, especially in the event of a death. Entrepreneurs would purchase the necessary materials and when individuals came to make arrangements for the coffin, there was also the option to borrow the necessary funery supplies, for a fee. The budding industry also benefited from the increasing numbers of individuals who moved from rural to urban settings. The smaller urban living accommodations often meant that the family home did not have enough room to comfortably lay out the dead for visitations. This provided the undertaker with the opportunity to expand his services, and the funeral parlor was opened for business. The funeral parlor provided the family with a convenient place to house their dead during the customary three-day visitation period. If required, the undertaker would even take care of body preparations, collecting the body from the home and prepare it for viewing at the funeral home. In addition, the undertaker would transport the body to the church for the funeral service, transport it to the cemetery, and ensure that the burial was performed in accordance with religious and public health requirements.

The optional use of the funeral parlor grew steadily over the first half of the last century. As the urban lifestyle grew, so did the funeral industry as more and more people took advantage of the services offered. Desire to preserve the body for the three-day

visitation period led to the development of the contemporary art of embalming. Although embalming was used extensively in ancient Egypt, the reemergence of this mortuary art as a common component of contemporary funerals is a fairly recent phenomenon.

While embalming methods were used in Europe throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the technique was mostly restricted to corpses used for medical research. It was not until after the American Civil war that embalming became a more common practice in deathcare preparations (Bowman, 1959; Haberstien and Lamers, 1955). During the war embalming methods were developed as a means to both reduce the health risks of storing corpses of soldiers and to preserve the bodies for transportation back to their hometowns for burial. The function of embalming in the twentieth century expanded from basic preservation of the body to include cosmetic work, including reconstruction, to give the corpse the illusion of someone who was just resting peacefully. The fifth edition of *The Principles and Practice of Embalming* states, "it is the purpose of modern funeral service to alleviate grief by fostering the feeling that the deceased is merely sleeping" (Strub and Frederick, 1989: 20).

The undertaker not only managed the physical needs associated with the body but eventually became the professional who directed the social needs of the funeral service too. The expanded repertoire of services offered by the undertaker increased the amount of time required to fulfill these new tasks and created a more permanent social institution – the funeral industry. No longer was the job just a moonlighting opportunity but a serious profession that required specific skills and served specific social needs. The undertaker could be expected to issue death notices to the local newspapers, prepare orders for flowers and arrange for the clergy to perform the service (Wells, 2000). The

change in job description also resulted in a change in title from "undertaker" to "funeral director", a term first introduced in the early 1900s but a standard designation since the 1950s. "Whereas the undertaker of yesterday furnished little more than a casket, the modern funeral director furnishes a complete funeral service" (Strub and Frederick, 1989: 39).

To aid the social acceptance of this new professional designation, funeral directors formed associations to promote their industry. A noticeable sign of the success of their efforts was the increasing role that the funeral industry played in fulfilling government regulations for treatment of the dead. Over the second half of the twentieth century, the funeral industry has become an integral player not only in fulfilling government regulations but as an institutionalized component of them. As the Quebec Civil Code states, "Dès qu'un décès survient, il faut s'adresser à un thanatologue (directeur de funérailles) pour l'inhumation ou la cremation del la dépouille, ou tout autre arrangement funéraire" (Quebec Civil Code, Lors d'un décès, edition 2003). In Canada, it is illegal to transport the dead without authorization from a licensed funeral director and only licensed funeral directors are allowed to register the dead and apply for burial permits. Although embalming is not a legal requirement before burial or cremation in Canada, some provinces, like Quebec, will only allow public exposure to corpses that have not been embalmed up to twenty-four hours after death. Any open casket visitations that occur after the first twenty-four hours of death require that the corpse be embalmed (Quebec Civil Code, Edition 2003).

The social authority of the funeral director as the professional to consult for death care services has not only increased dramatically over the last century it has also

contributed, in many ways, to the declining authority of the clergy (Moller, 1996: 98). As death care has shifted from the personal responsibility of family to the professional responsibility of the funeral director, the role of traditional organized religion has shifted from the institution that provided the social framework to guide the family through the death of a loved one, to just one more of the one-hundred and twenty-five plus services that the funeral director supplies (Stub and Frederick, 1989: 40). The transfer of social authority has not necessarily been smooth.

3.4 The Funeral Industry and Traditional Organized Religion

Several studies of the development of the modern funeral industry have considered the shift in social authority from the clergy to the funeral director (Auberg, 2000; Bowman, 1959; French, 1985; Haberstein and Lamers, 1955, 1960; Howarth, 1996; Irion, 1966; Iserson, 2001; Mitford, 1964, 1998; Northcotte and Wilson, 2001; Smith, 1996; Walter, 1996). A notable trend within the older studies was the more prominent consideration of the social authority traditional organized religion had in guiding the funeral service, although all recognized a growing power struggle between the funeral director and the clergy. Conversely, the more recent studies observed a trend toward traditional organized religion as an increasingly marginalized institution that has become only one of several resources the professional funeral director, the new 'weaver of ritual' (Iserson, 2001: 534), provides to people who want to mark the death of an individual with a ritual. The social authority of the funeral director appears to have been accepted and is particularly evident in urban centers where the social trends away from traditional organized religion are most pronounced (Bowman, 1959; Irion, 1966;

Howarth, 1996; Iserson, 2001; Smith, 1996; Wells, 2001; Sarrison Interview, 2002; Curry Interview, 2003).

3.4.1 A Funeral Director's Perspective: Two Southern Ontario Experiences

Jennifer Curry, a funeral director who has worked in the funeral industry in southern Ontario for the past eight years, confirmed a significant difference between the services offered in small towns compared to large urban centers. Curry began her professional career as a funeral director at a funeral home in Port Perry, a small city with a population of less than 50,000. Curry recalls the community as being very well-connected, "with big families, everybody knew everybody, there was lots of community support for the bereaved so they did not look to the funeral director for support outside of the usual body preparations, use of the funeral 'parlour', as they liked to call the funeral home, and transportation services" (Curry interview 2003). The funerals were also very traditional in that the body would almost always be embalmed and present for the customary visitation period at the funeral home, an event where it was not uncommon for more than 500 people to attend. The visitation was such an expected part of the deathcare process that even when families chose not to host any visitations, people came to the funeral home anyway. The funeral service itself would be held at the church. A significant exception to this pattern was during the period of rebuilding the Catholic church that had burnt down. Reluctantly the priest did perform the funeral mass at the funeral parlor but would not offer the Eucharist unless the service was held at the church. After the service the body would be interned at the local cemetery. Cremations were rare. This pattern of funeral service was so predictable, Curry commented, she could "almost

do up the funeral arrangements before the family even walked through the door" (Curry Interview 2003). Throughout her tenure in Port Perry she only recalls having served one walk-in client, all other clients were loyal customers of the funeral home known personally by the staff.

However, a subsequent position with Griffen-Mack, a funeral chain of six homes that serve several regions in the greater Toronto area, offered a more demanding professional role. Curry mainly worked at the Scarborough branch that served the large suburb in Toronto's east end. She noted several differences in the needs of the clients in Port Perry compared with those in Toronto. The clientele in Scarborough was almost exclusively walk-ins. Many were elderly people who lived fairly isolated lives in the large apartment buildings in the local area. The isolation often meant the clients did not have a very large community to support them in their grief. Therefore, despite the adage expressed through her training that "funeral directors are not grief counselors", Curry often found herself performing the role of grief counselor "just listening to the people because they needed to talk to someone" (Curry, Interview 2003). Of the more than 350 clients served each year over fifty percent would open up to Curry for support during their acute grief. She recalled one elderly client who stayed in contact with her for over two years after the death of his wife because he needed to talk with someone and felt Curry had done "more than anyone" in supporting him during his time of grief. As Curry explained,

> People don't have the same support network available to them as before. So they look to me as this professional who could pull them through this, sort of like a doctor. I was very receptive to their needs and would not necessarily counsel them but would just listen to them. They needed to talk about what they were experiencing and so I listened. The ones

> who talked I knew would be okay, it was the ones who didn't talk that I was more concerned about.
>
> Sometimes the boss would be mad at me for spending too much time with clients, but what kind of a human being would I be if I didn't support them. Eventually he came around when he noticed the number of thank you cards and recommendations we received as a result of my listening (Curry, Interview 2003).

Another significant difference Curry noted between services rendered within the smaller community compared to the Toronto market was the far more professional approach to services in Toronto with a greater concern for legalities. Curry explained that at any of the Toronto branches, "you could hardly say hello without having the client sign a waiver" (Curry, Interview 2003). Waivers were required for everything from permission to remove the body from the hospital, to embalming, to describing exactly what clothing and jewelry would be placed on the body. Although such contracts were also signed in Port Perry, the awareness of fulfilling legal requirements was more acute in the larger urban centre.

The Scarborough funeral home also experienced a much higher trend toward cremation and direct disposition (direct internment or cremation of the body with no organized funeral service). At the Scarborough funeral home over sixty percent of clients opted for cremation and it was not uncommon for families to request direct cremation and take the ashes home without any ritual. Curry discouraged that approach to death, suggesting the funeral service was a very necessary ritual that helps people come to terms with the transition from life with the deceased to life without them. Nonetheless, many clients opted for cremation without a service.

The rate of cremation was even higher at the downtown branch with over 80% of clients requesting cremation. The downtown branch also performed the most non-traditional services. As Curry explained,

> The services at the Yonge street branch were more often a eulogy-based celebration of life or memorial services with the funeral and reception occurring at the same time. A family member may say a few words about the deceased and invite other guests to offer their memories. All the while there would be coffee, tea and light refreshments being served. Sometimes a clergy member would be present but more often not. In fact, the Yonge street branch has the lowest percentage of ministers coming to the funeral home (Curry, Interview 2003).

Curry remarked that the trend for cremation and non-traditional rituals might be related to the distinctive demographic qualities of the clientele: upper middle class, post-secondary educated professionals with minimal ties to traditional organized religion. Such qualities are consistent with demographic profiles of the nominal and non-religious offered in several studies (Bellah et.al., 1985; Brikerhotff and Mackie, 1993a, 1993b; Bromely, 1988; Davis, 1998; Fuller, 2001; Gee and Veevers, 1989; Gill et.al., 1998; Glock and Wuthnow, 1979; Hadaway and Roof, 1988; Hale 1977; Hoge 1988, 1994; Iannacone, 1998; Lamoureux-Scholes, 2002; Nelson and Bromely, 1988; Roof, 1988, 1993, 1999; Walter, 1996; Wuthnow, 1979, 1995, 1998).

In contrast to the non-traditional services provided at the Scarborough and downtown branches, Curry described the Toronto west-end branch as one that provided very traditional services not unlike those offered in Port Perry. This trend toward the traditional service was due in large part to the almost exclusive clientele base drawn from the Catholic Italian community living close to the funeral home. As well, the Oshawa branch that served a mostly Catholic community also tended to have more traditional

funeral services with less cremations or direct dispositions. The influence of traditional organized religion is more prevalent in areas where religious identities are supported by an extended faith community (Bromely, 1988; Davis, 1998; Fuller, 2001; Hadaway and Roof, 1988; Hoge 1988, 1994; Olson, 1993, 1999; Roof, 1988, 1993, 1999; Wuthnow, 1979, 1995, 1998).

Despite the trend toward the more non-traditional funeral services performed at the Scarborough and downtown branches, Curry recognized the need for the funeral director to maintain good relations with the clergy due to the industry's need for ritual managers who can adequately serve the needs of clients.

> We were always trained to respect the clergy and recognize them as the boss of the funeral ritual. We need these people. They can make or break the reputation of the funeral home through recommendations to their congregations. So it is also in our best interest to preserve the service as well and it is nothing without the preacher. It is what people want. When faced with a lot of choices, people just want to be told what to do and how to do it. They want to do what is proper, 'what is expected'. The Priest or minister offer a lot of comfort to families by taking charge of the service and telling them what they are going to do. Priests and Ministers are very important to the funeral home. Families need them. Until we get to the day when families are prepared to do all the arrangements for their own personalized services, I foresee an ongoing need for the clergy (Curry, Interview 2003).

3.4.2 A Funeral Director's Perspective: Montreal Experience

Respect for the clergy as an integral element of the funeral ritual was a sentiment also expressed by Andy Sarrasin and Andy Roy of Mount Royal Funeral Complex in Montreal. In the large urban center of Montreal, Mount Royal Funeral Complex operates three funeral homes, two cemeteries and a crematorium. In 2002, Mount Royal Funeral Complex celebrated its 150th anniversary. Initially the complex began as a non-profit cemetery built to serve the Protestant community of Montreal. In 1902 the cemetery built

the first crematorium in Canada and was the exclusive provider of cremation services to all funeral homes in the Montreal area up to the early 1970s. Over the years the crematorium expanded from the simple building housing the furnaces, to include a columbarium, mausoleum, and a small chapel that could accommodate private funeral services arranged by outside funeral homes. In the early 1990s the complex expanded its services and bought two funeral homes in different Montreal east end districts. In 1996 construction began to expand the crematorium into a large modern funeral home with a much larger columbarium, mausoleum, and several richly decorated, comfortable rooms to accommodate various visitation and ritual needs.

While the initial cliental at Mount Royal was mostly Protestant, and the board of directors continues to be made up of mostly Protestant elders who have purchased plots in the cemetery, the cemetery has always been open to non-Protestant clients and now considers itself to be a non-denominational institution. Nonetheless, Sarrasin commented that the majority of the clientele who request funeral rituals at the facility have some connection with a traditional Christian faith community, although for most it is a nominal connection.

> There is not an absence of religion [in the funeral service] because certainly 95% of the services we have here are conducted by a clergy. ... People are often religious to the extent that they don't necessarily practice in church but they still have a connection to a specific religion. Outside of the ethnic communities with strong ties to their religious communities, such as the Chinese or Russian Orthodox who will often bring the clergy with them to make arrangements, approximately 85% of the cliental ask for us to contact a clergy to perform the service. ... They will say, "well we would like an Anglican priest, but if you can't get one any Protestant minister will do." (Sarrasin and Roy, Interview 2002)

The *laissez-faire* attitude toward religious leadership has also influenced the manner in which services are performed. Sarrasin, who has worked as an embalmer and

assistant funeral director for over thirty years, has noticed the increased personalization of funeral services. "People are doing a lot more [funeral rituals] where they bring a lot more stuff in to mark the life of the person" (Sarrasin and Roy Interview, 2002). Sarrasin has also noticed a significant shift in the approach of traditional organized religion. More Catholics opt for cremation and the recent decree (1997) from the Montreal Bishop now permits priests to perform the committal service outside the church, but will still not allow the service to include the Eucharist. The official funeral liturgy for the Anglican Church has also changed twice in the last fifteen years including more opportunities for personalized eulogies. Other clergy are trying to personalize their services a bit by allowing family members to participate more in the service. Sarrasin also suggested that the trend toward more personalized services is a strategy used by some clergy members who often do not know the deceased or the family members and are trying to make the service meaningful for the participants.

To accommodate the need to arrange for clergy to officiate funeral services, Mount Royal maintains a roster of clergy members willing to perform funeral services for clients who are not affiliated with a traditional religious faith community. The list is separated by denomination and includes at least two and as many as five contact names for each denomination: Catholic(2); Anglican (5); Presbyterian (3) and United Church (2). Sarrasin explained that sometimes it is a matter of going down the list until one can be reached who is available for the date and time selected. However, the funeral home staff are also aware of the personal style of each clergy and are careful to match the clients needs with the appropriate clergy. For example, there are Presbyterian clergy on the list who will perform only traditional funeral rituals with very little opportunity for

personal input and will only serve people who can demonstrate some connection, even a distant one, with the Presbyterian church. Whereas, the funeral home may recommend a more liberal clergy member to those clients who want a more personalized service that does not center on the traditional Christian liturgy.

Occasionally the clients connect with the clergy and look to them to offer spiritual guidance through the grief process or to accommodate future rites of passage for the families. However, many maintain a situational relationship with the clergy limited to the funeral service itself.

In recent times the funeral industry has recognized that the social trend away from traditional organized religion has left many people without the social support previously available through the faith community. In an effort to respond to this need many funeral homes are introducing aftercare programs. Aftercare programs can be limited to assistance in fulfilling the legal requirements when clearing an estate, to more extensive grief management programs that offer emotional support to clients throughout the grieving process. In 2000, Mount Royal initiated an aftercare grief management program entitled "Growing Through Grief". The complex hired Dawn Cushay, a bereavement counselor, to coordinate and run the program. Cushay has been a professional nurse for over twenty-five years. About ten years ago while completing her Master's studies, Cushay recognized the limited treatment available for individuals experiencing grief. Since then she has spent much of her time developing grief education programs that she administers whenever and wherever possible.

At Mount Royal, Cushay has had well over 200 people participate in grief support groups. The emphasis of the program has been to normalize the death process and the

subsequent grieving process. Cushay recognizes there has been a significant shift in social awareness of death over the last one hundred years.

> One hundred years ago death was a part of life. We died earlier. There wasn't modern technology. People died at home. The family dug the grave, washed the corpse and laid it out while the kids ran about and it was really sad, and we cried but then life went on and we had to get back to work on the farm. Death was a part of life. Then we started separating it. People who were ill were sent to nursing homes and institutions and the whole business of death care was given to the funeral home to handle. The result is families are not encouraged to participate or be involved with death. And why not? Because people are not comfortable with death. All you can do is accompany someone who is dying, you can't die for them. How do you do this [accompany them]? By being comfortable with yourself. But we are a "fix-it" society; we want to fix people's grief and fix people who are dying, but we can't. (Cushay, Interview 2002)

Cushay's approach to death does not endorse a return to the traditional death model governed by religious communities. Instead, she encourages a post-modern approach to death and grief: a "no rules" approach to death and grief that allows the individuals to cope with this life transition in a manner most meaningful to them. However, Cushay also recognizes that it can be difficult for people to develop their own grief management strategies, and so she offers guidance through regular eight-week support group sessions and through "Coping with Holiday Memories" services conducted twice a year in the chapels at the Mount Royal Funeral Complex.

The group sessions offer participants the opportunity to share their grief with others who can empathize with their situation. As Cushay explained,

> Most often the participants bond together very quickly, raising the comfort level that allows them to share grief experiences with one another. Some groups have continued to meet long after the eight-week session finishes. I am willing to continue to meet with them if I consider it helpful to their grief journey, like one group that has been meeting once a month for a year after their original session. However, once the group begins to consider the

> session as more of a social activity I leave it to them to continue meeting since it is obvious their grief journey has passed the acute stages. (Cushay, Interview 2002)

Although Cushay may no longer participate directly in the grief journey of individuals outside the eight-week sessions, she does continue to invite all her current and past clients to participate in the twice annual coping with the holiday services she conducts in the Mount Royal Funeral Complex chapels. Many past clients attend and continue to attend year after year. As one participant who had been attending the services since the death of his wife four years previously, said: "the service provides me with the opportunity to dedicate time to the memory of my wife and express my gratitude to Dawn for supporting me" (Coping Service, December 2002).

The holiday services offer an opportunity to commune with others going through similar experiences. One service is held in early December and concentrates on the theme of managing grief through the holiday season. The other service is held just before Mother's Day and focuses on coping with special anniversary and celebration dates. At the December 2002 service, there were approximately 110 people attending the service with half attending the English version and the other half attending the French service.

The framework for the service was not unlike a religious service in that it took place in the chapel, opened with a musical interlude, included a lecture from the pulpit, shared actions (lighting candles), and a moment for collective meditation. However, there was no mention of God or a transcendent being or state and there were no prayers. The service did include the opportunity for individuals to share different coping strategies; however, at this particular service there were few who took up the call. Fortunately, Cushay was a very capable facilitator and did not allow the silence to become too awkward by moving the service along to a collective exercise of writing

down a memory of a deceased loved one. Cushay asked several children in attendance to distribute pens and small cards to everyone. She then offered a few minutes for people to write personalized messages to their loved ones onto the cards that would later be hung on the memory tree. Afterward, Cushay once again asked the children to distribute a candle to everyone. One by one, the candles were lit and the attendees were invited to take a few moments to meditate on their loved one while listening to music. As the music faded the candles were extinguished and everyone was invited to the reception area where people hung their memory cards onto the two large Christmas trees made ready for the event. Over refreshments participants expressed appreciation for this meaningful service that also offered some great advice for coping through the holidays.

Cushay later explained that many people who attend her services did not necessarily have strong ties with a faith community or, if an affiliation was mentioned, they felt the community had not provided them with the support they needed. These people may even have resented their traditional faith community for trying to make them fit into a standardized process that did not adequately respond to their unique needs. Cushay offered that the best way to respond to people's needs is to "give people more choices, to empower them" (Cushay, Interview 2002). The choice should not be limited to grief management but should also apply to the funeral service. This post-modern approach to death is even more evident in Cushay's recommendation that instead of promoting traditional religious funeral services that "can be flat with the name of the deceased only said once", funeral homes should offer more support to families interested in doing their own services; personalized "Celebration of Life" services that would be more meaningful (Cushay, Interview 2002).

As the above accounts suggest, the contemporary approach to death in Canada includes all three of Irion's funeral types: the religious, the conventional and the humanist. The traditional religious funeral tends to be performed for individuals with strong ties to a particular ethnic or faith community. The conventional funeral is more commonly employed by individuals who live in large urban centers and maintain a nominal affiliation with a faith community. More recently, funeral homes have recognized a trend toward non-traditional, personalized celebration of life services or the humanist funeral, especially in the larger urban centers where affiliation with traditional faith communities is less prevalent.

In the effort to meet the ever-changing needs and desires of the increasing numbers of nominally religious or non-religious clientele, the funeral director has become the social authority of contemporary death rituals. The funeral director supports the client through a spectrum of services that are customized to that client's needs. As a result, the funeral director must maintain a balance between the traditional and non-traditional, preserve good relations with the clergy but also be flexible and ready to service nominal or non-religious needs as well.

3.4.3 Funeral Director Training and the Funeral Ritual

The funeral industry has recognized the increased demands on the funeral director to adequately provide services that span the spectrum from traditional religious funerals to non-religious personalized services to direct disposition. Professional funeral associations offer support to their members through regular conventions that include workshops and seminars dedicated to sharing new deathcare strategies; however it is only

in recent years that alternative ritual planning has been included. Professional journals also offer advice through articles on how to manage relations with clergy, set up aftercare programs and how to aid clients in developing personal rituals. Funeral directors also rely heavily on the formal training they receive through various post-secondary programs dedicated to the art of thanatology or death studies.

M. Ardré Lépine is the director of the Rosemont College program "*Techniques de thanatologie*", the only program in Quebec that trains future funeral directors. Lépine is a second-generation funeral director who began his professional career in the early 1970s in the Quebec City region. Even at that time Lépine recognized the need for funeral directors to offer alternative funeral services to clients, particularly for disenchanted Catholics who participated in the quiet revolution and wanted to personalize the funeral service in contrast to the traditional Catholic funeral mass. In 1974, his funeral home introduced cremation as an option. As more people utilized the service, Lépine assisted them in preparing and performing rituals prior to the cremation. Over time more rituals were developed that followed a humanist approach with no religious leader, no religious readings and music that was more contemporary. Lépine encouraged people to personalize their rituals by setting up tables with items and pictures that were important to the person, reflecting what the person liked in life. The response was always very positive.

In the late 1980s, Lépine joined the teaching staff at Rosemont College. About ten years ago he introduced into the curriculum the idea of flexibility and willingness to facilitate alternative rituals. As he explained:

> The students must be prepared to ask people to participate in the development of rituals. The ritual must be meaningful and set at a time most appropriate to the participant. Could

> be at night or on weekends. The funeral director must be flexible. The location could be anywhere—the church, a chapel, under a tent in the cemetery at dusk or dawn. We must be prepared to provide services like tents, drink, food, chocolate, wine. The funeral is a celebration of life and we must be ready to help the client prepare the celebration. A key principle to follow is to do what you can do for the client. (Lépine Interview 2003)

Although Lépine recognized the need for future funeral directors to learn creative approaches to non-traditional funeral rituals, the thanatology course outline for the three-year program suggests the funeral ritual is not a central focus of the funeral director training. In all there are only nine hours dedicated to information about funeral rituals including military, civic and high priest rituals, and traditional organized religion rituals both Christian and non-Christian. Once those rituals have received a cursory overview, there is usually less than one hour to discuss non-traditional approaches.

Instead of rituals, three quarters of the course load is dedicated to treatment of the body and embalming practices. The remaining quarter of the programming is split between psychology courses, administrative management, legal aspects of funeral services, health and safety measures, and material preparations (caskets and urns, funeral home set-up, transportation, etc.), leaving little time to dedicate to the death ritual itself.

Lépine explained that one of the reasons for the limited time dedicated to ritual studies was because funeral directors are told the rituals belong to the church. However, the funeral industry is aware that the declining social authority of traditional organized religion in contemporary society has placed the funeral director in a more prominent role as the social authority for death rituals. This sentiment is particularly evident in the following statement from the "Bible" for funeral directors, *The Principles and Practices of Embalming*, by Clarence G Strub and L. G. "Darko" Frederick (or "Freddie and

Strubs" as the text is affectionately called), a funeral industry standard training manual found in funeral homes throughout North America:

> In the funeral service itself, many primitive customs are encountered which fortunately are being subdued and eliminated in some of the more progressive sections of the country. A generation ago a funeral service was a test of endurance between the preacher and the friends and relatives.
>
> Lengthy services designed to eulogized the dead and display the eloquence of the preacher were considered a necessity. The original purpose of these eulogies was, of course, to flatter the spirit of the dead and keep it from harming the survivors. In later years, however, the funeral became an excuse for an often neglected preacher to deliver a sermon to a captive crowd of larger proportions than he could attract at any other time. Rare is the funeral sermon that can be comforting if it extends over a period of more than ten or fifteen minutes. (Strub and Frederick, 1989: 21)

The rather caustic critique of the role of traditional organized religion offers a bold assertion of the social authority that the professional funeral director has in determining the parameters of a meaningful funeral service. Later on in the text, Strub and Frederick are quite clear on how the funeral director has contributed to the creation of meaningful funeral services.

> Funeral Customs, including those mentioned in this chapter, have changed more rapidly and radically during the past generation than during the preceding century. This is because the public has come to look to the professional mortician for guidance in matters of procedure. The modern, progressive funeral director is well aware of the ancient origin of our current funeral customs, and has been able to preserve their original significance while shaping and adapting such customs to the needs of the present era. Through the efforts of the modern mortician, funeral customs which have their roots in ancient fears and superstitions have come to represent love and respect. The funeral service is a bridge from the present to eternity. (Strub and Frederick, 1989: 23)

The above quotation not only reiterates the authors' disdain for the traditional religious funeral services as being grounded in "ancient fears and superstitions", but

asserts the religious authority of the contemporary funeral service, directed by professionals within the funeral industry, as the most meaningful way to respectfully and lovingly mark the passage of the deceased from the present world to a meaningful transcendent reality. However, the emphasis on love and respect as the foundation of the funeral service is less evident in a subsequent description of the modern funeral that seems more concerned with promoting deathcare services.

> Modern funeral customs are founded entirely upon sentiment and pride. There is an expression of love and respect for a deceased relative or friend—a matter of pride in presenting that deceased person to the public under the most favorable conditions possible. Eliminate the elements of sentiment and pride, and you eliminate the need for attractive caskets and protective vaults, and the need for an elaborate mortuary and luxurious automotive equipment. The burial of the dead then becomes a matter of quickly and economically disposing of an inanimate object which is only of interest because it may offend the senses and serve as a hazard to public health. ...
>
> Beautiful caskets, correct floral arrangements, harmonious lighting effects, complete and satisfactory funeral arrangements—all serve one purpose and one purpose only—to provide a suitable frame for the memory picture thus enhancing the illusion of a loved one in a pleasant, restful repose. And of what value is a beautiful frame when the picture itself is of dirty fingernails, careless shaving, unnatural feature arrangement, visible discolorations, feature distortions, poor posture, slipshod cosmetic application, wrinkled eyes, shrunken and parted lips, or symptoms of early decomposition? ...
>
> As has been explained, a funeral service is a social function at which the deceased is a guest of honor and the center of attraction. If such a function were to occur during the lifetime of the individual, it is unthinkable that he or she should acquire a completely new outfit of clothing and accessories costing several hundred dollars and then neglect to bathe, shave, and otherwise fail to perform the toilet procedures necessary for such an important occasion. A poorly prepared body in a beautiful casket is just as incongruous as a young lady appearing at a party in a costly gown with her hair in curlers. ... It is always the quality of the service—particularly the embalming—which makes a funeral home distinguished. (Strub and Frederick, 1989: 54-55)

It is sentiments like those above that have contributed to the extensive criticism directed toward the funeral industry; however, this criticism does not result in renewed support for traditional organized religion.

3.5 Critiques of the Funeral Industry

The above quotations offer insight into why the funeral industry has been the focus of harsh criticism throughout the twentieth century (Berg-klug, et.al., 2001; Bowman, 1959; Dowd, 1921; Gorer, 1965; Haberstein and William, 1955, 1960; Harmer, 1963; LaMarche, 1965; Mitford, 1964, 1998; Moller, 1996; Neilson, 1973; Puckle, 1926; Rocco, 2001; Wilson, 1938; Wong, 2003). A central theme to all critiques was the emphasis on material goods as necessary elements of the funeral service providing the funeral industry with the opportunity to take advantage of people in a vulnerable state by encouraging the purchase of excessive products and services to demonstrate affection for the deceased. With very few exceptions, another commonality of the critiques was the absence of a call for traditional organized religion to reacquire the social authority over the funeral. Instead there was the plea for individuals to take charge of their own deathcare, to develop strategies to avoid paying the funeral director.

The harsh criticism directed at the funeral industry and the marginal support of traditional organized religion contributed to the development of memorial societies. Memorial societies offer their members no-frills direct disposition services. In most of North America and Europe the law states that only licensed funeral directors are permitted to transport and intern or cremate a body. As such, memorial societies negotiate a no-frills arrangement with a particular funeral home in their region that will

provide the essential deathcare services. Essential services include transportation of the corpse from the location of death to the funeral home, the supply of a basic plain coffin and either burial or cremation of the body as requested. The memorial society does not negotiate additional ritual services although some families may upgrade the basic package at the funeral home to include more traditional funeral services. Other families will collect the ashes from the funeral director and may or may not conduct private religious or non-religious services off-site.

The memorial society is but one of the growing number of non-traditional, post-modern options for responding to deathcare needs in contemporary culture. The next chapter examines the range of options available and how this increased choice has changed the social authority of traditional organized religion in contemporary death rituals.

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[1] Northcott and Wilson reported a significant shift in the number of hospitalized deaths of Canadians between 1939 and 1994. In 1939, 40% of deaths occurred in hospitals. By 1994, that figure had rose to over 75%. See *Dying and Death in Canada*, 2001, pages 28-29.

[2] A comment by Dr. Bernard Laplante of the Jewish General Hospital Palliative Care Unit, made during a presentation on the development of Palliative Care programs in the "World Religions and Bio-medical Ethics" course at the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, March 2002.

Chapter 4 – Death Rituals in Contemporary Society

4.1 Contemporary Death Rituals

In societies throughout history some form of ritual has always marked death. The death ritual serves multiple purposes. It provides a framework for organized grieving and it offers social support and the opportunity to reinforce group identity (Durkheim, 1995; Fenn 1997; Fuller 2001; Mol, 1976; Moller, 1996; Roberts, 1993; Van Gennep, 1960; Walter, 1996). In contemporary North American society, where individualism is valued over shared identity, the funeral ritual continues to provide the majority with the social framework for responding to the death of a loved one. However, erosion of the traditional idea of "community" has meant that modern funeral rituals more often "assemble a network of individual grievers," and offer only a fragmented and temporary semblance of group identification (Moller, 1996: 93). In his book *Confronting Death (1996),* David Moller also noted that contemporary funerals are not very sad occasions anymore and the funeral ritual has gradually become "empty, shallow and increasingly worthless" (Moller, 1996: 97). Moller explained that the change in social value of the funeral ritual is due in large part to our prolonged relationship with death.

In contemporary North American society, people live with terminal illness for longer and longer periods of time. Less than fifty years ago, the dying process was limited to days or weeks, rarely lasting months let alone years. However, advancements in healthcare have resulted in an extended dying process that can last years, and yet the extra time people receive does not always offer the most positive life experience. The extended period of dying can result in people being stigmatized or socially rejected because of their illness. As health deteriorates, so does mobility limiting opportunities

for the individual to actively participate in society. The individual becomes increasingly isolated, whether at home or in long-term care settings, and can experience a social death long before the physical death occurs (Moller, 1990; Auger, 2000). For those in long-term care settings, immediate family members may view death more as a relief than a traumatic event. Mourning for the loss of the social life of the individual has often already been processed. Acute grief at the time of physical death can be tame or minor since survivors view the deceased as having lived a long full life with death offering an end to the suffering endured in the final days, months or years (Auger, 2000: 64). As the social death of the individual increasingly precedes physical death, and the emotional response to death changes from grief to relief, a new trend has developed where survivors eliminate the formal funeral ritual and opt for direct disposition with little or no ritual action. This trend is particularly strong in large urban centers. As Robert Fulton revealed:

> In San-Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and other major cities ... upwards of 25 percent of deaths annually go unreported in the obituary columns of the daily newspaper. ...
>
> In San Diego County, a contemporary scenario for the disposition of the dead that is now practiced in almost one-sixth of all deaths in that area is as follows. Upon the declaration of a patient's death, the body is removed to the hospital morgue; an organization called Telephase is notified; the body is picked up at the morgue and enclosed in a rubberized bag; it is transported in an unmarked station wagon to a crematorium; the body is cremated, and the ashes are placed in a cardboard or plastic container for storage, dispersal, or delivery to a designated recipient; the legal survivor is later billed. (Fulton, 1988: 271)

On the other hand, there remain a significant number of people who continue to uphold the social value of the death ritual. As Paul Irion noted, "in spite of these dramatically changing perspectives, [the death] ritual endures" (Irion, 1990: 163). And

while it is true that the traditional religious funeral ritual remains the choice of many for marking the death of a loved one, in contemporary society there are a myriad of death ritual options to choose from.

Traditional organized religious funeral rituals continue to dominate the death ritual market. However, even religiously oriented people are choosing alternative funeral practices with or without conventional services (Bergan, 1981). As indicated earlier, there are increasing numbers of people in contemporary society who are living without a traditional religious liturgy to guide them through death rituals. They therefore look to non-religious professionals, such as the funeral director, to connect with either religious or non-religious facilitators who will assist them in creating meaningful rituals (Woodward, 1997). As Northcott and Wilson explained: "religion still has significance to individuals [requiring death rituals], but is clearly more significant for some people than others" (Northcott and Wilson, 2001: 62).

Ronald Grimes (2000), a sociologist from Wilfrid Laurier University, recognized the trend toward more personalized rituals as a way for individuals to respond to the void left in the lives of people who have marginalized or severed their relationship with traditional organized religion. In 1996 Louise Carus Mahdi et. al. edited the book *Crossroads: the Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage,* a text with over thirty essays by various academics, clergy, therapists and non-traditional ritual leaders. A broad theme explored within the collection of essays was the role that rites of passage play in promoting physical, psychological, social and spiritual health. Like Grimes, several authors argued that the trend away from traditional organized religion has left many

people without a social structure to perform these rites. In response to this need, various authors offered guidelines for creating effective rites of passage.

The efforts to support individuals interested in developing meaningful personal rituals were not limited to these authors. In recent years there has been a deluge of scholarly and popular culture books dedicated to creating personalized rituals. A search on the Amazon.ca website (August 2003), resulted in over 46 titles dedicated specifically to death rituals, 2,305 titles offering guidance for grief management and 1,971 titles for bereavement. Although many titles suggest an affiliation with traditional organized religion, there were many that approached death and grief in individualized, non-traditional ways.

A fine example is the text *In Memoriam* (1993) by Edward Searl. As a Unitarian minister, Searl acknowledged the growing need for individuals dealing with the death of a loved one, to "make a traumatic and often confusing occasion meaningful, while giving appropriate honor and fitting dignity to the end of a human life" (Searl, 1993: i). Although the text offered a brief overview of traditional religious death rituals conducted by Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish faith communities, the major focus was directed toward planning personalized memorial services. Searl encouraged individuals to prearrange funeral plans including details for the ritual to ensure that "your wishes and integrity will be honored," and to assist and protect survivors from "making difficult and perhaps uninformed choices, choices that often have a high price—emotionally and financially" (Searle, 1993: 8). To support individuals, Searl included detailed "Personal Plans and Arrangements" worksheets. He also offered ten templates for the memorial service and four sample eulogies. A common theme expressed throughout was the trend

for the "modern funeral and memorial service ...[to] meet today's growing need for human-centered, naturalistic, psychologically sound, artful services that center on an honest and loving eulogy of the deceased" (Searl, 1993: 10). Searl acknowledged that a meaningful funeral service could rely exclusively on traditional organized religions. However, there are also many socially acceptable non-religious options that individuals could choose from. As Searl explained:

> Direct cremation (often after organ donation), followed by a memorial service with a scattering of ashes, is now common. Many people believe this to be the most dignified, economical and ecological way of dealing with death.
>
> Yet many others follow the tradition of the funeral service and burial because it deals directly with death and, therefore, is spiritually and psychologically sound. Many believe that seeing the body in the casket makes death real—at a time when emotionally we often are denying that reality.
>
> Most people agree that ostentatious display and unnecessary expense make death vulgar. Simplicity, dignity and economy characterize the contemporary wisdom about funerals and memorial services. This is why many families now ask that tributes to the deceased by given as memorial donations to charity rather than as flowers.
>
> There is no right or wrong way to handle a funeral. There is your way—the way that respects your values and emotions. No longer are you required to meet the death of a loved one according to established traditions. However, if certain traditions speak to you, you are encouraged to respect and follow them. More and more, modern death practices are finding new ways to deal with life's oldest story, the story of living and dying. (Searl, 1993: 10)

The trend toward personalized, non-religious treatment of death is also evident in many popular culture newspapers and magazines. For example, the *Globe and Mail*, one of Canada's national daily newspapers, includes a "Lives Lived" column on the last page of section A in every daily paper. This column is so popular that over five hundred people submit essays for consideration every week (Haskins, Interview, 2003). A

striking similarity of those submissions selected was the focus on the personal life of the deceased. References to traditional organized religion are rare, and only included as one of many qualities that contributed to the development of the individual being eulogized.

In the November 30, 2002, edition of the *Globe and Mail*, the "Focus" section was dedicated to the subject of "The Way We Die Now". Although the theme of the ten-page section was on how individuals respond to death, a notable omission was the lack of even one article dedicated to the traditional religious response to death. The only reference to death rituals or traditional organized religion was as the cause of family feuds. Instead, death was presented as a fact of life that can be explained through science and dealt with by professionals. The section included articles that examined the role of funeral directors, investigated costs associated with funerals, documented various technological attempts at denying death (freezing, cloning, and the life extension movement), determined the exact moment of physical death and discussed family feuds that have erupted after death. There was even a poem about living life to the fullest now because death is an unknown. For many articles, death was something to be controlled, a task to get through, with no concern for what follows.

As the social attitude to death has changed, the range of deathcare strategies has expanded, leaving many needing assistance in choosing the course of action that best reflects their needs. Even though the funeral director has become the social authority for most contemporary deathcare needs, there are several alternative deathcare industries that are ready to assist people who want to take control of deathcare. For those interested in do-it-yourself funerals, you can hire a personal consultant for death. Jerri Lyons of Home Funeral Ministry explained that planning a funeral is like planning a wedding or anything

else, "I help people achieve the kind of death and funeral they envision. I take care of what needs to be taken care of" (Miller, 2000: 1). The internet also offers a growing range of products and services that will assist individuals in personalizing their memorials. Althugh the new deathcare options are diverse, two characteristics common to these alternatives are the emphasis on celebrating the life of the individual and the marginalization to total exclusion of traditional organized religion.

The approach to death rituals in the early twenty-first century is diverse and the social authority of traditional organized religion varied. The following explores that range from the traditional funeral ritual securely supported by a faith community, to the myriad of alternatives that will satisfy individual religious or non-religious needs.

4.2 Contemporary Death Rituals and Traditional Organized Religion

In 2003, Statistics Canada confirmed that most Canadians are affiliated with a traditional organized religion; the majority or 74% of Canadians affiliate with Christian traditions and 6% with the vibrant and growing non-Christian faith communities (see Table 1). This section explores the range of social authority that various Christian and non-Christian faith communities have over contemporary death rituals in Canada. The examination begins with accounts of death rituals performed by non-Christian traditions in which the faith community generally maintains a significant level of social authority in the lives of the participants, an attribute also found in subsequent accounts from the conservative end of the Christian spectrum. Signs of diminishing social authority of faith communities are increasingly evident in the accounts of more liberal Christian traditions, especially for situationally religious nominal or non-affiliated Canadians who access the

faith community only for the purpose of performing death rituals. With the exception of the Muslim account, all observations were based on interviews with funeral directors and religious ritual leaders affiliated with Mount Royal Funeral Complex in Montreal and compared with similar observations from Ms. Curry, a funeral director from Toronto.

4.2.1 Contemporary Death Rituals: A Muslim Experience

Mr. Bashir Hussain is a Muslim who has lived in Montreal since 1963. In a recent interview he explained how the Muslim community of Montreal has serviced the funeral ritual needs of the community since the mid 1950s. When a Muslim dies, the body should be washed (men wash men and women wash women), wrapped in three pieces of plain cloth (four pieces for a woman), placed in a plain inexpensive box, and presented at the mosque where special prayers are administered before burial. All this takes place within the first twenty-four hours of death. Because anyone present at the mosque is invited to participate in prayers for the dead, whether known to them or not, the Iman or President of the mosque may give a brief eulogy prior to the prayers to identify the individual on whose behalf the prayers will be given. After the burial, the family is expected to not cook for three days, resulting in the community taking up the task of bringing food and support to the family during that period. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, body preparation was completed by the community in facilities provided by a Montreal funeral home. In exchange for providing the preparation facilities, the funeral home was hired to fulfill the transportation needs from the place of death to the funeral home, from the funeral home to the mosque, and then to the Dollard cemetery where 130 grave sites had been purchased. As the decades passed, the Muslim community in Montreal grew from a few dozen to tens of thousands. In the mid 1980s,

the Islamic Centre of Quebec expanded the mosque and built their own facilities to accommodate body preparation needs. In 1988 the community also purchased an acreage in Laval large enough to serve the growing community. In 1999, two members of the community secured funeral director licenses that allow them to legally transport bodies, register the death and bury the body. With the licensing of the Muslim funeral directors, the body preparations facilities and the cemetery, the Montreal Muslim community has successfully eliminated the need for a non-religious, non-Muslim funeral director to service their deathcare needs. These actions have also contributed to the community's ability to maintain the social authority of the faith community in the performance of death rituals.

4.2.2 Contemporary Death Rituals: The Jewish Perspective

Montreal is home to the second largest Jewish population in Canada. Like Muslims, observant Jews have specific rituals requirements that must be fulfilled upon the death of a Jew. The body must be washed and wrapped in a simple shroud and placed in a plain box before burial within twenty-four hours. To accommodate the specific death ritual needs, the faith community has managed to eliminate the need for the non-religious funeral director through the establishment of several Jewish funeral homes, managed by licensed funeral directors who are Jewish, thus maintaining the social authority of the faith community in the performance of death rituals. The exception is non-observant or secular Jews who may approach the non-religious funeral director to facilitate their needs for non-religious rituals (Sarasin, Interview 2002).

4.2.3 Contemporary Death Rituals: Other Non-Christian Religions

Since the mid-1960s, Canada has promoted a more global immigration policy that has attracted many people who maintain a non-Christian religious identity including Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. For many, the faith community serves as an important resource for the transition into Canadian society because it provides a community base to affirm their cultural identity, speak a common language and access earlier immigrants who share their experiences, wisdom, etc. (Breton 1965, 1990). Like the previous accounts of the Muslim and Jewish faith communities, these non-Christian faith communities tend to maintain a significant social authority over death rituals. However, unlike the previous two accounts, these faith communities utilize the non-religious funeral director to fulfill the Canadian legal requirements for body preparation and burial. But, as Sarrasin explained, the involvement of the funeral director is most often limited to the historic undertaker services since "the faith community handles all other aspects of the death ritual, usually at the religious site of the faith community" (Sarrasin, Interview 2003).

4.2.4 Contemporary Death Rituals: Chinese Canadians

Mr. Sarrasin also recognized the limited role of the funeral director in servicing the needs of the Chinese community in Montreal. For the Chinese Christian community, the funeral home was only expected to transport and prepare the body, leaving the Church community to provide the remaining services. However there is also a segment of the Chinese community in Montreal that does not affiliate itself with the Christian tradition but instead practices a combination of folk and Buddhist rituals. Even though

this community requests more services from the funeral home, such as rooms for group gatherings and facilities to burn paper money—a ritual integral to sending contented spirits to the underworld—they do not look to the funeral director for guidance in fulfilling ritual needs. The occasional exception would be when unaffiliated Chinese clients ask the funeral director to connect them with a Chinese Christian Clergy to perform a Christian funeral. Reverend Cirric Chan has performed such funeral requests for the Mount Royal Funeral Complex, and explained that the request for a Christian funeral is not necessarily due to the participants desire to become Christian; rather it is "because Chinese people like the Christian service. It is nice and simple" (Reverend Chan Interview, 2003). Reverend Chan does not see this as a problem though. Instead he considers it a pastoral opportunity. "I want to show my concern, to lighten their burden through Christianity. I come to serve the living. I cannot do anything for the dead but [I can] show the living God's love" (Reverend Chan, Interview 2003). While Chan recognizes that many of these families also practice folk rituals, he insists that they remove any traces of the rituals prior to his performance of the Christian funeral ritual.

4.2.5 Contemporary Death Rituals: Eastern Orthodox Christian

Russian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox communities have not eliminated the role of the funeral director in their death rituals; however, like the above accounts of non-Christian traditions, the role given to the funeral director more closely follows that of the undertaker in the traditional death ritual model. The funeral director provides only the basic legal requirements of transportation and body preparation with the social authority over all other aspects of the death ritual firmly grounded in the faith community. As Mr.

Sarrasin explained, the individuals of the Russian Orthodox faith community often "bring the clergy with them to make arrangements and we just deliver the body to the church" (Sarrasin Interview, 2002).

4.2.6 Contemporary Death Rituals: Conservative Evangelists Christians

When asked about conservative evangelists Christians, Sarrasin explained that they were similar to the Greek and Russian Orthodox Christians in that the community played a significant role in managing the death rituals with the funeral director acting more as the undertaker. However, Sarrasin did note the community was just as likely to use the funeral home chapel for the service as the church (Sarrasin, Interview 2003).

4.2.7 Contemporary Death Rituals: Mainline Protestant

In the above cases, the faith community remained in charge of the funeral ritual, which served the more traditional role of reinforcing the social authority of the shared sacralized religious identity of all participants. However, other faith communities have experienced difficulty in maintaining the traditional social authority over the funeral ritual and have had to adapt to the demand for more personalized services that include the family in more and more aspects of the ritual.

In particular, the role of the funeral eulogy has created a dividing line for religious leaders. In the past few decades, the eulogy has become a more central element in many Protestant funeral rituals. However, in February 2003, the Anglican Diocese of New York State banned personal eulogies from the religious service due to the "growing abuse associated with eulogies at funerals" (Wakin, 2003). The ban was welcomed by priests

who "favoured refocusing on the mysteries of the faith rather than on the deceased's love of the Jets or penchant for domestic beer" (Ibid.).

Reverend Richard Topping of the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, a Presbyterian Church in Montreal, also forbids eulogies by anyone other than himself in the funeral rituals he performs. Reverend Topping explained that even with people he knows well he is hesitant to allow them to perform a eulogy at the funeral for a number of reasons. They may not be comfortable at speaking in public, they may find the experience too emotional or they may take the service off on a tangent that is inappropriate. The refusal for eulogies does not necessarily mean families are not offered the opportunity to participate. They can read passages from the Bible at preordained times within the service. They may also personalize the service by choosing which readings or hymns will be included, albeit from a limited number of preselected options. The readings are limited to ensure they follow the Christian theme of resurrection, and the hymns are limited to well-known selections so Reverend Topping "doesn't have to sing solo" (Reverend Topping Interview, 2003). As a Christian, Reverend Topping also does not permit non-Biblical readings or music at the funeral rituals he performs because he considers the ritual a sacred opportunity to remind the participants of our place in the larger story that is Christ. His insistence on the Christian liturgy was even more clear in his response to the question of handling requests to tone down references to God, Christ or the Bible throughout the funeral ritual. As he explained,

> I have been asked to go easy on Jesus references because there will be Jews in the audience. I recognize the request is due to the modern pluralistic culture we live in, but if I did what they asked the result would not be a Christian worship service. And if I did not believe in the resurrection, I wouldn't do funerals. What would be the point? It would be like holding

> hands on a sinking ship. It might feel good but it wouldn't change anything. (Reverend Topping Interview, 2003)

Even though Reverend Topping will only perform funeral rituals for people who can demonstrate a connection with the Presbyterian Church, even a remote one, he continues to receive such requests and has acknowledged them as one more indicator of the shift away from the social authority of traditional organized religion.

> The Church is no longer the source of identity. When people are asked 'who are you?', they don't answer 'Baptized Christian!'. They answer, 'I am an investor!' Similarly, when they describe God it sounds more like themselves. Like the 'Sheiliaism' Bellah described in *Habits of the Heart*. God is whatever they define him as and Jesus has become a chapter in their spirituality instead of the other way around. (Reverend Topping Interview, 2003)

However, Reverend Topping recognized that people who require funeral rituals have a pastoral need and as a minister it is his duty to perform this pastoral obligation, not the appropriate forum to try and "score theological points". Instead he reminds people that he is a Christian minister and that the only funeral ritual he will perform is Christian. His approach has been fairly successful. Reverend Topping customarily performs a follow-up contact with the family within three months of the funeral to ensure they are managing well in their mourning. As result of his caring approach, a number of people have returned to the church for weekly worship services, and some have even become members of the congregation.

Reverend Oswald Slattery has served the Anglican community of Montreal for over forty years. Semi-retired, Reverend Slattery continues to perform mass once a week at St. Athanasius Church in Verdun and conducts marriage or funeral rituals when requested. Like Reverend Topping, Reverend Slattery sees his role of performing these

rites of passage as a pastoral obligation. As an on-call clergy for numerous funeral homes in the city, he often does not know the family who requires his services; thus his first task in servicing their needs is to try and learn more about them and the deceased. This is not a simple task considering that the shift from the three-day visitation period prior to the funeral ritual, a standard format thirty years ago, is now more often limited to one hour before the service. However, Reverend Slattery remarked that the shift is beneficial for some, since he recalls too many times when he had to "comfort bereft people because nobody came to the visitation" (Reverend Slattery Interview, 2003).

Throughout his tenure as a pastor in Montreal, Reverend Slattery has witnessed significant changes in the way death rituals are conducted. He recalled how early in his career people always called the priest before the undertaker and sometimes we were asked to accompany them when they went to make the arrangements with the funeral director. But the last time he did that was in the early 1970s. Reverend Slattery also acknowledged changes in the liturgy too. The physical surroundings of the church changed to better reflect the theme of resurrection: white vestiges, joyful hymns, a celebration of life. The service also changed to allow for eulogies; however, like Reverend Topping, Reverend Slattery always ensured the eulogies centered on the theme of the resurrection and the salvation of Christ and would only let an individual offer a eulogy if he knew that this theme would be honoured. Reverend Slattery has also witnessed a revival of the inclusion of the Eucharist in the funeral ritual, an action that was traditional years ago but has only recently become more common. Although Reverend Slattery allows families to display personal affects of the deceased, they must be removed at the time of the service. He always closes the coffin at the beginning of the

service as a symbolic gesture of moving from the individual to the gospel. Reverend Slattery did express a preference to conduct most funerals at the church; however, he also recognized the value of having facilities available at the funeral home. He considers the funeral home to be an appropriate outlet for non-religious people who want to conduct a funeral ritual much in the same way that halls provide a forum for civil service marriages.

When asked about bereavement support, Reverend Slattery explained that the on-call nature of the funerals he performs and the limited personal knowledge of the families he serves have affected any significant follow-up effort by either party. However, he does explain to each family that the name of the deceased would be placed in the Church memorial book and as a result, on the anniversary date of the death, the name of the deceased would be included in the mass held that day. Reverend Slattery remarked that many had made the point of attending those anniversary services and afterward expressed gratitude for including their loved one in the service. Despite the appreciation expressed for his services, in all the years Reverend Slattery has performed funerals on an on-call basis, he has only had one family become a member of the church. (Reverend Slattery Interview 2003)

4.2.8 Contemporary Death Rituals: Quebec Roman Catholic

Father Dubé has been an ordained priest for over fifty-four years and has been in Montreal since 1990. A few years ago he retired from active service in the church and now only performs death rituals for clients of Mount Royal Funeral Complex on an on-call basis. Father Dubé recognized that the individuals he is called to serve "were Catholic but they no longer know the background" (Father Dubé Interview, 2003). Like

Reverend Topping and Reverend Slattery, Father Dubé recognized his performance of the funeral mass as a pastoral obligation, but unlike the others, Father Dubé does not spend a lot of time trying to acquaint himself with the family. He prefers to meet them for just ten minutes before the service. At that time he offers comfort to them in that they are reminded "their memories are theirs, but my role is to bring them to God through Scripture. My job is to bring God to the ritual. ... I make it very clear that God is very much part of death as he is of life" (Father Dubé Interview, 2003).

Father Dubé will only perform a committal service because he is not entitled to perform the funeral mass outside the church. However, the committal service is not as rigidly constrained as the funeral mass, which allows for some flexibility in the service. As a result, Father Dubé is open to the inclusion of non-Biblical texts as readings or non-religious music and will even allow eulogies. He relies on the Holy Spirit to guide him as to whether he should add or withhold something.

Father Dubé does not offer any follow-up bereavement care since he feels "it is not in my right to do so. It is for much the same reason that I don't ask people why they are requesting a committal service at a funeral home instead of going to a church. It is their role to remember and mine to bring God into the ritual" (Father Dubé Interview, 2003). When pressed, Father Dubé explained that Catholics have been cultured to have a funeral in the church and even though they may not be active members of the church, they still have a cultural need to have a priest perform the funeral. Father Dubé also remarked that it has only been three years since the Cardinal in Montreal gave permission for priests to conduct committal services outside the church at the funeral home and only after recognizing the trend was moving away from the church.

Another trend the Catholic Church of Montreal has adopted recently due to its recognition of the trend away from the church is the performance of non-religious funerals at the Notre-Dame Basilica. In 2001, a non-religious funeral was held there for Jean Riopelle, an internationally renowned painter from Quebec. In June 2003, it was the location for the non-religious funeral of Pierre Bourgault, one of the original players in the Quebec separatist movement in the 1960s and a vocal atheist. The decision of the church to accommodate these requests for non-religious funerals was not embraced by all Catholics as a letter to the editor in *The Gazette* (Montreal) declared,

> A 'non-religious funeral' was held in historic Notre Dame Basilica last week for Pierre Bourgault, a political figure described in a *Gazette* headline as an 'icon.' The same service could have been held at the Bell Centre or the chalet on Mount Royal – and the flags and boos and cheers that accompanied it at the basilica would not have been out of place. I wonder whether any voices were raised against this travesty; your report on the funeral cited only approving ones.
>
> The reporter who covered the funeral should have been accompanied by *The Gazette*'s religion reporter to tell us what this charade was all about. Was the coffin sprinkled with holy water? Was it clouded in incense? Did the priests wear dazzling vestments? Indeed, were any priests present? Was there any mention of God or Christ or did organizers ban mention of the deity following Ottawa's example of exclusion?
>
> For this outrage, Notre Dame should lose its status as a basilica. Before any further religious services are held there, the church should be reconsecrated. The rector should be called to explain and the archbishop called to account by Rome. Creating 'scandal,' I was told in catechism class, is the worst of sins. The clergy who assisted in any way in permitting this abomination should be punished.
>
> As a Roman Catholic whose baptismal certificate bears no expiry date and who has never been viewed as a defender of the faith, I am in danger of losing what little I have – but I will not be driven out by influential boors and atheists who can manipulate an intimidated clergy. (Edward W. Barrett, Montreal)

4.2.9 Contemporary Death Rituals: Liberal Christian Responses

Whereas Mr. Barrett expressed strong condemnation for the decision of the Catholic Church to honour the request for a non-religious funeral service, the Reverend Arlen Bonner is open to any requests he receives. Reverend Bonner has been an ordained minister with the United Church since 1984. Except for his first three years, the Reverend Bonner has maintained a non-traditional ministry. He served as chaplain at the City Mission for four years and as the chaplain at the Montreal General Hospital where he attended to pastoral needs throughout the hospital, including the palliative care unit and AIDS unit. Reverend Bonner credits his non-traditional ministry for providing him with the flexibility to respond creatively to the spiritual needs of the people he encounters. This is especially evident in the death rituals he performs. Reverend Bonner is a familiar name at several funeral homes in Montreal, and he is often called upon to service those clients who shy away from the more traditional religious funeral ritual. As Reverend Bonner explained:

> I do a number of funerals for funeral parlors, twenty to twenty-five over a year, at several parlors. They know me. They are familiar with my style. They know I have a particular approach that is fairly laid back and inclusive.
>
> When I first started I did things by the book. Now I am far more concerned about what the pastoral response is than the prescribed response. That is, I have developed a certain approach to funerals that works for me, that maintains my own personal and theological integrity, and allows me flexibility to respond to people and their needs. In the funeral I address larger spiritual concerns without getting caught up in traditional religious symbolism. A lot of the people who get in touch with me through the funeral parlor are obviously not people caught up in religious tradition per se, or they would have their own Rabbi or Priest or whatever. They are usually nominal something or other, and I come in not trying to lay something on them that follows a traditional religious format, like here I am and this is the United Church and here is the box [the official liturgy]. But rather I come and say I am a United Church minister and I am here to accompany you and do what

> I can in terms of this process. I have a lot of flexibility there. I keep it simple. (Reverend Bonner, Interview 2003)

Reverend Bonner regularly incorporates non-religious symbolism into his funeral rituals. He has used the lifecycle of a snowflake, a rose or a sunflower as an analogy of the human life cycle. Each object offers a unique life expression, yet each must also experience the end of the life cycle or death. Reverend Bonner prefers using non-religious symbols in his funeral service as a reference point that cuts across religious boundaries. He also recognized that in a religiously pluralistic and multi-ethnic society, there is the need to offer a bridge for all participants to experience a meaningful ritual. "Symbols have power; you give them meaning and so people have something to work with. Whether you are Jewish, Christian or Muslim, people understand the snowflake, especially in Montreal" (Bonner, Interview 2003). The non-religious symbol also provides a bridge for nominal affiliates or non-religious people whose views of traditional organized religion span the spectrum from the situational need to disinterest to outright hostility. Reverend Bonner has regularly served such individuals. As he explained,

> Often times people say "I don't want anything too religious." But I don't think they know what they are talking about. Somehow they have this image of what it's been like religiously. And I make a distinction for myself between religious and spiritual. And so what I think they are saying is "I don't want you coming in and laying a lot of heavy duty religious imagery and attributes on us and this person that was not real for them." And so I come offering a broad spiritual perspective that allows some appropriate religious symbols to be incorporated in such a way that [the participants] are not threatened by it. I pray and invoke God's presence and image. I use the Christian tradition and scripture and yet people come away feeling like it wasn't religious, in the traditional sense, because I offer [the funeral service] to them in what I think is a fairly non-threatening way. (Reverend Bonner Interview, 2003)

His approach has been well received. Reverend Bonner regularly receives praise from participants. Some have come up to him after a service and declared that they wanted him to perform their funeral, and that they were even going to put it into their will. He has even had non-Christians express the desire for his services because the funeral was so accessible. And although his efforts have not resulted in increased attendance or membership at his United Church worship services, he has become the default religious leader for several families who require marriage or death rituals.

> Originally I started doing on-call funeral services after I presided at a funeral for someone I knew. Then the funeral people experienced me in terms of style and presence and asked me to come back. Eventually I became known through families. There are some families for which I have done five or six burials for them, and sometimes do their weddings. So even though they don't necessarily have anything to do with me or the church outside of these rituals, there is an interconnected play sometimes. (Reverend Bonner, Interview 2003)

Reverend Bonner does not feel the non-religious symbolism detracts from the sacredness of the ritual, or his Christianity. Instead, he considers his approach to be supported by his faith, and an expression of it. As he stated, "I am an expression of the faith. I am an expression of the resurrection. I am an expression of Christ by presence. I believe nothing that I do can diminish the power of Christ" (Reverend Bonner, Interview 2003). The United Church has been receptive to Reverend Bonner's approach and has often asked him to attend national General Council meetings and offer workshops on using symbols when attending to the pastoral needs of others, particularly those in palliative care and bereavement programs supported by the church. Despite the general support offered by the church, Reverend Bonner recognizes that some of his colleagues take exception to his approach of using non-religious symbols and performing funerals at

funeral parlors instead of at the church. Nonetheless, Reverend Bonner does not let their concerns deter him from what he sees as his pastoral duty. As he explained:

> I am of the mind everybody deserves to be treated with respect, and in times of crisis and transition have somebody accompany them. I will get a call from a funeral parlor to do a service for someone I have never met, and of course I will. Some of my colleagues say [to the client] "well no, you are not a member of the faith community." I don't understand that personally because I believe it is part of my theological pastoral perspective that allows me to go to those places. It is a pastoral response, not sheep stealing, that says somebody here is in need, and is in crisis, is in transition, and is reaching out to a religious spiritual leader, no matter how disconnected, for something. I think what would Jesus do but offer compassion to those in need. So I support them as best I can. (Reverend Bonner Interview, 2003)

4.2.10 Contemporary Death Rituals: Unitarians

Reverend Bonner approaches contemporary funeral rituals with the aim of providing individuals with a service that is meaningful to them. That aim is also shared by the Unitarian Church. Helen Krutz-Weils has been a lay-chaplain with the Unitarian Church of Montreal for twelve years. As a lay-chaplain, Krutz-Weils supports the main church chaplin in servicing the pastoral needs of the congregation. However, throughout her tenure she has also been asked to perform countless marriage and funeral rituals for individuals outside the congregation. Krutz-Weils explained many of the individuals who approach the church for rites of passage are estranged from the religious community that they were born into or no longer find that the traditional religious framework adequately responds to their needs for personal expression. As Krutz-Weils described it:

> The religious label is no longer a clear label. They will say 'well I'm Catholic but it doesn't mean anything to me. I don't really know what a mass looks like. I don't know what the vows sound like. That was my background but I would feel hypocritical to go back there. So I want something that is spiritual. I want to touch respectfully on something but I don't want to go there.' Other times someone might say, "well my family is kind of Protestant," or "this is my religious label but it doesn't mean anything to me, I don't have any knowledge of it." Or I have an interfaith situation where both people want to bring something to the ceremony that

> reflects who they are. Because they come from a variety of situations, I have different packages that we build from.
>
> Sometimes someone will say to me, "look my dad died. He didn't think anything of all this religious stuff. He didn't believe in God. He was an atheist, but we want something respectful." And they may say, "but we happen to have a lot of members of our family who are Christian, and we need something for them. So, although he was an atheist, we would respect the feelings of other people here and therefore we will have a prayer. We will say the Lord's Prayer, or we will touch on religion for those other people who are there." And sometimes they will say, "out of respect for that person, the deceased, we will not." Or "in our daily lives we never prayed to God, we never asked for a blessing, so we are just going to do something very personal. We are not going to touch on that." (Krutz-Weils, Interview 2002)

In order to respond to the distinct needs of each individual or family she serves, Krutz-Weils works with them to create their service. The family may choose to conduct a small service beside the casket in the crematorium or host a church funeral or memorial service. They may include music or readings from traditional organized religion, Christian or non-Christian, or may select non-religious poems or music. There may be an invocation to God or a more general recognition of the "all-knowing spirit of peace and hope that dwells with us all". For interfaith families there may be rituals or readings from both or neither tradition. About fifty percent of the time, the families request a planned reflection period, an open time of sharing when individuals present can share memories of the deceased. Krutz-Weils manages the sharing sessions to ensure that this part of the service does not become too long, or conversely, void of responses. In the former case, she will adjust the extra readings or music if the need to share proves more important. In the latter case, Krutz-Weils always has preselected readings ready for one of the principle mourners to recite.

The response to her services has been positive. Many families have expressed gratitude to Krutz-Weils for her support and flexibility in responding to the various needs. Krutz-Weils recalled one family's response.

> I did a very, very large funeral here for a very dynamic family, a very well-educated people. There were six children, one girl five boys, all of whom were professionals. The family grew up as Anglican. They were all Anglican. When their mom died, the children were worried about her. They had been to a number of Anglican funeral services for friends of their mother, and were not very satisfied. They had also gone to one or two funerals in Ottawa at the Unitarian Church for someone they had known, and they thought, "oh, it was like a celebration of his whole life and I remembered things with happiness and we were sad but there was this mixture of loving him all over again and remembering him because of the personal touch." They came away very satisfied.
>
> When their mother died they contacted us and they came here and said, "our mother was always a kind of non-conformist and a rebel, although she lived in a very traditional world. We have decided that we don't want her to have a traditional Anglican service. We want her to have a very personalized service here." And so we did a service here and there were a lot of grandchildren and they all lit a candle and five out of six of her children spoke. Somebody read a letter that she had written to them, a sort of funny letter which let you know what a funny person she was and what her character was like. Somebody else did a scriptural reading because she was concerned about the other Anglicans present. Everybody else did a personal reflection. Apart from the scriptural reading I would say there was nothing religious within that service. But in the eleventh hour the daughter said she was really worried about some of the people attending, and asked me to include something from the Anglican funeral service. So we added something from the Common Book of Prayer. They did the funeral service here and then they took the body up North to the burial place. They had asked me to come but I was not available. So they organized an Anglican priest to conduct the graveside committal service and the daughter called me back after and said, "you know they were so satisfied with everything that had been done here that they had a good feeling about how they had said goodbye. They had honoured her in the way that she would have liked to have been honoured." I asked how things had gone at the graveside and she said, "well it was a real reminder to me why we came to the Unitarian Church. Everything that I had heard there didn't touch me as something that were words she would have listened to. There was nothing there that echoed in me as relevant." (Krutz-Weils Interview, 2002)

The Unitarian approach to funeral ritual emphasizes the celebration of a full life from beginning to the ongoing memory of that life. However, the means of fulfilling that order requires the individuals to participate in the development of the service. Although Krutz Weils does offer a selection of frameworks to build from, the task of filling in the details of each service is understood to be the responsibility of the family with Krutz-Weils only participating as the facilitator of their personalized ritual. One result of this less central role in the service is that Krutz-Weils does not offer bereavement support to families, not because she is unwilling but because she has never received a request. After some probing, Krutz-Weils offered, "I think a lot of people feel comfortable about the fulfillment of their responsibility [to perform the death ritual], and are better able to deal with their own grief knowing that this responsibility was handled in a satisfying way" (Krutz-Weils Interview, 2002).

4.2.11 Contemporary Death Rituals: Social Authority of Traditional Religion

As the above accounts demonstrate, the social authority of traditional religion over contemporary death rituals is dependant on the level of commitment an individual makes to the faith tradition and the recognition of the chosen tradition as a significant social authority over all aspects of life. Chapter two examined how commitment to a religious tradition is significantly enhanced through ongoing participation in formal and informal religious practices. That is, the sacralized religious identity is more significant in the life of an individual who dedicates time to religious practices that reinforce commitment to the religious ideology. Conversely, as practice decreases, alternative non-religious symbol-systems become more authoritative in life, relegating the religious

identity to a situational use only. This spectrum of the social authority of traditional religion is evident in the above accounts of contemporary death rituals.

Non-Christian and Christian Orthodox conservative faith communities that demand high levels of commitment and participation from their affiliates maintain significant social authority over the death ritual. By contrast, the social authority of religion over death rituals is significantly diminished for liberal Christian faith communities that do not demand ongoing participation of affiliates.

4.3 Contemporary Death Rituals: The Non-Traditional Route

A significant characteristic of the non-traditional death rituals are the individualistic and independent nature of the rituals that do not necessarily follow a specific institutional framework or faith community.

4.3.1 Contemporary Death Rituals: Humanists

The emphasis on respectful fulfillment of one's obligation to the deceased is a theme also found in the contemporary humanist funeral ritual. However, unlike the Unitarians, a humanist funeral ritual will not include readings, music or symbolic gestures from traditional organized religions. As in the Unitarian approach, the structure of the ceremony includes several opportunities for sharing thoughts or memories of the deceased. The officiant also acts as the facilitator of the service with participants providing most of the content. The exception is the "Words of Comfort" section of the ceremony where the officiant reminds those gathered of the natural process of grieving, the healing power of time, and the fact that memories are the only link between the living

and the deceased in a universe that continues to unfold (Humanist Association of Canada, n.d.:2-4).

The Humanist Association of Canada has performed non-religious funeral services since 1999. Currently, in southern Ontario there are fifteen officiants available to perform non-religious rituals from funeral/memorials to weddings, child naming or undoctrination (see Table 10).

TABLE 10 - HAC CEREMONIES PERFORMED OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS

Year	1999	2000	2001
Officiants	10	13	15
Weddings	207	620	625
Funerals/Memorials	10	36	39
Namings	3	14	17
Gay/Lesbian Unions	4	9	5
Undoctrinations	1	7	*2:18
Reaffirmations	1	8	10
Coming of Age	1	0	1
Pet Memorials	0	1	0
TOTAL	**227**	**675**	**730**

* 2 separate ceremonies and a total of 18 people undoctrinated

Source: *Canadian Humanist News*:Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2002

Sheila Ayala, Senior Administrator for the organization, explained that while the number of rituals performed in the first three years was low, there has been steady growth as more officiants are trained and advertise their availability. Recently, officiants have approached local funeral homes to have their names added to the list of clergy available to perform funeral rituals. The officiants recognize the central role of the funeral director in facilitating deathcare needs and hope that by introducing themselves to the funeral

director there will be greater opportunity for people to access the humanist service (Ayala Interview, 2003).

4.3.2 Green Funerals

A new trend in contemporary death rituals is the "green burial". The movement originated in England in response to the burgeoning cemeteries that had fallen into disrepair. As the official website of The Natural Death Centre explained, instead of having one's body interred in a designated plot of land with a marker that requires maintenance "in perpetuity", people can choose the more environmentally sensitive option of having the non-embalmed corpse wrapped in a shroud or contained in a simple wooden box, and buried in an unmarked grave that is located in "Natural or Woodland or Green Burial Grounds" (Natural Death Centre, 2003). The green burial grounds are maintained in as natural a state as possible. While burial sites are not specifically marked, as in the traditional cemetery, there is a map of the grounds that indicates the general area of burial. Some green burial grounds offer marker stands where small plaques can be placed on a boulder and others will dedicate trees.

In 1994 the Natural Death Center launched the Association of Natural Burial Grounds to assist schemes of this type. Since then more than 180 sites have been opened or are planned in the United Kingdom. There are two Woodland burial grounds in Canada: the Memorial Forest in Calgary and the Green Burial Park on Vancouver Island. The Memorial Forest in Calgary began in 1996 and since then has planted over 13,000 trees in provincial parks or conservation areas in the Calgary region. The Green Burial Park project is an effort by the Memorial Society of British Columbia, the group which is

"in the process of looking for land and hopes to establish a Green Burial Park in the near future, most likely on Vancouver Island. This will be a community-run, non-denominational, not-for-profit venture" (The Natural Death Centre, 2003). As of August 2003, the official website of the Memorial Society of British Columbia stated that information about Green Burials will be available as of September 30, 2003 (http://memorialsocietybc.org).

4.3.3 Do-It-Yourself Funerals

In 1982 Deborah Duda wrote the book *A Guide to Dying at Home.* At a time when the hospice movement was just beginning and modern medicine played the authoritative social role in facilitating the dying and death processes, the text offered practical advice about making the decision to die at home. The text provided an holistic approach to care of the dying and dead with plenty of pages dedicated to the "what-to-do and how-to-do-it of physical care", but also contained advice for responding to the mental, emotional and spiritual needs of the dying and the caregiver (Duda, 1982: dust-cover). In addition, the text included a chapter that explained how an individual could extend homecare of the dying to homecare of the dead including how to prepare the body for a home funeral.

Although the text did suggest that one contact a traditional religious clergy "if your spiritual understanding and practices have been related to a particular religious group" (Duda, 1982: 237), the advice was tempered by the following statement. Duda explained that traditional organized religious clergy "have a commitment to do things in the manner prescribed by their particular faith. Check within yourself to see if their

suggestions meet the earlier wishes of the person as well as your own sense of rightness. Everyone has equal access to God" (ibid.). Instead of relying on traditional organized religion, Duda recommended creating a personalized funeral ritual that celebrates the life of the deceased.

Duda was one of the first to offer advice for individuals choosing the home-care approach. Since then, home care options have grown and so has interest in extending home-care of the dying to home-care of the dead. As Lisa Carlson, President of the Funeral and Memorial Societies of America stated on the National Public Radio "End of Life" series, "little by little, the idea of caring for your own dead, I think, is reemerging as a logical extension of the hospice ideas and the other end of the spectrum from natural childbirth. I mean, we're a generation that helped to unmedicalize the childbirth experience, and I think this will be the generation that will do the same thing with death" (National Public Radio, 1997a: 4).

The desire to unmedicalize death and support people interested in performing personalized care of their dead is the motivation behind a new genre within the death care industry: the do-it-yourself death care consultant/educator. As Jerri Lyons of the Home Funeral Ministry explained on the Final Passages official website:

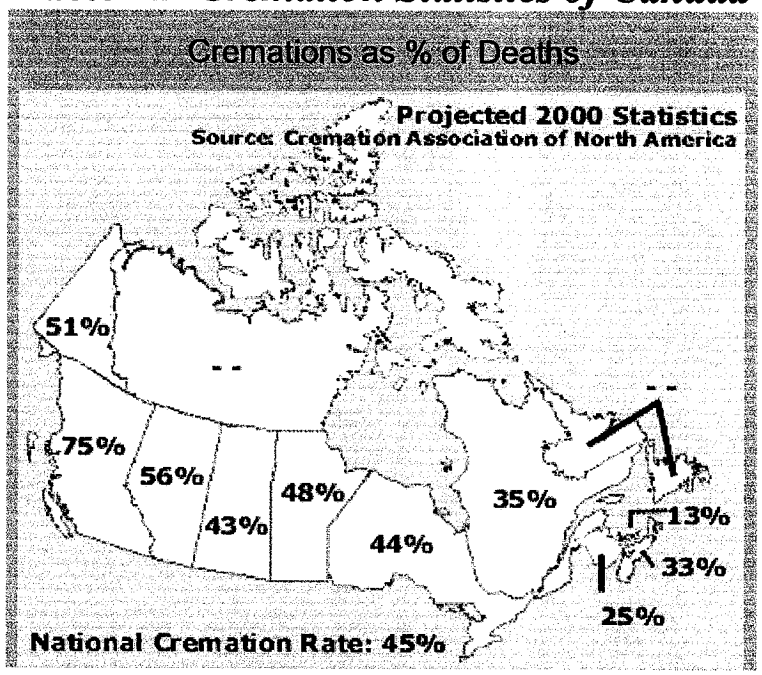
> Thanks to training in natural childbirth and home hospice care, Americans have begun to reclaim some of life's most powerful experiences from "the professionals." Natural, family-directed funerals are the newest element in this movement. The benefits of so-called "do-it-yourself funerals" are many yet they often remain out of reach of individuals due to lack of information, misinformation, or intimidations. Now you can help play a part in the re-birth of home funerals through this unique education program. ...
>
> It is our intention to re-introduce the concept of funerals in the home as a part of family life and as a way to de-institutionalize death. We are dedicated to a dignified and compassionate alternative to current funeral practices. (Final Passages, 2003)

The Home Funeral Ministry is described as a community resource for alternative deathcare and the Final Passages program a series of seminars designed to train people in developing personalized deathcare strategies. Lyons founded the organization in 1995 as a result of her participation in one home funeral of a friend (Final Passages, 2003). The three-day experience included participating in the washing, dressing and laying out of the body in the home of the deceased. The ceremony was a personalized, non-traditional service that celebrated the life of her friend. The experience inspired Lyons to initiate Final Passages as a vehicle to "reawaken a choice that our ancestors once held sacred" (Final Passages, 2003).

4.3.4 Virtual Alternatives

A significant trend in North American death care is the dramatically increased demand for cremation services. In 2000, cremation was the choice for more than 45% of Canadians, with the Western provinces utilizing the services more often than those in the East (see Table 11).[1]

Table 11- Cremation Statistics of Canada



Source: http://www.cremation.org/ May 6, 2003

As the trend toward creation continues to grow, so do the options for disposal of cremated remains or "cremains". Julia Scheeres explained, "You can do a lot of neat things with dead people after they've been baked at 1,700 degrees for a couple of hours and reduced to a pile of bone fragments" (Sheers, 2003: 1). A limited search of the internet offers up a wide range of options.

One can have the cremains of themselves, their relatives or pets sent to LifeGem Memorials, a Chicago based company that will process the carbon remains into diamonds, creating "a certified, high quality diamond created from the carbon of your loved one as a memorial to their unique and wonderful life" (www.lifegem.com).

If you prefer to spend eternity in the ocean, you can have Eternal Reef manufacture your cremains into "reef balls" or cement forms used to create artificial reefs, creating "a permanent memorial that replaces the cremation urn and allows future

generations of the family to enjoy the environmental legacy without the concern and responsibility of finding a final resting place for the previous generations remains" (www.eternalreefs.com).

If outer space is more to your liking, contact Celestis, a Houston based company that has launched the cremains of over 100 people. The cremains are placed into lipstick-sized aluminum containers and sent into space from California's Vandenberg Air Force Base using small rockets. Prices range from $995 U.S. to launch 1 gram of cremains into Earth's orbit to $12,500 to send 7 grams into deep space or to the moon (www.celestis.com).

For those who find outerspace too far out, consider having the cremains made into a fireworks display built around a musical theme. Celebrate Life organization will gladly process your creamains into a celebration that "lets you go out with a bang" (www.celebratelife.net). The website lists seventeen prepackaged "celebrations" to appeal to individual tastes, to honour a veteran, child or couple, or to celebrate your ethnic heritage. Prices begin at $3,350 US and arrangements can be made through your funeral director (www.celebratelife.net).

For something a little closer to home consider contacting Bettye Brokl at her website "Eternally Yours Memorial Art". Brokl will incorporate your cremains into original paintings. You can choose from four styles (abstract, scenery, monarch or custom) and request a colour palette to match your décor. Brokl can incorporate ashes from adults, children, stillborns or pets. Prices range from $350 to $950 US (www.memorialart.com).

Conclusion

The social authority of traditional organized religion in Canada has changed dramatically over the twentieth century, particularly within mainstream Christian faith communities. The shift is evident in the statistical portraits of the religious landscape where declining rates of participation in formal worship services and memberships have created an ever-increasing number of Canadians who maintain a nominal or non-affiliated religious identity. Globalization has contributed to this change in Canadian society. Increased multiculturalism and religious pluralism have created a nation in which individuals have access to a wide range of religious and non-religious symbol systems. As a result, traditional organized religion finds it increasingly difficult to maintain social authority in the lives of Canadians. Orthodox or conservative Christian and non-Christian faith communities that demand active participation from members are better able to reinforce the social authority of religion on the lives of their members. However, as increasing numbers of Canadians choose a non-active relationship with a faith community, the social authority of the traditional religious identity is more often a situational one, utilized for the convenience of having access to a socially accepted framework to fulfill expected cultural traditions instead of the traditional religious concept of reinforcing commitment and submission to the guidance of a sacred transcendent being.

As the above examination of contemporary death rituals demonstrated, the social authority of traditional Christian religion in Canadian death rituals has changed for many, and the degree of change is directly related to the amount of time committed to active participation within a faith community. Individuals who maintain an active religious

practice within orthodox or conservative religious communities tend to have strong sacralized religious identities and rely on the religious community for guidance and support throughout the rituals that mark the death of a loved one. The support of the faith community reinforces commitment to the religious identity and encourages continued participation in activities.

For Canadians with a nominal or non-affiliated religious identity, the professional funeral director has usurped the religious leader as the social authority over death rituals. For them, the choice of religious leader is more often grounded in a situational religious identity that reflects an historic connection to a faith community, one that will be put aside once the service has been completed. There is always the potential that a few individuals will renew their commitment to a traditional religious identity as a result of having participated in a traditional religious death ritual performed for a loved one. However, far larger more people request and participate in the traditional religious funeral ritual because it provides a convenient framework that is socially accepted and the funeral director is willing and able to make all the necessary arrangements with little to no commitment required of the participants.

More recently, the trend toward a postmodern approach to death that emphasizes personalized celebrations of lives lived with little concern for an afterlife or judgment has contributed to the further marginalization of the social authority of traditional organized religions.

The above examination of contemporary death rituals in Canada does support Bibby in his claim that traditional organized religion continues to assert social authority in the lives of a *limited* number of Canadians who are active participants in faith

communities. For non-Christian communities with large first-generation immigrant populations, the social authority of religion reflects a commitment to the religious ideology that is reinforced by a faith community offering a familiar cultural and linguistic environment; this combination not only aids the new Canadian in the transition from less secularized nations but also reinforces the sacralized religious identity. Multi-generation Eastern Orthodox Christian traditions maintain similar high levels of social authority for similar reasons. As a minority religious tradition in Canada, the faith community offers a cultural and linguistic environment that reinforces the distinct ethnic heritage of the participants and promotes commitment to the religious ideology both of which foster the significance of the sacralized religious identity. Christian evangelical congregations strongly encourage participation in all formal and informal religious practices conducted by the faith community, activities that reinforce the sacralized religious identity resulting in significant social authority of the religious tradition on the lives of community members.

However, my research does not strongly support Bibby's theory that ongoing affiliation with traditional religions, particularly for rites-of-passage exercises, demonstrates the ongoing social authority of religion in Canada. Instead, the above analysis highlights the importance of *on-going practice*, formal and informal, in maintaining a strong sacralized religious identity that is a social authority in life. For mainstream and liberal Christian traditions, participation is encouraged but not demanded. In the latter half of the twentieth century, affiliates in these traditions have increasingly opted out of regular participation in formal or informal services (See Table 2). The same could be said of nominal affiliates with non-Christian traditions, orthodox

or conservative evangelical Christian traditions who only participate in rites-of-passage or high holy day religious activities promoted by the faith community. In most of these cases, declining participation has reduced opportunities to reinforce the sacralized religious identity resulting in diminished commitment to the religious ideology and diminished to non-existent social authority of the religious tradition.

Contrary to Bibby's claim that participation in rites-of-passage constitutes an on-going social authority of religion in the life of the participant, particularly in the large number of nominally and non-religious Canadians who continue to participate in religious rites-of-passage, my research demonstrated that when these rites are the primary source of expressed identification with a religious belief system, the religious identity developed through the experience might be, at best, a situational one. Without additional activities to reinforce the symbol-system of the faith community, its social authority will be limited to non-existent.

Thus, the current inclusion of individuals who maintain a traditional sacralized religious identity with individuals whose religious identity is situational to non-existent into a single religious category that is then used to measure the influence of religion in society is misleading. Instead, my research supports the appeal from James, Olsen and Fuller, among others, that we need to unpack current religious categories to better reflect the spectrum of religious identities found throughout society. Additional research into the diverse religious identities present in Canada is necessary for our efforts to better understand the social authority of religion in the highly secular, multicultural, religiously pluralistic milieu of contemporary Canadian society.

The Social Authority of Religion in Canada: A Study of Contemporary Death Rituals

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Interviews:

Ayala, Sheila. Senior Administrator, Humanist Association of Canada. February 22, 2003.

Bonnar, Rev. Arlen John. St. Paul's United Church (United Church). February 25, 2003

Chan, Rev. Cirric V. F. Montreal Bible Church (Chinese Presbyterian). January 16, 2003.

Curry, Jennifer. Funeral Director from Toronto, Ontario. February 25, 2003.

Cushay, Dawn. Grief Educator, Mount Royal Commemorative Services. February 2002. Second Interview, April 22, 2002. Third Interview Dec. 8, 2002.

Dube, Father. Catholic Priest, Paroisse Notre Dame de la Salette. January 27, 2003.

Haskins, Colin. Obituary Editor, *Globe and Mail.* Telephone interview April 15, 2003.

Hussain, Bashir. South Asian Community Centre, Funeral Washer for Islamic Center of Quebec. March 5, 2003.

Krutz-Weils, Helen. Chaplain, Unitarian Church of Montreal, Montreal Quebec, February 14, 2002.

Lépine, R. Andre. Rosemont College, Thanatology Department. February 27, 2003.

Mathieu-Primeau, Louis. Coordinator, Bereavement Support Services, Palliative Care Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, Quebec. Tuesday, February 12, 2002. Second Interview, March 26, 2002.

Roy, Andy. Operations and Facilities Manager. Mount Royal Commemorative Services. February 20, 2002. Second Interview, April 22, 2002

Sarrasin, Andy. Assistant Funeral Director, Mount Royal Commemorative Services. February 20, 2002. Second Interview, December 2002.

Scott, Darlene. Obituary Editor, *The Gazette* (Montreal). Telephone interview April 15, 2003.

Slattery, Rev. H.O.. Parish Saint Athanasius (Anglican). January 27, 2003.

Topping, Rev. Richard. Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul (Presbyterian). January 8, 2003.

Walls, Loren. President, Memorial Association of Montreal. February 11, 2002.

Participant Observations:
Non-Religious Memorial Service:

February 17, 2002 – For Professor Jon Hartwick. Birks Chapel, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University.

March 3, 2002 – For Dena Shane Mendell, Birks Chapel, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University.

March 20, 2002 – Monthly Memorial Service at Palliative Care Unit, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, Quebec.

May 8, 2002 – "Memories", a non-religious memorial service conducted by Dawn Cushey for Mount Royal Commemorative Services in honour of Mother's Day and Father's Day and Birthdays of deceased.

December 12, 2002 -- "Coping with Holiday Memories", a non-religious memorial service conducted by Dawn Cushey for Mount Royal Commemorative Services in honour of Mother's Day and Father's Day and Birthdays of deceased.

Appendix 1 – Copy of Letter of Approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board II

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
McGill University
845 Sherbrooke Street West
James Administration Bldg., rm 429
Montreal, QC H3A 2T5

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4853
Ethics website: www.mcgill.ca/rgo/reshum.html

Research Ethics Board I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

Project Title: New Death Rituals: Signs of the Changing Face of Religion in Canada

Applicant's Name: Laurie Lamoureux Scholes Department: Religious Studies

Status: Master's student

Supervisor's Name: Dr. K. Young

Course # (if applicable):N/A

Granting Agency and Title: N/A

This project was reviewed on April 25, 2002 by

2) Expedited Review _____ 3) Full Review ✓

Signature/Date 25/09/2002

John Galaty, Ph.D.
Chair, REB I

Approval Period: Sept. 25, 2002 to Sept. 24, 2003

REB File #: 103-0402