Review of Bowen's "Growing Up Christian: Why Young People Stay in Church, Leave Church and (Sometimes) Come Back to Church"

Ken Badley
George Fox University, kbadley1@gmail.com

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Here, John Bowen of Wycliffe College in Toronto summarizes his findings from research conducted among alumni of a leadership program at Ontario Pioneer camps. Working with 333 responses to a survey sent to 1,258 former camp leaders, Bowen categorized his participants into four main categories.

Seventy-five per cent of his respondents still called themselves Christian and remained involved in church. By contrast, 4 per cent no longer considered themselves Christian and had stopped attending church.

Between those two ends, Bowen notes 17 per cent who considered themselves Christian but had “more or less dropped out of church” and another 2 per cent who still attended church but were unsure about whether they were Christian or not.

Growing Up Christian benefits by Bowen’s inclusion of many quotations – most of them insightful and some of them deeply sobering – from those who returned his surveys. At points, you might wish for more explanation as to how the comments fit into the larger picture he’s drawing, but their authenticity compensates somewhat for the absence of interpretation.

You may take courage that the majority of Bowen’s respondents remain in church (which he admits relates in part to the population willing to participate in his research). If you’re wondering about late adolescents and young adults who have “strayed,” Bowen’s later chapter on the reasons people return may bring hope.

“Travelling Together,” his final chapter on what his participants wish characterized churches, is worth the purchase price of the book and should be required reading for all Faith Today readers.