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WELCOMING THE STRANGER: THE CANADIAN CHURCH AND THE PRIVATE
SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES PROGRAM

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WELCOMING THE STRANGER: THE CANADIAN CHURCH AND THE PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES PROGRAM

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Master of Arts
Immigration and Settlement Studies
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ABSTRACT

Since the PSR program was founded in 1978, the Canadian church has played a major role in the program. Many of the first sponsored refugees converted to the branch of Christianity that their sponsors practiced. Conversion was a mechanism for refugees to gain social capital and integrate into Canadian society. Today, sponsored refugees are able to tap into the rich diversity of religious communities found in urban Canadian centres and therefore are less likely to feel pressured to join their Christian sponsors in worship. This study demonstrates how the Canadian church has influenced the formation of the PSR program. The study provides an analysis of the role of Christianity in the identity formation of sponsored refugees and the inter-faith relationship between Christian sponsors and non-Christian refugees.

Key Words:

refugees; sponsorship; religion; Canada; Christianity

Dedication:
To my parents and grandparents for their unconditional support

With Special Thanks To:
Dr. Myer Siemiatycki and Dr. Anne-Marie Lee-Loy

Table of Contents

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Bibliography...85

CHAPTER ONE—The Canadian Church and Refugee Sponsorship

<u>Introduction</u>

Religion can be an awkward subject to discuss within a secular society. We pretend it is

not there. We put it away into a private place and we take it out for holidays, weddings and

funerals. Researchers and policymakers tend to neglect the role of religion and spirituality as a

mobilizing force and as a source of community development for Canada's newcomers. But

within the Private Sponsorship of Refugee (PSR) program, Christianity plays an important role

as a motivator for sponsorship and as a source of identity formation amongst sponsored refugees.

Since the PSR program was founded in 1978, Christian congregations, Christian-based

organizations and individuals working through churches have been instrumental in shaping the

program. They are the single largest source of refugee sponsors in Canada (see Appendix F).

Most sponsoring groups acknowledge that sponsored refugees are individuals in need of

protection who are reliant on the sponsor for financial and emotional support. While Christianity

motivates the sponsoring group into action, Christianity should not be imposed on refugees. In

the past, some, not all, sponsoring groups made explicit demands on sponsored refugees to

convert to Christianity in return for the group's generosity. Religious conversion was also seen

as an adaptive strategy for newcomers to assimilate into Canadian society. Since then,

sponsoring groups have learned many lessons about religious and cultural respect and faith-based

organizations, acting as sponsors within the PSR program, are asked not to proselytize by the

Federal Government's refugee sponsorship training program. Many do not, not only because

they are asked not to, but because they believe in respect for all religions and their motivation for

sponsorship draws from humanitarian values, not from a desire to gain congregational members.

Since the first wave of refugees came through the program with the Indochinese refugee movement out of Southeast Asia, Canada has become an increasingly multicultural society. The first sponsored refugees, who were primarily Buddhist, were met by a society that was primarily Christian. Many of the first sponsored refugees converted to the branch of Christianity that their sponsors practiced. Conversion was a mechanism for Indochinese refugees to gain social capital and integrate into Canadian society. Today, sponsored refugees are able to tap into the rich diversity of religious communities found in urban Canadian centres and therefore are less likely to feel pressured to join their Christian sponsors in worship. This study is not a strictly urban study but it demonstrates how sponsorship groups located in rural, primarily Christian communities, impacts the integration experience of sponsored refugees. The role that Christianity plays within the PSR program is complicated and often varies from one sponsoring group to the next. This essay demonstrates how Christianity has influenced the formation of the PSR program and how Christianity affects the identity formation of sponsored refugees and the inter-faith relationship between Christian sponsors and non-Christian refugees.

Religion and Migration

Religion functions in competing and contradictory ways. Scholars of Religious Studies and International Migration have argued that religion has two main functions for migrants in a host society: religion facilitates adaptation and helps preserve ethnicity (Chen, 2008). In other words, religion functions to facilitate host-country assimilation and encourage ties to the homeland. A religious institution can function as a vehicle for socio-cultural integration, providing a space where people can gather and offer emotional and material support. Some religious communities act as extended families with their members taking the place of distant relatives who cannot be present during a funeral or wedding due to geographical distance (Levitt

2007). The symbols, rituals and narratives found within a religious tradition allow religious

institutions to create a familiar environment in an unfamiliar world. Religion has a way of

superseding national boundaries, and Peggy Levitt, a leading scholar on religion and

immigration, says that God needs no passport (2007).

A religious institution can also work to carve out a space within a foreign society to

celebrate the culture and traditions of the homeland, and therefore, a minority religious

community can also act as a form of resistance to the dominant culture. Minority religious

communities are often places where people who share ethnic identities gather together to speak

their own language, eat foods that are native to their homeland and celebrate customs and

holidays. Immigrants use religious institutions to pass on their language, traditions and values to

the second generation (Chen, 2008). Religion facilitates transnational belonging. In Canada, the

state protects the freedom and autonomy of religious association, and the government upholds a

multicultural policy. In a multicultural society, religion is a way for immigrants to negotiate

their cultural differences within the larger society. Religion helps immigrants assert their

identity and build community solidarity (Chen, 2008).

Religion also functions as motivation for social justice and plays an important role in

discussions of social inclusion and citizenship. Faith-based organizations, particularly Catholic

and Protestant denominations, play a central role in facilitating the settlement of refugees.

Christian humanitarian organizations have long been involved in social service delivery to

newcomers such as food pantries, emergency financial assistance, employment counseling,

English as a Second Language courses and assistance to the undocumented (Levitt, 2007).

Churches in Canada have a long history of providing sanctuary to undocumented migrants who

are under threat of deportation. And faith-based organizations play a central role in providing

relief to refugees overseas. Christian organizations in particular are in refugee camps around the world, providing for the basic needs of refugees.

Religion and Christianity have deep roots in Canada's immigrant history. The earliest European colonies of Canada featured many missionaries who proselytized to indigenous people. The stories of early missionaries are often associated with imperialism, colonialism, forced conversion, exploitation and coerciveness. The Society of Jesuits, founded in 1534 by the Spanish ex-solider Ignatius of Lyola, sent missionaries abroad to convert the "heretics" and "heathens" (Greer, 2000, p. 5). They practiced forced conversion and exploited the resources of Canada's indigenous people. The story of religion and migration is not the same story today, yet there are historic echoes that resonate within the PSR program and these are worthy of study.

This research points to the importance of recognizing religion as a significant part of immigration in Canada. Religion plays a major role in determining so much of human action and interaction, and therefore, it is necessary to assess the role of Christianity within the PSR program. This study does not evaluate Christianity as an abstract theological tradition but examines Christianity in its institutional form. The essay examines the living actions of Christianity's practitioners and the manner in which Christian values assert themselves within the PSR program. This study does not question or make any judgment about the authority of Christianity or any other religious tradition but examines the factors that have profoundly shaped the inter-faith relationships between refugees and sponsors.

The vast majority of refugees being resettled in Canada today are of non-Christian religious backgrounds but the preponderance of organizations settling refugees through the PSR program have a Christian affiliation (personal communication, July 19, 2008). Christian sponsoring groups do not explicitly proselytize and do not hold expectations for religious

conversion but the inter-faith relationship between the helper and the helped is complicated and often paradoxical. This study asks the questions: What is it that motivates individual Canadians to sponsor refugees? Why is it that the vast majority of Sponsorship Agreement Holders are Christian? How does Christianity affect the relationship between refugee and sponsor? And how does religious identification affect sponsored refugees?

While scholars often attempt to find simplistic formulas to explain social trends, this research demonstrates that the role of Christianity within the PSR program is unpredictable and often more complicated then we might think. In this current stage of history, the place of religion in Canada is in a precarious position. We find ourselves living in a society that claims to be publicly secular and yet the overwhelming majority of Canadians continue to identify as Christian. However, Christian congregational membership is dropping dramatically while diasporic minority religions are growing significantly. The place that religion has within Canadian society is shifting and the end result is yet to be seen. The place of Christianity within the PSR program has been significant since the program's inception and Christianity is instrumental in shaping the integration process of sponsored refugees. The shifting role of the church within Canadian society is reflected in this study's discussion of the influence of Christianity on the PSR program.

The next chapter describes the study's methodology, provides a literature review and defines key terms. Chapter three provides an overview of the PSR program. Basic information on how the program operates is explained along with a history of the program and its strengths and weaknesses. Chapter four examines the state of religion in the public sphere and provides an analysis of Christianity within Canadian society. It also examines how Christian organizations have become involved in refugee advocacy and it considers the motivations of sponsors.

Chapter five draws heavily on the interviews conducted for this study and provides analysis on the inter-faith relationships between refugees and sponsors. The study is concluded in chapter six and areas of further research are considered.

CHAPTER TWO—Study Overview

<u>Methodology</u>

In this study, qualitative research was gathered through primary and secondary sources. Nine original interviews were conducted with key informants who are professionals in the field, former sponsored refugees and former sponsors[1]. Initial recruitment for participation in this study began with an Internet search to identify major Christian Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs). Phone contact was made with these organizations and the investigator was referred to professionals, former sponsors and former sponsored refugees. Interviews took approximately one hour, and participants had the opportunity to review the questions in advance. Two interviews were conducted with professionals. Key Informant Professionals are individuals who have worked within the PSR program for a number of years and who are currently employed by Christian-affiliated SAHs. Four interviews were conducted with members of sponsoring groups with a Christian affiliation, and three interviews were conducted with former refugees who had been sponsored through Christian churches. Two were Muslim, and one was Buddhist. It was often difficult to arrange interviews with professionals and former sponsors, and many phone calls went unreturned. This could be due to people's hesitation in speaking about religion and fear of being seen to proselytize. Arranging interviews with former sponsored refugees was also

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[1] iv1 and iv2 are professionals in the field who are employed by Protestant Sponsorship Agreement Holders. They both have been working in the field for more then ten years.
iv3 is a male Buddhist sponsored refugee who came to Canada during the Indochinese refugee. Movement.
iv4 is a recently arrived female Muslim former refugee.
iv5 is a recently arrived male Muslim former refugee.
iv6, is a female member of a former sponsoring groups from a Protestant congregation.
iv7 is a female member of a former sponsoring group from a Protestant congregation.
iv8 is a female member of a former sponsoring group and a Minister within the United Church.
iv9 is a male member of a current and former sponsoring groups who has been involved in the program for 30 years.

challenging due to privacy concerns that prevented professionals and sponsors from handing out

contact information. Criteria for sponsored refugees participating in this study required that their

sponsorship term had come to an end, that they identified with a religious affiliation other than

Christianity, and that a Christian organization or congregation had sponsored them. Secondary

research was drawn from historical and contemporary studies that examined the intersection of

religion and migration.

Literature Review

Until recently, academic research devoted to migration and diversity tended to neglect the

role of religion. This can be attributed in part to the secularization thesis which Bramadat and

Biles (2005) articulate as the theory that:

> Religions, like fairytales, are consoling illusions that humans would cease to
> embrace once Western-style modernization and education illuminated the
> world…time, or so the story went, would sweep religion out of the way so that the
> Enlightenment project could unfold as so many assumed and hoped it would.
> Resistance was futile, as it were. (p. 171)

When religion was viewed as volatile and infantile, it became unfashionable as a subject of

scholarship and policy-makers avoiding explicitly addressing it as a factor in larger social trends.

But in recent years, the scholarship on religion and migration is growing and it is increasingly

relevant to Canada's multicultural society. These studies focus on transnational religious

identity and diaspora faith communities as well as accommodation and integration. In recent

years scholars have presented discussions on contemporary issues such as the hijab, the eruv,

minority religious education and the kirpan. Secularization theory is being proven false and

contrary to speculation, religion is not going to vanish. It continues to play a central, yet

complex, role in the contemporary world (Bramadat & Biles, 2005).

8

In the United States, a significant amount of research has been conducted on faith-based social services in response to the 2001 Bush administration's decision to fund faith-based organizations for social service delivery. The 1996 federal welfare reform legislation established that organizations whose main activities are religiously based may provide publicly funded social services and the organization's religious character should be respected and affirmed. The implications of the policy have raised a number of questions among researchers about the growing number of faith-based organizations involved in social services, their structure, their effectiveness and their relationship to government. The Nonprofit Sector Research Fund commented in the 2001 article "Grants to Faith-Based Service Providers: Promise and Pitfalls" that the most striking feature of the current American discussion about public support for faith-based service providers is that politicians are rushing to endorse providers with little to no reference to what type of client these organizations are willing to serve and what type of client chooses to avoid receiving services from them. Several American studies address faith-based organizations willingness and capacity to assume responsibility for service provision. Mark Chaves of the University of Arizona determined that 36% of faith-based organizations surveyed said they were willing to apply for government funding to deliver additional services. He concluded that more government funding would substantially change congregation's relations with the American government. Data from a study by Susan Grettenberger of Michigan State University indicated that welfare recipients and stigmatized populations such as gays/lesbians, ex-prisoners, and persons with HIV/AIDS, were unlikely to be served by congregations. Her study found that other important questions needed to be addressed such as whether churches would be willing to follow government regulations if they received government funding to

provide social services and if these funds would undermine the churches religious role (Nonprofit Sector Research Fund, 1-3).

Academic research projects on the PSR program have been few and far between. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the PSR program received significant public attention and some academic research because. Images of starving "boat people" flooded the media and provoked compassion that moved the Canadian population into action. An interviewee who was a sponsor during the Indochinese Refugee movement commented, "The boat people had a very high profile at the time because the papers were full of stories of refugees" (iv9). Once the Canadian government established the PSR program a body of academic work on the resettlement process of Indochinese refugees emerged shortly thereafter. In response to the plight of refugees from Cambodian, Laos and Vietnam, there was a public outpouring of volunteer action of support. Little academic research had been directly written on the PSR program after the Indochinese movement until the *Journal of International Migration and Integration* devoted an edition to the program in 2003. At that time, Treviranus and Casasola noted in their article, "Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program: A Practitioner's Perspective of Its Past and Future", that a more detailed analysis of the PSR program is needed and research should address sponsorship application trends, processing times by refugee groups and visa offices, motivation of sponsoring groups and refusal rates. However, there are currently no statistics on the religious affiliation of refugees sponsored through the PSR program and no statistics on religious conversion rates of refugees sponsored by Christian organizations. More research would identify specific processing issues and training needs, and could provide a wealth of information that would make the sponsorship process more effective.

In 2007, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) published a rare report on the PSR program as a section in their report to Parliament. The objective of the study was to evaluate the program for its continued relevance, success in achieving its goals and its cost-effectiveness. The evaluation findings reveal that monitoring activities are not adequate, internal administrative data maintained by CIC is inconsistent and increasing submission volumes and high refusal rates have contributed to delays in processing times. The study also compared the settlement success of privately sponsored refugees to government-assisted refugees. They determined that there are no noteworthy differences in the success of PSRs and Government Assisted refugees in terms of having their immediate needs met, but there are differences in employment income and employment earnings. Privately sponsored refugees become self-supporting far more quickly than Government Assisted Refugees (GAR). The study also determined that the PSR program is much more cost effective than the GAR program, as it requires a smaller operating budget. Within the PSR program, the federal government provides administrative costs and private sponsors assume all of the direct costs required to settle a refugee.

In response to this report, the Canadian Centre for Refugees (CCR), a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada, published a report because the organization had serious concerns about the inaccuracy of information provided about the program. The CCR criticized the evaluation's methodology, the presence of factual errors and the absence of adequate information on the government's data analysis. The CCR report detailed the problems with the CIC report and stated that the potential implications for the shortcoming of the evaluation are drastic because the report represents one of the very few government documents about the program. The CCR report also stated that the PSR program

11

has rarely been studied or evaluated. It is clear that more research needs to be done on the program. In particular, the CCR stated that the evaluation fails to address the motivation of sponsors, which is a major oversight considering that the PSR program is based on volunteer response. The program depends on sponsors making enormous contributions in finances and moral support. Furthermore, the CCR indicated that the government's evaluation did not assess the extent to which the program serves to successfully sustain and renew the motivation of individuals to participate in the program. The CCR indicated that more evaluation should be conducted to determine why some sponsoring groups sponsor many times over and why other sponsors express feelings of frustration with the program. These are important questions considering that the program relies on volunteers with enough motivation to provide a minimum of $5,000 in financial assistance and one year of emotional and settlement support.

Supplementary CCR reports are critical of the program itself; they praise the PSR program as a valuable asset in Canada's humanitarian efforts but also criticize the delays in processing, the backlog in applications, the low numbers of refugees being accepted through the program and the failure to provide recognition for those who have made enormous contributions to the protection and welcome of refugees. An evaluative approach to the PSR program, and specifically the role of faith-based organizations has been significantly overlooked.

Treviranus and Casasola (2003) called for more research on the PSR program so that the program can continue to provide refugees with a durable humanitarian solution and a new home in Canada. One of the reasons that the role of religion in refugee sponsorship has received little attention in Canada is because it is difficult to quantify how refugees' religious beliefs adapt and readjust to a new environment. In addition, Canadian society places an emphasis on the separation of church and state. Although the PSR program is a federal government program, it

has a strong religious dimension because the vast majority of sponsoring groups are affiliated

with religious institutions. The relationship between churches and the PSR program conflicts

with the notion that Canada is a secular society that upholds a separation of religion and the state.

Furthermore, the spiritual needs of refugees are a low priority in most resettlement policies, and

the material wealth and economic markers of settlement are more easily observed.

There is a vast amount of resources and information on the Internet provided through

Christian churches about refugee issues and sponsorship. For example, the website of the

Presbyterian Church of Canada has several pages with information on refuges and settlement.

The United Church of Canada's website provides an overview of the church's response to

refugees and forced migration. An analysis of this information determined that the material is

developed primarily for members of the church congregation. The information focuses on the

personal stories of refugees in order to elicit a sense of compassion and provoke participation in

the PSR program. These resources encourage congregational members to become involved in

social justice campaigns and advocate for issues relating to migration, such as faster processes

for sponsorship and family reunification. Some institutions such as the Mennonite Central

Committee, provide resources for congregations to create refugee simulation scenarios to provide

members of the congregation and the public with a participatory experience of living in a refugee

camp. The Christian Reform Church offers its congregation a learning tour of a refugee camp in

Africa. Also provided on many Christian websites are church bulletin inserts about refugees and

information about incorporating refugee issues into Sunday sermons. Much of the Christian

web-based literature from church denominations advocates that its members ought to have values

that reflect a deep concern for the plight of immigrants and act as a model community for

acceptance and appreciation of diversity. However much of the literature on refugees provided

by churches tends to essentialize refugees as victims and fails to provide an in-depth analysis of the historical, social and economic circumstances that lead to forced migration. Overall, Christian resource material tends to focus on the congregational response to refugee sponsorship rather than a complex understanding of refugee issues.

A search of news articles on faith-based sponsorship revealed an enormous number of articles on churches providing sanctuary to refugees. In the summer of 2004 the federal minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada asked churches to abandon the tradition of offering sanctuary to refugee claimants (Sison, 2004). In the preceding months, eight parishes and congregations from different Christian denominations had offered sanctuary to people whose need for protection had not been recognized by the federal government. In March 2004, Quebec City police entered a church belonging to the United Church of Canada and arrested an Algerian refugee. This violation of sanctuary broke a tradition that, until then, had been respected in Canada. In response, church leaders held a joint press conference and met with the Minister of Immigration to point out that the problem is not in the recourse of sanctuary but in the flawed Canadian refugee determination system that leaves refugees without protection (Amdur, 2008; Babych, 2004). The media attention given to this issue drew attention to the well-established role of churches in refugee advocacy.

Definitions

Religion is often one of the most difficult terms to define, and scholars have defined it in a number of different ways. There is little agreement about what religion is or how religious organizations can be distinguished from secular organizations like political systems or social clubs. The debate of how to define religion generally revolves around two themes. Some scholars favor functional definitions while others adopt approaches that focus on the essential

principles of a religious tradition. There are those who define religion restrictively and those who support an expansive view (Levitt, 2007). Some argue that the core of religion does not lie in doctrine but in the everyday lived experiences of its practitioners (Hall, 1997). While all definitions of religion can be problematic, this study speaks about religion that is based on religious doctrine and is formalized within institutions. For the purpose of this study, the definition of religion is borrowed from Keith Yandell (1999), who defines religion as "a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions and practices" (p. 16).

Christianity is found in many different versions with a number of denominations and branches however, distinguishing between them is left to other academics. For the purpose of this essay, I speak of Christianity generally. Christianity is defined as a set of beliefs that centre on the teachings of Jesus, who is believed to be the Lord and Savior of the world.

Inter-faith sponsorships are those that occur between refugees and sponsors of different religions. For the purpose of this essay an inter-faith relationship does not describe the relationships between branches of the same religion such as the relationship between a Catholic and a Protestant. An inter-faith relationship describes the relationship between stand-alone religious traditions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism.

The use of the term **faith-based organization** describes any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of a religion or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a religion.

Proselytization is used to describe the act of converting or attempting to convert someone from one religion, belief or opinion to another. In the context of this study,

proselytization is discussed in reference to members of Christian sponsoring groups who actively

attempt to convert non-Christian sponsored refugees to Christianity. Proselytization should be

distinguished from the sharing of beliefs where no attempt of conversion is made.

CHAPTER THREE—The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

<u>An Overview</u>

For more than three decades, the private sponsorship of refugees has been part of Canada's humanitarian commitment, yet there is little academic research on the program. Therefore, this study has drawn on a limited number of academic sources in presenting this overview of the PSR program. Since the inception of the federal government's PSR program in 1978 more than 195,000 refugees and persons in refugee-like situations have come to Canada through the generous support of voluntary contributions made by Canadians (Canada, 2007). Under the PSR program, groups of individuals working through organizations or informal groups agree to sponsor refugees. Through the voluntary commitment of Canadian citizens to provide financial and emotional support to refugees, individuals who have fled their country due to fear of persecution find new lives and new hope in Canada.

Many of the world's estimated 13 million refugees are forced to live in situations where they have little security and face serious hardship for extended periods of time (UNHCR Country Operation Plan, 2008). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) promotes sustainable solutions such as repatriation and local integration but also encourages the resettlement of refugees to secure nations such as Canada. On a per capita basis, Canada resettles more refugees than any other country in the world. In actual numbers of refugees resettled, Canada is second to the United States[2] (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). Still, the need for resettlement exceeds the number of resettlement spaces provided by refugee receiving countries such as the United States, Australia, the Nordic countries and Canada. The voluntary

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[2] In 2007, the United States resettled 31,800 refugees while Canada settled 11,200 refugees. The number of refugees resettled by the United States varies dramatically depending on government policy and global conflict (UNHCR, 2007c).

sector in Canada has stepped up to provide additional resettlement places beyond the spaces offered by the Canadian government-assisted program (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

Sponsored refugees are processed by Canadian visa officers and on arrival in Canada are welcomed by their Canadian sponsoring groups who provide refugees with the financial and community support refugees need to start new lives in Canada. Sponsoring groups can decide to sponsor specific refugees or sponsor refugees identified by the government as in need of resettlement (Canada, 2000). Sponsoring groups qualify for the PSR by demonstrating that they are able to assist with the refugee's integration into their community and by demonstrating that they have the financial resources to cover the refugee's costs for one year or until the refugee is self-sustaining, whichever comes first. In some exceptional cases a visa officer requests that sponsorship be up to three years. No public funds are received from the federal government, and the program relies on the energy and humanitarian commitment of Canadian volunteers who are dedicated to welcoming refugees to Canada (Canada, 2000).

There are three classes of persons who may be eligible under the PSR program. They are: The Convention Refugees Abroad class, the Country of Asylum class, and the Source Country class (Canada, 2007). Refugees must also meet the admissibility criteria as determined by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Canada, 2000). A Convention refugee is defined by the 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Geneva Convention as any person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, a) is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, by reason of that fear, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or

b) not having a country of nationality, is outside the country of his or her former habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of that fear, unwilling to return to that country (UNHCR, n.d).

The Country of Asylum Class is for people in refugee-like situations who do not qualify as Convention refugees. A Country of Asylum Class person is an individual who is outside their home country, or country of residence. They have been, or continue to be, seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, and/or have suffered massive violations of human rights. The Source Country Class is for people who live in a country that has been named a source country of refugees. Refugees in this class live in their home country, have been and continue to be seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, have lost the right of freedom of expression, the right of dissent or the right to engage in trade union activity, and have been detained or imprisoned as a result. People in this class may fear persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion (CIC, n.d.).

Once the refugee passes statutory criminality, security and medical screening, he or she can be settled under one of Canada's two resettlement streams: a publicly funded government-assisted stream or a privately funded private sponsorship stream. Refugees who are identified as having special needs that require extra settlement assistance are paired with a sponsoring group and admitted under the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program. Under this program, the government assumes financial responsibility for resettlement while a sponsoring group assists the refugees in becoming part of Canadian society (UNHCR, 2007b).

Canadians can sponsor refugees in three main ways: by working through a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH), forming a Group of Five[3], or as a Community Sponsor[4]. A SAH is an established organization that has signed a sponsorship agreement with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Two-thirds of the privately sponsored refugees come through a SAH. The program today has nearly 90 SAHs that represent faith-based communities, ethno-specific groups and humanitarian organizations, as well as Canada's labour coalition and one private firm (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). Individuals can sponsor either directly through a SAH or through their constituent group (CG). A CG is given authority by the SAH to act on its behalf in sponsoring refugees (Canada, 2007). Some SAHs have full-time staff who administer their programs, but most operate on volunteer resources. Each organization that participates in the program as a SAH sets its own criteria and objectives for the group's involvement. Some SAHs willingly sponsor any refugee regardless of his or her religious background, country of origin or ethnicity, and some SAHs focus their attention on particular refugee groups (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). For example the Afghan Women's Counseling and Integration Community Support Organization sponsors refugees whose country of origin is Afghanistan while the Oromo Family Association of Edmonton focuses on sponsoring refugees with family ties to their community. World University Service of Canada sponsors refugees who had their post-secondary education interrupted due to conflict and are able to resume their post-secondary studies in Canada (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

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[3] A Group of Five is any group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents, who are at least 18 years of age and who live in the community where the refugees are expected to settle.
[4] A Community Sponsor can be an organization, a corporation or an association that is able to sponsor.

The government of Canada sets a target for the number of refugees resettled in Canada each year. The government resettled 7,553 government-assisted refugees in 2007 (CCR, 2008) and has set its target for GARs at between 6,500 and 7,300 for 2008 (UNHCR, 2007b). The PSR program is primarily driven by the willingness of Canadians to sponsor and provide financial, material and personal support to resettle refugees above and beyond the government-assisted target. There is no limit to the number of refugees Canadians can sponsor but the Canadian government sets its target for the number of privately sponsored refugees processed annually at between 3,000 and 4,500 (UNHCR, 2007a). In 2007, 3,581 privately sponsored refugees came to Canada (CCR, 2008)[5].

Over the three decades that Canadians have sponsored refugees to Canada in the PSR program, the number of refugees sponsored has fluctuated dramatically. Yet long before the program's conception, Canada's faith communities, non-government organizations and ethno-cultural groups had assisted refugees to settle in Canada. For example, the Salvation Army was founded by a Methodist minister in the United Kingdom and established in Canada in 1882. Since the 1800s it has provided migration assistance and employment advice for single women, unemployed men and children (Salvation Army, 2007). The Mennonite Central Committee was created in 1920 to provide assistance to emigrants from Russia (Adelman, 1982). However , the Indochinese resettlement movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s launched Canada's PSR program. Over 60,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled in Canada in 1979 and 1980. Thirty-four thousand of them were privately sponsored (Canada, 2007). The United Nations urged governments around the world to respond to the mass movement of refugees fleeing Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The Canadian government decided to cultivate the outpouring of public

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[5] see appendix A.

concern by introducing a matching program under which, every Indochinese privately sponsored to come to Canada by Canadian citizens would be matched by the government of Canada (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The initiative established the PSR program and provided a way for the average Canadian to take on a meaningful role in the humanitarian relief of an international conflict. The Canadian public stepped up, and the Indochinese private sponsorship movement became one of the most significant voluntary movements in Canadian history. During the height of the movement in 1989, the number of privately sponsored refugees was as high as 21,212 (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The Indochinese boat people became the public face of the PSR program, and the Indochinese settlement was closely researched and followed by the media at the time. The Indochinese resettlement movement was pivotal to Canada's role as a refugee-receiving country; thousands of Canadians became involved in refugee issues and remain involved 25 years later (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

The establishment of the PSR program demonstrated Canada's capacity to be a major player in the resettlement of refugees and the impact and influence of a voluntary movement. In 1989, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recognized Canada's tradition of sponsoring refugees by awarding the "People of Canada" the Nansen Refugee Award[6], the first time that the medal was ever awarded to the people of a country (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

Although the program received attention from the Canadian government in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the public's enthusiasm for the program dwindled. It was not until the arrival of refugees from Kosovo in 1999 that the Canadian public voluntary movement to sponsor and

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[6] The Nansen Refugee Award is presented annually by the UNHCR in recognition of exceptional service to the betterment of refugees. The award is named after the first High Commissioner for Refugees at the League of Nations. To date Canada is the only country to have received the award as a nation. The award consists of a medal and a $100,000 monetary prize (UNHCR,2008).

resettle refugees was renewed (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The private sponsorship community was called on to provide sponsorship to refugees who were airlifted from Kosovo. This time, sponsors were not required to provide financial support but were asked to be the support network for settlement. Approximately 1,000 sponsoring groups offered their time and energy to the program within a few weeks of the call for volunteers. In addition to the groups that had been involved in the settlement of refugees during the Indochinese movement, individuals and organizations that had not been involved in the program before joined the movement (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The Kosovo movement demonstrated that Canada had the capacity to react quickly to a humanitarian crisis but also called into question why Canada could act so quickly to move refugees from Kosovo while refugees in Africa and Latin America, also living in danger, were in protracted refugee situations (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

By mid 2000, information and training resources were being provided by CIC to sponsors, and the criteria to assess an organization's ability to sponsor were expanded to allow for more flexibility (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). With the introduction of the 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, the criteria for forming sponsorship groups were clarified, and a new community sponsor option was introduced in the program. This allowed for profit or non-profit, incorporated or non-incorporated organizations to settle refugees in their communities (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). With the provisions introduced under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, refugees sponsored privately through the program are identified based on their need for protection, with less priority being placed on immigration considerations such as the refugee's ability to integrate into Canadian society easily. Families

are processed together, and a medical illness or condition no longer makes refugees inadmissible to Canada (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003).

Examining the history of the PSR program illustrates the fluctuating interest in the program. Based on the wavering number of refugees resettled annually through the PSR program (see appendix A), one might conclude that interest in the program today is weak because the number of refugees resettled in recent years is dramatically lower than at the program's peak in 1989. However the number of sponsorship applications submitted annually is currently more than 8,000, and the program remains a significant avenue for refugee resettlement in Canada. The target for refugees sponsored remains at 3,000 to 4,500. While many SAHs call for faster processing on the part of CIC, the government claims that delays in processing can be attributed in part to the large number of named sponsorship applications submitted that do not meet the program's criteria.

The PSR program has been an effective tool to supplement the number of refugees entering Canada through the government-assisted program. The program also allows communities large and small across Canada to welcome refugees and provides an avenue for newcomers to settle outside major urban centres, allowing the welcoming community to benefit from the diversity that the refugees bring and providing many Canadians with their first opportunity to meet refugees. This encourages the building of empathy and has promoted a broader understanding of global humanitarian concerns (CCR, 2006). The PSR program does not rely on public resources but instead draws on the energy and financial resources of faith communities, ethnic groups, families and community associations. According to the Canadian Council for Refugees (2006) the support offered through the PSR program is equivalent to

24

approximately $79 million annually and an estimated volunteer contribution of more than 1,600 hours per refugee family that is sponsored.

Challenges and Concerns

While the program is valued by immigration officials and sponsoring groups alike, the PSR program continues to face challenges. Operational problems such as long processing times and little communication from CIC leave sponsors frustrated and presents a challenge in motivating sponsors. In the early 1990s, the program, which was once known for being innovative and flexible, had gained a reputation for being mistrusted by both government officials and sponsoring groups (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). Employment and Immigration Canada, now known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), began a review of the PSR program and identified major challenges. Of concern was the large number of "named sponsorships." These are refugees who are identified by the sponsoring group and are most often refugees abroad who have a family connection to former refugees in Canada. Visa officers processing applications to sponsor were concerned that the humanitarian intent of the program was being compromised and the program was becoming an avenue for family reunification rather then helping refugees who were the most in need (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). The large number of submissions of family-linked cases appears to be motivated more by the link to Canada rather than the need for protection. Although no data is officially collected to determine family-linked sponsorship, today it is estimated that 95 percent of all refugees who are privately sponsored have been nominated by a private Canadian source such as a relative or a friend (Denton, 2003). Critics of the program are concerned that the program is moving away from its original goal of helping those most at risk and moving toward a program that provides an avenue for family reunification.

The main complaints about the program came from sponsoring groups that were

distressed over the long delays in processing times, high refusal rates, little communication from

visa posts and the lack of process in which refused applications could be appealed (Treviranus &

Casasola, 2003). Despite lobbying from sponsorship groups and the publication of several

reports that assessed the program's shortcomings, many of the issues of concern in the 1990s

continue to weaken the program today (Treviranus & Casasola, 2003). There continue to be

extensive processing times, inconsistent decision-making and a perception that the overseas

processing system is not transparent or responsive to concerns of the volunteers who dedicate

immeasurable amounts of time to the program (CCR, 2006).

Sponsoring groups often do not see the arrival of the sponsored refugee until about two to

three years after they have made the initial application (Denton, 2003). The Canadian Council

for Refugees has determined that 50 percent of all sponsorship cases take more than 21 months

to process. It can take as many as 28 months to process applications for refugees living in Africa

and the Middle East. As the PSR program is primarily a humanitarian program that is intended

to provide protection for the world's most vulnerable people, a program that asks refugees to

wait years to resettle is risking the lives of those who are living in dangerous conditions (CCR,

2006). Many named applications submitted for selection do not meet the criteria for individuals

eligible for the program and CIC is required to process twice as many applications to reach the

program targets. Refusal rate for the program has averaged 49 percent since 1998 and this

reduces CIC's efficiency in processing applications (Canada, 2007). The Canadian Council for

Refugees has determined that the willingness of Canadians to sponsor refugees is far greater than

the number of applications being accepted each year. Sponsoring groups have submitted an

average of 8,000 applications a year while the program's target set out by the government aims

to bring in fewer than half that number. Actual numbers are close to or sometimes lower than

the lower target range (CCR 2006). The program has been criticized by the CCR for restricting

the generosity of Canadians by limiting the number of resettled refugees who come through the

program. According to the sponsorship agreement signed by the government and sponsors, there

is no limit on the number of refugees Canadians can sponsor in any given year. But in reality,

the low annual targets set by the government means that sponsoring groups are restricted and

refugees who are accepted into the program often wait years in a refugee camp before arriving in

Canada (CCR, 2006). All sponsors, professionals and sponsored refugees interviewed for this

study believed the PSR program was making a positive contribution but many of them were of

the opinion that more could be done. A professional commented, "We are a country with

residues of anti-Semitism and the horrors of the residential schools. We should not pretend to be

sanctimonious for a minute about the fact that we are bringing 3,000 people to Canada…it's a

disgrace" (iv1). Another professional believes that CIC should be allocating more resources to

visa posts to facilitate the processing of more PSR applications. She posed the question, "If SAH

are fulfilling our mandate, why would the government not raise the target?" (iv2)

"Off-loading" of resettlement to the voluntary sector remains a concern for sponsors who

want to maintain the original purpose of the program, to supplement the number of refugees who

are being sponsored by the government. Some resettlement countries have programs that allow

their citizens to resettle refugees but it is only Canada's PSR program that enables the voluntary

sector to bring refugees in addition to the number of refugees resettled targeted by the

government.

Regardless of the concerns raised here, the PSR program provides enormous benefit to

both those who are sponsored and those who participate in sponsorship. The lives of those who

have been involved in the PSR program are profoundly changed for the better. The PSR

program provides a unique opportunity for the average Canadian to make a tangible contribution

to a humanitarian project.

CHAPTER FOUR—The Church in the Public Sphere

Canadian Society: From Christian to Secular

  This chapter demonstrates that despite the perceived secularization of Canadian society, Christianity still influences the public sphere. An examination of the changing place of religion within Canadian society and an analysis of the history of the church's involvement in the PSR program demonstrates the influence of Christian institutions in the development refugee policy.

  Over the last three decades the state of religion in Canada has profoundly changed. When the nation was founded, Canada was an overtly Christian society. Today, Christianity continues to hold a privileged position within society, but Christianity exists in competition with both secularization and the growing number of minority immigrant religious communities. The privatization of religion, coupled with the dramatic shift in immigration policy in the 1970s, has transformed the state of religion in Canada. Changes in immigration policy have resulted in the introduction and growth of the diasporic religious traditions; Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh, to mention only a few of the living religious traditions that can be found in Canada. Since the 1960s, the religious participation of Canadians in Christian denominations has been in decline. Only twenty percent of the Canadian population attends church services weekly (Noll, 2007), yet Christianity continues to be an important mode of identification for the majority of Canadians (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005). The lasting influence of Christianity on Canadian culture cannot be denied.

  When early Canadians named their country "the Dominion of Canada" it spoke volumes about their national identity as being entrenched in Christianity. The term "dominion" was a direct allusion to Psalm 72:8 that reads, "He shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (New International Version). This verse became part of the

Canadian Coat of Arms in its Latin form, "A Mare usque ad Mare" (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005).

The Coat of Arms is used as a mark of authority by various government agencies and appears on

all denominations of Canadian paper currency and on the Canadian passport. For nearly a

hundred years prior to the Second World War, the established place of major Christian

denominations in Canadian society was reflected in the influences of Christianity in social and

cultural norms. Canada was founded with an understanding of the intimate relationship between

Christian denominations and the powerful elites in society. As a result, social influences

originated from religious traditions that have shaped the character and identity of the nation.

During much of Canada's history under British control, there was an implicit acceptance of the

basic tenets of Christianity and Christianity was the assumed worldview of educated Canadians.

This fact become obvious when one reads the cornerstone inscriptions and the early mission

statements of many Canadian universities (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005). For a long period in

Canadian history the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian and the

United churches[7] were all granted an established status as the main religious denominations in

Canada. The majority of Canadian citizens were members of one of these churches, and

Christianity was part of Canada's unquestioned common religious background.   It was in this

context that Christianity became a normalized aspect of Canadian textbooks, hospitals and social

service agencies (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005).

In reflecting on the influence of Christianity in shaping Canadian society, it is important

to think critically about both the positive contributions of churches in their campaigns for a more

just society, and the close relationship between the churches and Canadian imperialist policies

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[7] The United Church of Canada was established on June 10, 1925 with the merger of the
Methodist Church, the Congregational Union of Canada and 70 percent of the Presbyterian
Church of Canada (The United Church of Canada, 2008).

that led to a number of abuses towards early minority immigrants and the aboriginal population. In encouraging ethnic assimilation, some of these government policies endorsed racism and discrimination (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005)[8]. Together with the missionary zeal of Canada's colonial churches and the political zeal of English-speaking Canada for British imperialism, the common discourse of the time helped define expectations of assimilation for Aboriginals, French Canadians and the first African and Asian immigrants (Bowlby, 2001). Throughout much of Canada's history, being Canadian implied a Christian identity. Immigrants of non-British origin often felt compelled to demonstrate their allegiances to the country by adopting a Christian identification (Kelly & Trebilcock, 1998). Conversion was seen as a symbol of immigrants' aspirations to accommodate to Canadian values and norms. Ethnic communities that adhered to non-Christian religious beliefs often felt compelled to adapt their religious practices to the dominant Anglo-Canadian religious format if their communities were to survive[9]. Some early Canadians believed they had the right and responsibility to impose Christianity on Aboriginals; and Christian identity was implicit to the kind of immigrants Canada officially sought to attract (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005). In 1913, the assistant superintendent of the Baptist Home Mission Board of Ontario and Quebec, C.J. Cameron, wrote:

> We must endeavor to assimilate the foreigner…if the Canadian civilization fails
> to assimilate the great mass of foreigners admitted to our country the result will be
> the destruction to the ideals of a free and nominally Christian nation, which will
> be supplanted by a lower order of habits, customs and institutions… there is but

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[8] For example, early immigration policy allowed British immigrants to naturalize automatically after five years while all other immigrants had to file an application in court and approval was based on the discretion of the state. Judges were not required to provide justification for naturalization rejections (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2000).

[9] The Japanese-Canadian Buddhist community illustrates this concept in their attempt at accommodating traditional Buddhist practices in a Christian format. At the Toronto Buddhist Church for example, pews, organs, hymns, books and weekly Sunday gatherings are used in a deliberate attempt to reflect Protestant Christian institutional norms (McLellan, 1999).

one all sufficient method by which this goal is reached; we shall Canadianize the foreigner by Christianizing him (Seijak, n.d., slide 22).

This relationship between citizenship and Christianity has lost most of its importance in today's religiously pluralist society as multiculturalism policy places Canadian identity in our diverse cultures. Canada has gradually distanced itself from an endorsement of exclusively Christian values and the freedom of religious practice is reinforced by the provisions in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The next chapter will provide a deeper analysis of the subtle relationship between Christianity and Canadian identity and will examine how this relationship has manifested itself in the religious conversion trends of refugees sponsored during the early years of the PSR program.

In 1968, American sociologist Peter Berger predicted that by the twenty-first century religious believers would likely be found huddled together in small sects, resisting a worldwide secular culture. Berger predicted the secularization of religion: the notion that with industrialization, religion loses control over areas such as politics, economics, healthcare and education, as happened to the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec in the 1960s (Bibby, 2002). Berger later recanted his prediction as he saw the ways that religion was adapting to modernization and reshaping itself in light of secularization (Bibby, 2002). Furthermore, Berger (1999) acknowledged that certain religious institutions have lost their influence and power and old and new religious beliefs continue to be part of individual lives and continue to have social and political roles even when very few people believe in or practice the religion. Although Christianity in Canada has been threatened and reshaped through a complex encounter with modernity, Canadian churches today continue to exert a strong influence in the public sphere. Members of church congregations continue to concern themselves with a variety of social justice

issues and have been successful in making social, economic and political concerns part of their spiritual mission (O'Tool, 2000). If one measures the state of religion in Canada by the striking decline of membership in Christian denominations then it may seem that Canada is increasingly secular. But the persisting Christian character of Canada is an important legacy of the past century. Although less than a third of Canadians regularly attend religious services, more than 80 percent of Canadians continue to describe themselves as Christians (O'Tool, 2000). The overwhelming majority of Canadians proclaim allegiance to one of the three major denominations: Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism or the United Church (O'Tool, 2000). While many scholars of religion and sociology expected the place of religion in society to wither away as it was exposed to industrialization and modern rationality, this has simply not happened (Bramadat & Seljack, 2005). While churches are less institutionally influential than they once were, it is impossible to deny the influence that religion has had on public life. Christian denominations have less of a prominent place in secular areas of power, but Christian involvement in the federal government's PSR program remains central. According to Bramadat and Seljack, (2005) who write about religion and ethnicity in Canada, the federal, provincial and municipal governments take a deeply entrenched general assumption that religious life should be private and something that the state should not meddle in. However, the majority of the voluntary sector that the federal government depends on to facilitate the resettlement of refugees through the PSR program comes from institutionalized Christianity. Canadian churches quickly became an important part of the PSR program. Churches were instrumental in the Indochinese and the Kosovo refugee movements. They continue to have a strong voice in the program today. National church bodies have sponsored refuges as part of their church's mission. They have used their organizational structure and voice to advocate for the rights of refugees. They have

drawn attention to the program's shortcomings and promoted the program within their religious networks. Of the 83 SAHs 65 of them have a Christian affiliation.[10] In a study conducted in northern Alberta surveying the Kosovar sponsoring experience, 62 percent of sponsors said that their church was responsible for their involvement. (Derwing, & Mulder, 2003). Despite the apparent demise and division between public and private spheres, Christianity still has an influential role in the public sphere. The next section in this chapter provides a historical analysis of the church's role in the PSR program and an examination of the Christian influence in shaping refugee policy. The next section traces the Christian church's involvement in refugee advocacy back to the Second World War and demonstrates how a seemingly secular government program has been shaped by the Christian voice.

The Role of Christianity in Refugee Advocacy

When the PSR program was initiated by the federal government in 1978, Canadian churches quickly took on an important role. Thousands of volunteers rallied around Christian congregations to raise funds and gather supplies in support of people needing refuge in Canada. Howard Adelman, one of Canada's leading scholars on refugees, wrote in his 1982 report on the Indochinese refugee movement that the most important force in actually organizing the sponsorship of refugees at that time were Christian churches. During the last quarter of the 20th century, churches have placed themselves as advocates for immigrants and refugees and worked closely with the government in the selection and resettlement of refugees.

Refugees did not become a major concern of the world's governments until the conclusion of the Second World War. The Council of Europe set up a committee that estimated

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[10] The number of SAH with a Christian affiliation does not always provide an accurate picture of who is sponsoring the most. Some Christian SAHs may not be as active in sponsoring as other secular or non-Christian organizations. The number of SAHs changes often but this is the latest available data at the time this study was written. See Appendix F.

11 million refugees poured into Western Europe after the war and by 1951, 4.5 million people were still waiting to be resettled (Beiser, 1999). The magnitude of the displacement created a phenomenon that had never existed before. In 1950, the United Nations created the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in response to the situation, and in 1951, the UNHCR developed the convention definition of refugees. (Beiser, 1999)

During the refugee movement of the Second World War, Christian congregations in Canada developed the experience and expertise that allowed them to take a major role in the postwar resettlement of immigrants from Europe (Adelman, 1982). In 1946, hundreds of thousands of former Eastern Europeans were seeking new countries of residence and Canadian churches began organizing relief assistance. Churches, with close associations with the refugees such as the Mennonites and the Lutherans, played an especially active role. The Canadian government decided that it would provide asylum to displaced persons of the Second World War and utilize the networking and financial resources of churches to assist in their settlement (Adelman, 1982). Together with four Canadian Churches, the government and transportation companies, the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (CCCRR) was established in 1947. Its mandate was to assemble and select refugees abroad who could be resettled to Canada. CCCRR representatives traveled to Germany to identify refugees and assembled them for screening by Canadian immigration officers. This program was instrumental in overseas refugee selection until 1953 when the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada decided to redefine the privileges and responsibilities of churches in overseas activities. But failure to negotiate an acceptable working relationship between the government and voluntary agencies led to the abandonment of the program in 1958 (Adelman, 1982). The National Inter-Faith Immigration Committee was established in 1968 with a limited mandate that

allowed church congregations to be informed of arriving immigrants and provide them with resettlement assistance. The churches' former role in overseas and domestic refugee policy was limited but they continued to assert themselves as key players in refugee resettlement and worked closely with the Canadian government (Adelman, 1982).

The Canadian government limited the church's involvement in refugee selection abroad but the government still sought church involvement in refugee sponsorship and resettlement. In 1975, the government released a Green Paper on immigration, a document intended to stimulate debate and launch a process of consultation. Of the 126 organizations that appeared before the committee established to hear responses to the paper, 45 organizations were associated with a church. The committee received an additional 200 written briefs, and 50 were from churches. When the *Immigration Act* of 1976 was before the House of Commons Committee on Labour Manpower and Immigration, only five organizations were allowed to appear before the committee; two were from important ecumenical associations (Adelman, 1982). Most of the concerns expressed before 1979 were related to the definition of refugees and with the refugee status determination process. The role of Christian associations throughout the history of Canada's immigration and refugee policy has been significant and they have used their organizational structure and voice to shape Canada's standing as one of the world's most significant refugee-receiving countries.

Initially, it was not churches that lobbied for refugee sponsorship provisions in the *Immigration Act* but ethnic organizations that wanted to sponsor refugees from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. After the sponsorship provision became part of the 1976 *Immigration Act*, the Department of Employment and Immigration (now the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada) called a 1979 meeting to discuss a campaign that would make the

Canadian public aware of the sponsorship provisions. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Department of Employment and Immigration, including the deputy minister, the chief of the Refugee Policy Division and representatives of all major Canadian religious denominations. The government was seeking the support of the voluntary sector in resettling refugees. However, at that time, many denominations were criticizing the government's refugee policy and responded negatively to the government's solicitation of their support in resettling refugees when the church community did not fully support the current policy. While the meeting was meant to stimulate support for the PSR program, the gathering of the major denominations resulted in the stimulation of a unified church campaign for alterations in Canadian refugee policy (Adelman, 1982). The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) was created in 1946 as an inter-church liaison organization. Refugee advocacy became a focal point for the organization with the introduction of the *Immigration Act's* sponsorship provision. The idea for the PSR program was initially well-received by churches because they recognized that sponsorship was an effective mechanism to provide resettlement assistance, but the church community was concerned that the primary responsibility for the cost associated with settlement should not be offloaded to the voluntary sector. The Christian community was also concerned that refugees with special needs would be passed over for selection and agreed to participate in the program only if the government prioritized a Joint Assistance Program (JAP). Refugees sponsored under the JAP program receive extended income support from the government of Canada and the support of a sponsoring group (CIC, 2007). The Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission made serious attempts to accommodate the concerns expressed by the churches and the Deputy Minister of Immigration, J.K. Manion, welcomed the proposal for the JAP. He contacted the Canadian Council for Churches to share the good news (Adelman, 1982).

In addition to the Christian community's influence in creating the JAP, the Christian community was also influential in increasing the number of refugees that the government was willing to accept. Between 1979 and 1982, 60,000 people from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia sought refuge in Canada and came to be known as "the boat people".[11] It was the largest single influx of refugees in Canada's history (Beiser, 1999). Beiser attributed the phenomenal sponsorship response to a meeting of social trends (including anti-communist sympathy and the newly acquired multiculturalism policy) tied together with small events and quirks of personalities. The media helped stir compassion worldwide by broadcasting television images and newspaper reports about frightened refugees. While such images stir an emotional response, after some compassionate support, most people go back to their lives (Beiser, 1999). However some Canadians did more and those efforts were most often structured through many faith-based organizations such as the Mennonite Central Committee and the Christian Reform Church (Beiser, 1999). Churches, working together ecumenically, were the major political force behind the government's change in refugee policy that led to the development of the PSR program (Beiser, 1999). It is unlikely that the large number of refugees would have been accepted for resettlement in Canada had it not been for the efforts of the churches and their grassroots supporters.

In the two and a half decades since the Indochinese refugee movement, more than 1,000 congregations from the United Church alone were involved in refugee sponsorship (Sinclair, 2004). Thousands of congregational members have filled out paperwork, found furniture and provided emotional support to refugees. According to the Presbyterian Church of Canada,

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[11] Almost two million people fled the Southeast Asian peninsula between 1975 and 1980. Although more people left Southeast Asia by land routes, Southeast Asian refugees are remembered as the "Boat People" due to the media's repeated images of distraught Southeast Asian refugees fleeing their countries in boats.

statistics have shown that church-sponsored refugees integrate into Canadian society the quickest

and most successfully (Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2008). This is attributed to the

customized settlement support that sponsoring groups provide. A professional interviewed for

this study commented that Christian sponsors who are motivated by their religious obligation to

help those in need are likely to go above and beyond what is required in helping the sponsored

refugee, therefore, the sponsored refugee is often able to settle in Canada more quickly than

government sponsored refugees. The professional told stories of Christian sponsors who happily

came to the call of refugees at all hours of the day. He told a story of sponsors who received a

phone call late at night from newly arrived refugees. A sponsored refugee said in broken English

over the phone, "lock, lock". The sponsors went to the refugees' home in the middle of the night

and showed them how to lock the door. They had never used a door lock in the refugee camp

(iv1).

The Christian community can be accredited for the development of much of the PSR

program current structure such as the Sponsorship Agreement Holder provision and the

development the Joint Assistance Program. The Mennonite Central Committee wanted

sponsorship procedures to be streamlined with less paperwork for individual congregations

(Adelman, 1982). The committee proposed umbrella agreements that allowed the

implementation of master sponsorship contracts. The government can waive the individual

approval procedures for the sponsorship group in return for a guaranteed number of sponsorships

by the umbrella agency. For example, the United Church of Canada is a national body that acts

as a SAH while individual United Church congregations act as sponsoring groups. Many

Christian congregations function under the sponsorship agreement held by the denomination's

national body.

In addition to shaping the PSR program, the Christian community has been critics of the program and refugee policy. Throughout the program's history, national church bodies have drawn attention to the program's shortcomings. During the early 1980s, churches, together with labour unions, academics and human rights organizations, advocated for more generous admission of refugees from Central America (Adelman, 1982). Today denominations are working in partnership with organizations founded on Christian beliefs such as KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, Citizens for Public Justice and secular organizations such as the Canadian Council for Refugees. Major contemporary advocacy efforts from the Christian community include opposing the government's decision to enter into the Safe Third Country Agreement[12] and endeavors surrounding the right to appeal refugee claims. On two occasions in 2005, members of all four political parties presented the House of Commons with more than 24,000 signatures in an ecumenical petition against the appeal procedures of the Immigration and Refugee Board (Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, 2006). As we saw in the early development of the PSR program, when Christian denominations work together they have a proven influence in encouraging governments to address the root causes of refugee flows and Christian advocates ensure that the refugee protection system in Canada is just. The Christian community has clearly had a role in shaping the PSR program from its beginning and without the Christian community, the program's momentum could not have been achieved and maintained. This conclusion raises the question of motivation. Why is it that Christians have

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[12] The Safe Third Country Agreement is an agreement between the government of Canada and the United States to manage the flow of refugee claimants at the shared land border. Persons seeking refugee protection must make a claim in the first country they arrive in, the United States or Canada, unless they qualify for an exception to the Agreement (Canada Border Service Agency, 2008)

taken on such a key role in refugee advocacy in Canada? And where do non-Christian and secular organizations fit in?

The Motivation of Christian Sponsors

National church bodies have sponsored refugees as part of their church's mission and are often motivated by Christian sacred text. The sponsors interviewed for this study all cited biblical text as a motivation for their involvement as well as a variety of other reasons for motivation such as humanitarianism and family influences. One sponsor commented, "My motivation for sponsorship comes from a variety sources but really, the sponsorship wouldn't have happened without our Christian beliefs" (iv7). Christian sponsoring groups often turn to the stories and passages of the Bible in describing their motivation for their involvement in the PSR program. Several of the sponsoring group members interviewed for this study cited passages from the Bible when asked about their motivation. According to the Old Testament, Jacob and his sons fled their homes in Canaan to escape famine. Subsequently Jacob's descendants had to flee Egypt to escape the pharaoh who took them as slaves and threatened the lives of their children. Had their exodus taken place in contemporary society, they would have been classified as political or convention refugees and they would be eligible to claim asylum in any of the 147 member states that have signed the United Nations Convention on Refugees (Beiser, 1999). The exodus from Egypt, the event that gave birth to the Hebrew God's chosen people, is therefore a story of refugees. The Biblical account asserts that the former slaves were thrown out so quickly that there was no time for their bread to rise (Exodus 12:39). These stories of exodus are memorialized in the Passover meal, includes the unleavened bread that is a symbol for freedom and a reminder that God's chosen people were refugees (Mummert, 1992). Exodus 23:9 announced the need to welcome the stranger: "You shall not oppress a stranger, you know

the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Similarly, Deuteronomy 10:19 declares, "So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt". Moses hid from the Pharaoh in Midian, Elijah was on the run from King Ahab, Mary and Joseph found refuge in a foreign country when on the run from the murderous Herod, Paul escaped from several cities over the wall at night and Jesus withdrew from Jerusalem—all were refugees (Presbyterian Church of Canada, n.d.). Scripture forms a foundation for Christian involvement in refugee sponsoring and scripture provides a reminder that it is the Christian responsibility to care for strangers based on a mutual understanding of a shared experience. Since it is part of the Christian identity to care for the weak, welcome the stranger and be advocates for those with no voice, then it is only natural that the Christian community would become involved in refugee advocacy and settlement. As a result, Christians have made important contributions to the discussions surrounding concerns for human dignity, protecting individual rights and caring for the world's most vulnerable.

Religious communities have historically played important roles in charitable organizations and are successful in recruiting volunteers and gaining financial support. The 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating demonstrated the importance of religious motivation in charitable giving and volunteering (Hiemstra, 2002). Individuals who are affiliated with a community of worship and attend a worship service regularly tend to give to charity more frequently and volunteer at higher rates than the rest of the population (Hiemstra, 2002). Sponsors interviewed for this study often commented that they demonstrate their faith through their actions. One sponsor commented, "Sponsorship is the act of welcoming Christ. It is an expression of love to God and our neighbor. We believe this is what we are called to do" (iv5). A calling from God, service to others in need and the personal awareness of needs and

availability of resources were common responses to interview questions[13] asked of sponsors and professional working with SAHs that were interviewed for this study.

Howard Adelman (1982) interviewed many sponsors involved in the Indochinese movement. In asking them about their motivation, he concluded that strong historical memories of their own history as refugees was the main motivation for many Christian denominations to become involved in refugee sponsorship. He also concluded that Christian denominations with a strong tradition of self-sacrifice tended to sponsor most frequently. Motivation for sponsorship in Christian organizations tends to be directly linked to the Biblical narrative of self-sacrifice, but many sponsors describe the personal benefit that the sponsoring process can have for the individual and community. During an interview conducted for this study a professional commented, "Sponsors often receive more than we give" (iv1). Sponsors describe their own spiritual growth as an outcome of their involvement. A sponsor who had never had a relationship with individuals from a non-Christian background described the experience of learning about the Islamic faith and said that it strengthened her own Christian beliefs. Other sponsors said that their church congregations became closer during the sponsorship because members of the church rallied around a cause that brought them together. All the benefits to the sponsoring groups described in the interviews were non-material in nature.

However there has been a decline in sponsorship in recent years and this has been attributed to volunteer fatigue, especially in light of the earlier discussion of the challenges facing the PSR. Interest in the program remains strong but the number of sponsorship applications has dropped dramatically since the height of the program. This can be attributed in part to declining church attendance and ageing congregations. As a consequent, financial

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[13] See appendix C

resources in mainstream denominations, that have historically proven to be a major source of sponsors, are dwindling (Denton, 2003). "Church funding for the PSR program is being cut left, right and centre," said a professional interviewed for this study. In an article published in the *United Church Observer*, Heather Macdonald is quoted in a discussion of the decline in church sponsorship. She states, "We were amazingly involved, but the number of sponsoring congregations has dropped. During the early waves of refugee arrivals it was several hundred a year. Now it's 30 or 40" (Sinclair, 2004, par. 9).

A sponsor interviewed for this study commented that ageing congregations should be a concern for the PSR program. Some congregations no longer have the resources or the energy to sponsor refugees. "In my current sponsoring group," he commented, "everyone, except one, is over the age of 65" (iv9). Given that the Canadian government is relying heavily on the Christian voluntary sector for the success of the PSR program, one wonders how the program will be affected by the declining Church membership within the next twenty years.

Apart from the Biblical foundation for motivation, one may hypothesize that churches encourage their congregations to become involved in sponsorship because a central goal keeps members coming to the church. Members of sponsoring groups interviewed for this study commented that the sponsoring process brought their congregation together. One interviewee commented, "Members of the church are closer now because we worked together on a tangible goal."(iv4). Another interviewee commented that meeting the sponsored refugees, who are of a Muslim background, made her own commitment to Christianity stronger. "Learning about Islam made me realize that there is a lot of freedom of Christianity…I knew that before but I realize it even more so now" (iv3). As the earlier discussion has demonstrated, the public role of religion within Canada is currently in a transitionary period as Christianity negotiates its place between

secularization and the growing number of minority religions. In addition to Biblical injunction and organizational advantages that binds members of the church to a common goal, there is an organizational benefit that produces a paradoxical altruism.

Non-Christian Sponsorship Groups

The relationship between the religious affiliation of sponsoring groups and the religious affiliation of sponsored refugees is often complicated. Increasingly, newly arrived refugees are Muslim whereas most sponsoring groups are Christian (Nawyn, 2006). However other religious communities have played a part in the PSR program to varying degrees throughout the program's history. During the Indochinese refugee movement, many Jewish organizations sponsored refugees. The organized Jewish community was active in resettling refugees from the Soviet Union, and twenty percent of the volunteers from the Southeast Asian refugee movement were Jewish (Adelman, 1982). Adelman noted that the Jewish response to the refugee movement was distinct from the Christian response in that Jews with the greatest involvement tended to fall on the more secular end of the secular to Orthodox spectrum. However, in reflecting on this distinction, he noted that many Orthodox Jewish groups who applied to sponsor Indochinese refugees and planned to bring them into an Orthodox home were refused on the grounds that immigration officials thought that adjusting to the Canadian lifestyle would be too difficult with the added burden of conforming to the habits and rules of a Jewish religious household (Adelman, 1982). This reinforces the earlier point that Canadian society assumes a normalized Christian religious orientation. Despite Adelman's explanation, he stated that it does not explain the disproportionate sponsorship involvement between Orthodox and secular Jews and he suspected that the reasoning for this distinction could lie more so in refugee identification and historical experience. Adelman quoted Peter Worthington, who wrote in the *Toronto Sun* that,

"as the world's most symbolic victims of oppression who had also sought escape by boats and been rejected by all countries, including Canada, it strikes me now that Jews might have spoken up louder and drawn more comparison between themselves and the Vietnamese today" (p. 939). Adelman concluded that personal experience as a refugee is not the main motivating factor that stimulates a strong involvement in the PSR program. Stronger motivating factors come from humanitarian values, including a willingness to engage in a personal sacrifice of money and time, together with involvement in a religious tradition. Other important factors in motivation are a historical experience with refugees, meaning the ability to identify with homelessness. Ethnic identification played a less significant role and tended to be more of a motivating factor in political lobbying than in strong involvement in refugee sponsorship (Adelman, 1982).

The involvement of sponsors in a religious organization helps to reinforce humanitarianism. However, in comparing the number of sponsorships that came through churches and synagogues during the Indochinese movement to secular organizations the numbers can be misrepresented given that some secular groups used religious organizations as a vehicle to sponsorship. Nonetheless, individuals affiliated with churches and synagogues were more active than individuals working on behalf of secular committees (Adelman, 1982).

Very few faith-based organizations, including churches and Christian organizations involved in the PSR program, limit their assistance to people from their own religious background. In a survey conducted on faith-based agencies in Alberta, only 2 out of 79 faith-based organizations said they give preference to clients who agree with the organization's religious orientation. This is further confirmed by the findings that only 5.3 percent of faith-based organizations draw more than half of their clients from their own religious community (Hiemstra, 2002). Of the sponsorship groups interviewed for this study, all participants made it

clear that the religious background of the sponsored refugee was of little consideration, and sponsoring groups did not expect sponsored refugees to join their religious community. The Christian motivation for refugee sponsorship is the recognition that each person is made in God's image, and therefore everyone is deserving of protection regardless of his or her cultural or religious background (Pohl, 2006).

Current SAHs do include organizations affiliated with non-Christian faiths such as Islam and Judaism, as well as ethnic associations with no specific religious orientation. Appendix F demonstrates that the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada and the Islamic Foundation of Toronto held sponsorship agreements in 2008. The Islamic Foundation of Toronto does sponsor refugees of all religious and cultural backgrounds (personal communication, July 15, 2008). Jewish SAHs have historically committed to sponsoring Jews and Jewish organizations were among the first to assist Holocaust refugees (Denton, 2003). A number of ethnic organizations are SAHs including the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, The Oromo Family Association of Edmonton, The East Kootenay Friends of Burma and a number of organizations with a focus on refugees from Sierra Leone. These organizations tend to sponsor refuges of their own ethnic background. This trend can be attributed to a needs-based approach to sponsorship of refugees from their own community (personal communication, July 15, 2008). Christian sponsorship groups are well-established in Canada, and therefore, they have the structure and resources to sponsor refugees of any religious and ethnic background. Minority ethnic communities that are relatively new to Canada are less established and therefore their resources may be devoted to activities other then sponsorship. However, sponsoring groups with a minority religious affiliation tend to sponsor refugees from their group's own background because there are refugees with a shared ethnic or religious background who are in need of assistance. As

previously mentioned, a large percentage of sponsorships today are named sponsorships, meaning the sponsoring group identifies a refugee they would like to sponsor, usually at the recommendation of a refugee already in Canada. Ethnic organizations are likely to sponsor individuals from their ethnic background who have been identified by a member of that community as an individual in need of assistance.

As has been demonstrated, Christian sacred texts emphases the need to "help the stranger" and Christians are called to give special attention to the poor and vulnerable. Islam also emphasizes the importance of charity but in contrast, the Qur'an places emphasis on the need to help first your family, and secondly the wider community. The Qur'an states, "The importance of the obligatory charity (Zakat) cannot be over emphasized. As instituted in 6:141, Zakat must be given away upon receiving any income - *2.5% of one's net income must be given to the parents, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, and the traveling alien, in this order*" (author's emphasis) (7:156). A Muslim sponsored refugee interviewed for this study commented that both the Qu'ran and Islamic culture emphasize the need to help your family first, your neighbor second and the wider community third. She said, "In my culture first you take care of your family, then your neighbor, then your neighborhood" (iv4). One might hypothesize that the difference between Islam and Christianity's approaches to charitable giving is a factor that attributes to the limited involvement of Islamic organizations in the PSR program.

The demographics of SAHs require further study to determine why more SAHs of non-Christian religious backgrounds are not more involved. This is especially important given the previous discussion on the decline in Christian sponsorship groups. However, one of the strengths of the PSR program is its emphasis on inter-faith cooperation. Adelman (1982) described the PSR program's ability to embrace all humankind despite religious affiliation. He

mentioned an incident that occurred after he spoke about the PSR program to a crowd of three hundred people in Kitchener, Ontario. An elderly man approached Adelman after the lecture, threw his arms around him, hugged him and said, "Isn't it wonderful when a Mennonite can hug a Jew over sponsoring a Buddhist!" (157).   Further discussion of the inter-faith dynamics of sponsoring groups will be provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE—Distinctions and Divides: Interfaith Alliances

<u>**Interfaith Sponsorship Relationships and Conversion to Christianity**</u>

The previous chapter has demonstrated that Canada is a country with a strong and persisting Christian heritage. The majority of Canadians continue to identify as Christian today, and Christian symbolism finds its way into seemingly secular public institutions. Yet, in today's society religion is often approached with skepticism and an increasing number of people identify with no religion at all (Berger, 1999). In recent years, we have seen religion manifest itself most visibly in fundamentalists, extremists and terrorists. However, viewing religion only through these lenses prevents us from seeing the rich contributions that religion makes to both society and the quality of individual lives. The previous chapter demonstrated the influential role that Christianity has had in the development of the PSR program and explained the motivation for Christian involvement in refugee advocacy through the Biblical narrative. Christianity is a very powerful motivating force for social justice and has tremendous benefits to those who practice it and to those who benefit from its good work. Faith-based organizations often become agents of transformation and have used their influence to demand better governance. They are a positive catalytic for change and make enormous strides in issues of social inequality. But on occasion Christianity is exploited by people for their own ends or practiced in a manner that is coercive. In the past, some churches sponsoring refugees of different religious backgrounds have coercively proselytized and expected refugees to convert to their branch of Christianity in return for sponsorship (Nawyn, 2006). A sponsor interviewed for this study commented, "In the past, members of some sponsoring groups have proselytized and conversions have occurred, but I think it was only done with the best intentions" (iv9).

Since then, Christian sponsoring groups have learned many lessons about inter-faith relationships and respect for different cultures. Most sponsoring groups today are conscious of the need to respect the religion of the refugees they sponsor, and most do not hold expectations that the refugees will join their church. In fact, many sponsoring groups encourage sponsored refugee to join the faith community of their choice and sponsors often go to great strides to connect refugees with people of their own religious background. But, in some cases, the expectations of the sponsoring group are not always made clear, and refugees may wonder what is expected in return for their generosity. Coupled with invitations to attend church services and church social events, this may influence the sponsored refugee's decision to convert to Christianity. However, attributing sponsored refugees' conversion to sponsors alone is problematic and does not express the complexities of the role of religion in refugee resettlement. This chapter examines factors that influence sponsored refugees' decision to convert to the religion of their sponsoring group and examines early studies of refugees who came through the PSR program.

The term *conversion* is used here to describe people who considered themselves adherents of one religion in their native country but of another religion since immigration to North America. The term *conversion* is not being used to describe people who changed one branch or denomination of a religion to another. For example, in this context it does not describe a Catholic who converted to a Protestant denomination but does describe a Buddhist who converted to Christianity. It should also be noted that a change in religious social identification may not signify religious conversion in a psychological or emotional sense but may be a shift for a variety of factors that will later be explored in depth.

The 2008 book, *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations: Bridging the Sacred and the Secular* examines the role of faith-based organizations in international development. The authors, Clark and Jennings, acknowledged that international development is never neutral. The same can be said about refugee sponsorship. Development, like refugee sponsorship, is always based on values, but the question is, what values should it be based on? And how does this shape the relationship between refugee and sponsor? The fact that Christian sponsoring groups are willing to acknowledge the religious basis for their work can add value to what they bring to Canada's humanitarian commitment to refugees. According to the Presbyterian Church of Canada website, Presbyterian congregations were initially drawn to help migrants from the Reformed churches of Europe. The advantage of this approach is that the shared faith facilitated a stronger relationship between the church and the recipient. While the Presbyterian church acknowledged that there are ways of helping someone with a shared faith that are different from someone of a different faith, church officials also acknowledged the importance of reaching out to people of all religious backgrounds out of love and acceptance and not in hope that the Christian sponsoring group will gain congregational members. Many faith-based organizations understand refugee resettlement to be divinely mandated and not an opportunity to practice religious rituals or to spread their religious beliefs. A man named Roger, quoted by Stephanie Nawyn in the study entitled, *Faith, Ethnicity and Culture in Refugee Resettlement* (2006), said, "We serve refugees not because they are Catholic but because we are" (p. 1519). Generally, Christian sponsoring groups help refugees who are Christian and non-Christian alike.

Faith-based organizations vary in organizational style and in the way they share the teachings of their faiths. Religious discourse provides the basis for action in faith-based

organizations, but a spectrum exists of the role that religion has in faith-based organizations. There is a perception of faith-based organizations that they seek to take advantage of people who are in need and convert them to advance their religion (Clark & Jennings, 2008). For some organizations, Christianity provides an explicit motivation for their action and plays a direct role in identifying whom they will help.

Most Christian sponsoring groups recognize a special call to help refugees that is based on the Biblical narrative, but their motivation is drawn also from broader humanitarian principles. There is no overt discrimination against refugees who are non-believers and sponsoring groups support multi-faith cooperation. At the other end of the spectrum, we find faith-based organizations wherein the motivation for action is rooted in religion, or a branch of religion, and if militant, is directed toward one or more rival religions and provides benefits solely to adherents to that religion. They provide support to members of the religion to the exclusion of others. This is a form of discrimination and an attempt to advance the religion at the expense of others. It has the potential to generate conflict or social exclusion (Clark & Jennings, 2008). Faith-based organizations can fall anywhere between these two ends of the spectrum and all members of sponsoring groups interviewed for this study belonged to the more passive end of the spectrum. However, given the broad range, it is easy to see how outsiders to the organization can become cautious of any faith-based organization. It may be unclear as to where a particular organization falls within the spectrum and sponsoring groups run the risk of being lumped together with faith-based organizations that engage in discriminatory practices that privilege some people at the expense of others.

Given that the majority of sponsoring groups have a Christian affiliation, it raises the question: what is the relationship between religion and resettlement services? Recently, in the

United States, the Bush administration signed controversial legislation that would provide $1.7

billion for faith-based organizations and marked a shift towards a faith-based approached to

social service delivery. But in the United States, the shift toward a closer relationship between

the state and faith communities has raised concerns over the potential negative impact that

religion based organizations can have in the lives of those most in need. In the United States, 8 of

the 10 major immigration resettlement agencies are driven by Christian missions[14] (Gozdziak,

2002). There is concern that faith-based social service agencies that serve refugees of different

religious beliefs are not prepared to serve clients who are religiously diverse; the agencies may

lack knowledge of other religious practices, they may not be committed to inter-faith dialogue or

they may proselytize to clients[15]. However, Stephanie Nawyn's study of faith, ethnicity and

culture in refugee resettlement indicated that in most cases faith-based resettlement organizations

and secular resettlement organizations are more similar than different in how they resettle

refugees. Religion emerges within the organizations for the most part independently from the

resettlement services provided. Religion is a motivation and the rationale for service delivery,

but the resettlement services provided are almost entirely secular. Nawyn concluded that when

religion does emerge it is usually a marker of cultural differences but is not necessarily viewed as

a threatening worldview that is in competition with Christianity (Nawyn, 2006). The data

collected through interviews for this study are consistent with Nawyn's conclusions. In

discussing some of the difficulties of inter-faith sponsorship relationships, a sponsor commented

that any problems that did arise were usually the result of cultural differences, not religious

differences. Another sponsor commented, "Sponsorship wouldn't have happened without our

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[14] The main refugee resettlement agencies are the Lutheran Social Service, Episcopal Migration
Ministries and Catholic Charities (Shandy, 2002).
[15] In some cases, it is illegal for faith-based organizations funded by the U.S. government to
proselytize to clients (Gozdziak, 2002).

Christian beliefs but Christianity didn't interfere in our relationship with the sponsored refugees" (iv7). Christian sponsoring groups in Canada provide settlement services such as assistance finding housing, employment and English language classes in much the same way a secular settlement organization would.

All of the sponsors and professionals interviewed in the study made it very clear that the religious background of the refugee sponsored was irrelevant in their decision to sponsor. However, one professional who works with a number of congregations said that some, not all, congregations refuse to sponsor refugees who have been persecuted for their sexual orientation (iv1). When an organization draws their motivation from religious beliefs it can result in excluding social service delivery to people who do not agree with those beliefs. Immigration policy was exclusionary for a long period of time and the door to Canada was closed to people who were of non-European decent and non-Christian. Today, Canada has adopted a liberal policy to immigration and homosexual rights. But the state is relying on Christian organizations to provide settlement services through the PSR program and some Christian sponsoring groups refuse to provide settlement services to gay and lesbian refugees. While official policy in Canada has come a long way from their previously exclusionary practices, the close relationship between faith-based organizations and the state in the PSR program can have serious implications for homosexual refugees. This is especially relevant to contemporary immigration issues, as Canada is one of the few countries in the world that includes in the definition of a refugee, people who have been persecuted for their sexual orientation. As raised earlier in the literature review, the close relationship between faith-based social service providers and the state needs to be examined further to gain a better understanding of how stigmatized populations are taking advantage of social services delivered through religious organizations.

Religious Conversion as an Adaptation Strategy

Sponsoring groups acknowledge cultural and religious difference between themselves and the sponsored refugee, sponsoring groups do not discourage sponsored refugees from seeking out their own religious communities. However, this may not have always been the case. A number of case studies from the PSR program's early years (Desan, 1986; Winland, 1992; McLellan, 1995) highlight a variety of factors that lead to the sponsored refugee's decision to convert to the religious tradition of their sponsoring group. These factors will be explored throughout this chapter. Richardson (1985) proposed two models of conversion, and Lewis Fraser, and Pecroa (1988) described them. The traditional view of conversion has been that the passive subject is converted through external influence over which they have little control. An alternative paradigm proposes a more pro-active approach, wherein the individual is seeking meaning and consciously chooses to convert to a new religion. Elements of both models may be present in the conversion practices of sponsored refugees.

During the early years of the PSR program, many refugees from the Indochinese refugee movement, sponsored by Christian churches, were documented as having converted to Christianity at unprecedented rates. The Hmong community, from the hill tribes of Laos, is the most noteworthy case. The early consensus among scholars was that refugees most often chose the denomination of their host (Winland, 1994). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Mennonite Central Committee[16] based in Kitchener-Waterloo accepted the largest population of Hmong people in Canada. The vast majority of Hmong sponsored refugees converted to Christianity. The tendency to accept the denomination of the sponsoring group was quite common among refugees who were supported by religious organizations. It was seen by

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[16] The Mennonite Central Committee is a non-profit organization affiliated with the Mennonite Church of Canada.

sponsored refugees as a strategy to take advantage of certain material benefits provided by the

sponsoring church. Initially, conversion to Christianity reflected feelings of obligation to the

sponsoring group but conversion developed into a means for the Hmong community to integrate

into the dominant society and gain social capital. The Hmong community viewed the church as

a major Canadian institution that could mediate their settlement experience and provide a

cultural anchor to strengthen the Hmong ethnic community (Winland, 1992). Hmong traditional

beliefs emphasize equilibrium with the universe, and balance is maintained by appeasing the

forces around them. The Hmong viewed Christianity as the religion of North America, and

therefore, adopting Christianity was a way to live harmoniously in Canada. The Hmong do not

view changes in their religious affiliation as a change in their basic religiosity but rather as a

function of adaptation to their new environment. For many Hmong, conversion was an

acculturative mechanism that bridged traditional values and practices with Western ones (Dean

1983). From their initial migration to Canada, they recognized the need to further their

economic and social position in society through involvement in one of Canada's dominant

institutions, the Christian church.

Religious conversion facilitated the maintenance of Hmong values by reshaping them

into a belief system that is more accepted in North America. For the Hmong, conversion to

Christianity did not mean the abandonment of Hmong values altogether but rather was viewed as

a way for their traditional values to be absorbed by a new belief system that was considered

acceptable by the dominant Canadian culture. The Hmong people are very family oriented and

pay respect to elderly members of the community. Many Hmong were drawn to the Mennonite

church in particular because its values paralleled key Hmong values. When asked why they had

joined the Mennonite church, many Hmong emphasized that their religious conversion facilitated

community solidarity, family values and mutual aid. None of the respondents mentioned doctrinal belief or a change in religiosity as important factors in their decision to convert (Winland, 1992). The Hmong in Kitchener-Waterloo commented that belonging to the church was an excellent opportunity to meet with friends and family. It served as a regular meeting place for the Hmong who otherwise would have little opportunity to socialize with other Hmong.

In comparison to the Hmong community, the conversion rates of the Khmer refugee community of Cambodia are negligible yet still worthy of examination (McLellan, 1995). A large movement of Khmer refugees came to Canada through the PSR program at the same time as the Hmong community. The Khmer identity is very tightly bound with Theravada Buddhism and Khmer is the majority ethnic group in Cambodia with a strong sense of national identity (McLellan, 1995). An important part of the national identity has always been a strong Buddhist affiliation. In contrast, the Hmong are an ethnic minority in Laos and struggled in their homeland to distinguish themselves from their surrounding Buddhist environment. In fact, many Christian missionaries were aware of these dynamics and focused their evangelizing efforts on ethnic minorities in the hill tribes of Southeast Asia, where the Hmong are located (Smith-Hefner, 1994). These patterns of religious affiliations have played an important role in conversion trends in refugees who received asylum in North America. Anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in Cambodia in the late 1950s realized that efforts of Christian conversion in Cambodia were unsuccessful given that Theravada Buddhism is the official national religion of the Khmer Republic. When Khmer are asked about their religious affiliation, many reply that they are Khmer and all Khmer are Buddhist (McLellan, 1995).   In Canada, Buddhist beliefs remain central to Khmer self-identity, and concerns of assimilation have often strengthened the relationship between Khmer identity and Theravada Buddhism. Lavish celebrations of Buddhist

holy days, wedding ceremonies and the Khmer New Year are often viewed as important forms of cultural expression. Smith-Hefner's (1994) research on the Khmer community in the United States demonstrated that Khmer who convert to Christianity are often accused by other members of the Khmer community of having forgotten their culture. While the number of refugees who converted to Christianity in the Khmer community remains low in comparison to the majority Buddhist community, examining the motives of those who did convert to Christianity is worthy of study and adds to the discussion of conversion trends within the PSR program.

Members of the Khmer community in Canada who converted to Christianity were required to make a fundamental adjustments in their Khmer self-identity. In converting, they often distanced themselves from Khmer culture, symbols and habits, but they also gained a pathway into North American society and gained social capital from their new Christian family. This new social capital allowed these Khmer to gain access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable to them such as the social network that can facilitate advancement in careers and educational opportunities (Smith-Hefner, 1994). However, many Khmer people converted to their sponsors' religion out of a sense of obligation (McLellan, 1995). One Khmer woman from Kingston was quoted as saying:

> People from the Church met us at the airport and were good to us. Cambodians are very grateful people and because they have done good for us and looked after us and kept us very well we must do good for them. This is why we keep going and every year we donate to the Church. It would betray them if we didn't go. This is what our Buddhist culture and background taught us. We can never turn away from them, it would not be right. Because we are good Buddhist we become Christians here. Inside we still hold many Buddhist ideals but we don't tell them or say anything because this would make them sad. Buddhism teaches us that we must be flexible (McLellan, 1995, p. 29).

Even those Khmer refugees who did not convert to Christianity but were sponsored by Christian churches were provided numerous advantages over those who were sponsored by the

federal government (McLellan, 1995). Many of the churches were involved not only in sponsorship but also in family reunification through private sponsorship. The Christian Reform Church, for example, reunited thousands of Cambodian families in Ontario (McLellan 1995). Through the sharing of foods, music, dance and fellowship private sponsors also helped to bridge the cultural gap between Cambodian and Canadian society. In some cases, close contact with Christian sponsors allowed refugees to learn about attitudes and values that were different from their own (McLellan, 1995).

Studies among the Khmer community indicated that refugees who made use of the social services provided by faith-based agencies or had Christian sponsors often felt obligated to attend church services for a time to repay the sponsors for their generosity. However, among the Khmer community in the United States, those who attended church services often stopped doing so once they no longer received sponsorship support. Despite the early conversion trend among the Khmer community, the influence of the private sponsors decreased after 1985 when the Khmer community was more established. The community of friends and family had a stronger influence on the Khmer refugees than the sponsors (McLellan, 1995). No contemporary research has been conducted on the Hmong community in Kitchener-Waterloo to assess if members of the Hmong community who converted to Christianity during the early years of the PSR program remain Christian today (personal communication, July 11, 2008). This is an area for further research that could add to the discussion of how religious conversion is used as an adaptation strategy by migrants.

Within the Buddhist tradition there is often considerable movement between religions. Many Buddhists do not consider it wrong to attend worship ceremonies of other religious traditions. Many Khmer living in the United States acknowledged that they had attended a

church service at some point in time when invited by their friends or sponsors (Smith-Hefner, 1994). Many Buddhist refugee parents were not usually concerned when their children attended church activities. A former Vietnamese sponsored refugee interviewed for this study arrived in Canada when he was a child during the Indochinese refugee movement. Although he and his family remained Buddhist, his parents encouraged him to attend church services with their sponsors. His parents valued Christian teachings as integral to Canadian culture and wanted him to learn about Christianity to become better integrated into Canadian society.

As these examples illustrate, the Christian church may simply provide a functional alternative to the religious institution of the homeland (Burwell & Hill, 1986). In some cases, religious conversion may be simply a shift in religious social identification and sometimes even a shift of convenience. Within the scholarship of immigration and religion, two major themes have emerged: how immigrants reconstruct new communities in the host society and how immigrants reconstruct new selves. The disruption of social networks caused by immigration challenges the religious traditions that are often central to their cultural identity. Religion in relation to immigration is often understood to serve the function of adaptation and preserving ethnicity. Conversion also provided an opportunity to gain social resources from the church community. Joining the Christian community allows immigrants the possibility of social support as well as the possibility of breaking free from their old lives (Smith-Hefner, 1994).

Converting to a new religion may provide an alternative worldview and a sense of establishment in an unsettled world. In some cases, refugees who convert to a new religion are attracted to the idea of discarding their old identity and gaining a new one. For some refugees who had experienced trauma, converting to Christianity allowed them to adopt an understanding of the world that relieved the guilt they were feeling and allowed them to reinterpret the trauma

they had experienced in redemptive terms and as a sign that the Christian God had deliberately chosen them to be saved (Smith-Hefner, 1994). Exposure to Christianity and a new worldview helped explain why they had survived and others did not.

The data collected from interviewees conducted for this study suggests that refugees do not feel the same need to convert to the religion of their sponsoring group that the Hmong felt during the early years of the PSR program. This may be the result of a number of factors. Sponsoring groups may be more sensitive to the negative impact of pressured conversion as most sponsors interviewed were adamant that they had no expectations that the refugees would join their churches. A greater diversity of ethnic communities have become more established in Canada and interviewed refugees all said they had joined a diasporic religious or ethnic community after arriving in Canada, therefore minimizing the need to join the religious community of their sponsoring group in order to gain social capital. It is also significant that the place of Christianity in Canadian culture is changing and Canada has gained a more pluralistic religious landscape. As we saw earlier in the discussion of the changing role of Christianity in Canada, Canadian identity is not as closely bound to a Christian identity as it once was. One sponsored refugee said of Canada in speaking about her expectations before she arrived, "We [she and her family] knew that Canada was a Christian country but we knew that Christians and Muslims have many similarities so we didn't think we would have difficulty living here…We knew there was freedom of religion in Canada and we knew there were many people of different countries" (iv4). Despite these difference between the sponsored refugees who arrived early on in the PSR program and the refugees who are arriving today, the data gathered from this study suggests that sponsored refugees continue to feel obliged to attend at least some worship services when invited by their sponsoring congregations in order to demonstrate their gratitude.

Proselytization

The role of proselytization within the PSR program is sometimes unclear but is a complicated aspect of refugee sponsorship worthy of study. Within Christianity, the practice of proselytization derives from the notion that Christianity is the only true religion. Practitioners of Christianity share the principles of the tradition with non-believers to convince them that their salvation lies in Jesus. Some denominations of Christianity emphasize proselytization more than others. Today, proselytization is often viewed as coercive, and therefore, many people in Canadian society have a negative opinion of it (Mann, 2001). Proselytization is seen as particularly negative when working with people who are vulnerable such as refugees, especially in the PSR program where refugees are often reliant on the sponsoring group during the sponsorship period. Proselytization is often seen as leading to a forced conversion, and thus, any resulting religious change is not voluntary and may not truly be a change in religiosity but in religious identity only (Winland, 1992).

Only one of the sponsors interviewed for this study promoted proselytization to sponsored refugees. In this exceptional case, the sponsor stated that she did not proselytize to the sponsored refugees because it is not promoted within the PSR program but believed it should play a stronger role in refugee sponsorship and overseas missionary work. The sponsor said that her church congregation never expected the refugees to convert to Christianity. However in speaking about Christian conversion of the Muslim sponsored refugees she also said, "Hopefully seeing the joy in our hearts, it would plant a seed. There is always hope" (iv3). Clearly in some cases there is at least a desire that refugee sponsorship will lead to Christian conversion and the possibility of congregational growth. When the question of proselytization was asked of other interviewees, most sponsors made it clear that it was not something they did or thought was

moral. One professional stated: "The idea of using this program to proselytize — I hate. I personally would never be part of such a thing. I believe we do this out of the kindness that Christ would bring. I think there are some people—some who are part of the program with that in mind. They are very few. I think they are wrong" (iv1). The training provided to sponsoring groups by the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP) emphasizes that the refugees' religious and cultural beliefs should be treated with respect. A sponsor interviewed for this study described an incident wherein a Christian from a neighboring church who was not part of the sponsoring group took it upon herself to knock on the door of the sponsored Muslim family and proselytize to them. However, the sponsoring group spoke to this person and explained to her that the practice of proselytization was not acceptable within the PSR program. Mann's 2001 study conducted in Ontario on the role of faith in the PSR program asked a question about the role of proselytization. Proselytization was always seen in a negative context, and she felt that some interviewees had a fear of being seen to proselytize. Mann concluded that, in some cases, the fear of proselytizing leads to a fear of speaking about religion at all to the sponsored refugee. In some cases, avoiding the topic of religion entirely may result in refugees feeling unsure of social expectations and as Beiser concludes, could lead to increased incidents of depression. However, when interviewees were asked in this study if they talk about religion within the inter-faith sponsor-refugee relationship, most replied that they speak about religion in casual conversation. An individual who sponsored a Muslim woman commented, "When I drove her to English classes we would speak casually about our beliefs. We shared what we each believed in and we learned from each other" (iv7). This same sponsor later commented that the sponsorship was her first experience interacting with a Muslim person and learning about Islam strengthen her own Christian beliefs.

Sponsors interviewed for this study, when asked how being involved in an inter-faith sponsorship affected their own religious beliefs, often said that the sponsorship strengthened their religious commitment. A sponsor commented that she admired the faithfulness of the Muslim sponsored refugees (iv7). The exposure to another culture made sponsors more open to people of diverse backgrounds and less judgmental. Sponsors interviewed by Mann (2001) had a positive experience with their inter-faith relationships and one sponsor spoke about being called a brother by a Muslim and attending a Buddhist funeral.

Most church congregations decide to sponsor out of a desire for social justice and out of their desire to adhere to their religion by serving their God. In an article published by the United Church, Heather MacDonald, who has been involved in the private refugee sponsorship program for many years said that her grandfather practiced the Highland tradition of maintaining an empty chair at the table "for the stranger." MacDonald said the empty chair represents what sponsorship means, Buddhists from Southeast Asia or Muslims from Ethiopia—"it was a Christ figure you were welcoming. You were finding God in yourself and in them" (Sinclair, 2004, par 17).

Some churches actively help the refugees they sponsor connect with members of their own religious communities. One sponsoring group interviewed in a rural community went so far as to drive the sponsored refugees, who were of a Muslim background, almost an hour away to attend a mosque. A sponsor interviewed for this study remarked that several Muslim refugees that he had sponsored over the last thirty years said they were not interested in connecting with a mosque and said, "Why would I go to a mosque, they will not help me" (iv9). It should be noted that religion is not necessarily important to all people and in many cases the sponsored refugees were of no religious affiliation. In those cases, the Christian sponsoring groups also respected the

refugee's choice to not participate in a religious organization. A professional commented, "We make it clear that this is a country where you have the freedom to practice your faith. If your faith is no faith, then that is fine, too" (iv1). Regardless of the sponsored refugees' religious identification, several recognized the benefit of finding a community that would provide settlement assistance. If that community happened to be Christian, it made little difference.

Refugee Sponsorship and Social Capital

Many refugees find themselves in overcrowded refugee camps for an extended period of time. For the small number of refugees who are granted to the opportunity to resettle in countries such as Canada, social networks are often shattered and difficult to reestablish. Religious institutions provide instant social capital to refugees who have recently arrived in Canada (McLellan, 2005). Maan (2001) conducted a study in Kitchener-Waterloo to assess the role of faith in the private sponsorship program. In interviewing sponsored refugees she came to the conclusion that for many sponsored refugees, the church, as an institution, provided a social network of people and an opportunity to attend social events. Some interviewees saw the church as a way to make contacts for employment, a place where their children could learn about morals and an institution that provided finances. The church then was viewed as an instrumental institution that could provide social capital and in the case of sponsored refugees, financial capital as well.

Social capital is defined by Coleman (1988) and described in McLellan and White (2005) as "those social structures that make it possible to achieve particular goals and replicate familiar structural relations between people that generate networks of obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness" (McLellan, 2005, p. 237). Putnam (2000), as described by McLellan and White distinguished between two types of social capital. The first type is social capital that binds people

together, helping them to operate as a cohesive unit. The second type is social capital that

provides "bridges between individuals or groups, enabling them to move beyond their particular

setting" (237). Social capital is important to immigrants and ethnic minorities because the bonds

formed enable them to be included in greater social, economic and decision-making processes

(McLellan & White, 2005). Religious institutions act as a form of social capital for new

immigrants and especially refugees who are often forced to flee their homes and families and are

often separated in among the chaos of the conflict.

<u>Distinctions between Urban and Rural Sponsorship</u>

Although the majority of refugees settle in major cities, the PSR program is unique in its

ability to bring refugees to smaller communities. The PSR program requires that refugees live in

close proximity to the sponsoring group, and if they choose to move to another community, then

the sponsoring group is no longer responsible for providing for their financial, social and

emotional needs. In fact, it is not uncommon that refugees who are sponsored by small

communities decide to move before their sponsorship year has come to an end because they want

to be closer to friends and family living in a larger urban centre. Being in close proximity to a

large city centre also facilitates accessibility to resettlement services such as health centers, ESL

classes, interpreters and a diversity of religious and ethnic communities. In many rural

communities in Canada, the local church becomes the center of social activities, with everything

from bingo nights to ice cream socials. Churches are also the venue of supposedly secular

activities such as community board meetings and election polls. And in communities where

there is an implied Christian foundation, it is not uncommon that even seemingly secular civic

community groups begin their meetings with a Christian prayer or sing a hymn. There is very

little attention given to the pervasive symbolism and the exclusionary nature of these practices.

The implication is that Christianity is normative (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). Small towns and cities in Canada and the United States, where there is a limited array of religions practiced, and resettlement is done dominantly by Christian churches, have the highest percentage of refugees who have converted to Christianity (Smith-Hefner, 1994; McLellan, 1995).

In some cases, refugees who are sponsored by Christian churches in small communities that are also Christian themselves may find integration into the community easier than non-Christian refugees. A sponsoring group interviewed for this study from a small community sponsored a devout Muslim family. Although the sponsoring group made great efforts to help connect the sponsored refugees with people of their own ethnic and religious background, the normative Christian foundation of this small community, coupled with the sponsored refugees' visibly "othered" appearance and the limited job opportunities, made the settlement experience difficult, and the sponsored refugees moved to a larger urban centre before the sponsorship year had come to an end. One sponsor commented that when a Muslim sponsored refugee first arrived off the airplane she was wearing a headscarf—a visible symbol of Islamic devotion. However, after arriving, the refugee was never seen wearing it again.   The sponsor wondered if she stopped wearing it because it would further ostracize her from a community where Christianity was the norm (iv7). Despite ending the sponsorship agreement early, both the sponsoring group and the sponsored refugees interviewed indicated that they maintained a positive relationship with each other, and the sponsored refugees referred to the sponsoring group as "their family" (iv5).

A study in a small community in the Midwestern United States compared the integration experience of two African immigrant populations (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006). The study demonstrates how Muslim Somalis and Christian Nuer refugees from southern Sudan

encountered similar obstacles in their resettlement, but their differing religious affiliations had a dramatic effect on their resettlement. The two communities examined in this study were similar in that both populations fled civil war in East Africa, both were visible minorities in a town where residents were predominantly of European origin, and both populations had similar education and jobs. However, their differing religious affiliation produced distinctions in their resettlement experience. For refugees and immigrants who do not have family ties in Canada or the United States, churches and mosques become important institutions for social networking and resources. The authors found that the refugees who were Muslim had limited opportunities to interact with the larger Christian community in the same way that the Christian refugees did. Because there was no mosque in the small town, members of the Muslim refugee community traveled an hour outside the community to worship. This distance from the local community furthered them both physically and socially from the community. By contrast, the Christian refugees had opportunities to go to church services and church social activities with the non-refugee population. The authors of the study wrote that refugees such as the Nuer were often persecuted based on their religion and sponsorship by Christian churches allowed the Nuer refugees an opportunity to integrate into the local community. However, for Muslim Somalis, their lives in the predominantly Christian community restricted their freedom to practice Islam and restricted their opportunities to educate their children in Islamic schools. In some cases, being of non-Christian background in a dominantly Christian community acts as a barrier to integration.

The integration experience may be easier for refugees in urban centers where there is a diversity of religious and cultural networks but that is not to say that smaller communities should not sponsor. A professional interviewed for this study said that the sponsoring groups from

small communities are the most active and they are often the quickest to respond to a call of need (iv2). This is attributed to the lower cost of living in smaller cities and towns and accessibility to affordable housing, which is not always available in larger urban centres.

As was demonstrated with the example of the Hmong and Khmer communities, tapping into the religious institutions of their Christian sponsoring groups allowed them to gain social capital and maintain patterns of traditional family roles. Members of the Khmer community who converted to Christianity initially to benefit from the resources of the Christian community often reverted back to Theravada Buddhism within a short time of being in Canada. This may be in part because in the early years of the PSR program, there were few minority religious communities already established in Canada, and therefore, sponsored refugees recognized the benefit of joining a Christian community. Today, a multitude of minority religious communities can be found in Canada's major urban centres, and thus sponsored refugees benefit from the diaspora community and do not feel obligated to convert to Christianity to integrate into Canadian society. This is reinforced by the fact that many sponsored refugees who are settled in rural areas where there are limited minority religious communities are most likely to either join the Christian denomination of their sponsoring group or relocate to an urban centre as soon as they are able[17]. Contrary to the early studies on refugees arriving in Canada through Christian sponsoring groups, the data collected for this study suggests that sponsored refugees do not feel obligated to convert to Christianity, but they may not understand why strangers are sponsoring them, and they often feel obligated to attend at least one Christian church service to demonstrate their gratitude. A Muslim sponsored refugee interviewed for this study said, "We went to church services to thank them for sponsoring us" (iv4).

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[17] More quantitative research is needed to determine the prevalence of this trend.

Expectations of Sponsors and Refugees

Many privately sponsored refugees do not understand why strangers would make the self-sacrifices necessary to sponsor, but for the few refugees who are lucky enough to be granted the opportunity to come to Canada, it is a life-changing experience for which many of them are deeply grateful. One interviewee, when asked why she thought her sponsors took part in the private refugee sponsorship program, could give no other explanation except that "they are angels" (iv4). Some refugees do not understand the generosity offered by strangers, and because they do not know what their sponsors expected in return, the refugees became vulnerable to exploitation (Beiser, 1999). In a study of the Indochinese refugee movement, Beiser stated, "Sometimes knowingly and sometimes not, more than a few private sponsors took advantage of the helplessness of their beneficiaries" (p. 52).

The refugees often do not know anything about the sponsoring group before they arrive and therefore do not understand their motivation. A professional commented that a more adequate orientation should be provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada for sponsored refugees, and the orientation should include information about the sponsoring group (iv2). Most sponsoring groups interviewed for this study extended invitations for the sponsored refugees to attend worship services but did not expect the refugees to join the church or convert to Christianity. Many sponsored refugees attended a few church services and church-related social events because they felt that their sponsors had expected it but did not express resentment over the invitation.

While members of sponsoring groups and professionals interviewed for this study were adamant that they do not explicitly proselytize, there may be implicit expectations that the refugee will join their Christian congregation. A sponsor interviewed for this study commented

71

that her congregation had no expectation that the refugees they sponsored would join the church. However, she later stated that the congregation had hoped to sponsor a family of refugees with children so that the children could join the church's youth group.   Had the children joined the youth group, they would have inevitably participated in Christian prayer and Bible study while participating in seemingly secular social activities. This point reinforces the earlier discussion of how sponsorship can lead to the mingling of altruism and concern for congregational membership growth and retention. The contradictory expectations of this sponsoring group demonstrates that Christian sponsoring groups are aware that proselytization to refugees that are dependent on them can be coercive, but they may not be aware of the more subtle ways their Christian orientation affects the interfaith relationship between Christian sponsors and refugees. While invitations for the sponsored refugee to attend a church supper or worship service is most often extended with the best intentions it may send a signal to the sponsored refugee that they expect the refugees to convert, especially, when neither CIC nor the sponsoring group explicitly tell the refugees upon their arrival that there is no expectation of conversion or repayment to the sponsoring group. As demonstrated, many sponsored refugees do not understand why perfect strangers would help them.

Morton Beiser conducted a longitudinal research study on the adaptation of Southeast Asian refugees in 1981, 1983 and 1991. Among other findings, Beiser determined that an incongruent religious affiliation among refugees and sponsors was a factor in higher depression rates of sponsored refugees. Christian sponsoring groups were not coercive and did not overtly pressure sponsored refugees to convert but unclear social expectations affected refugees' mental well-being. When sponsoring groups fail to explain to refugees that no payment, either material or non-material, is expected in return for their sponsorship, it can negatively affect the refugee's

mental health as they may agonize over how to repay their sponsors. Beiser concluded that

sponsorship is worthwhile but the policy implication is that sponsors need to be aware of

perceptions of equality and cultural expectations. Beiser noted that it is important to understand

the vulnerability of refugees considering that research has demonstrated that sponsored refugees

do not always feel supported and protected by their sponsoring groups (Beiser. 1999).

CHAPTER SIX—Revelations

<u>Conclusion</u>

This study has provided a discussion on the role of Christianity within the PSR program. It has demonstrated the inter-faith dynamics of Christian organizations sponsoring non-Christian refugees and analyzed the complexities of a program that is an important part of Canada's humanitarian commitment. Canadian society finds itself negotiating the role of religion in the public sphere. This study has demonstrated that Canada has not cut a clear divide in the relationship between church and state and that Christianity has a persisting influence on government immigration policies. Christian refugee advocacy groups have been instrumental in the development of the PSR program and the state finds it convenient to draw upon the Christian voluntary sector to provide the grassroots resettlement work. Canadian churches and Christian organizations provide an invaluable service to the refugees they sponsor and their dedication to refugee advocacy is commendable. The Christian motivation originates from both scriptural text and a concern for social justice. However Christian churches have also benefited from PSR program as it takes on a functionalist role in maintaining congregational membership during a period of declining church attendance. This study has highlighted the complexities of religion and the tension that exists between religion that is understood as a system of beliefs that holds spiritual meaning to the individual believer, and religion as an instrument of social functions. This tension is not easily understood or explained but is likely to always exist.

Early studies on religion and ethnicity of Southeast Asia refugees suggested that some Christian sponsoring groups explicitly proselytized to sponsored refugees. As a result, religious conversion rates among some specific communities were high and sponsored refugees often

adopted the denomination of their sponsor.   However, sponsored refugees were not passive

subjects and instead made active decisions to convert as an adaptive strategy and as a vehicle to

gain social capital in an unfamiliar country. The data collected for this study suggests that

sponsored refugees no longer feel pressured to convert to the religion of their sponsoring group

and sponsoring groups are sensitive to cross cultural and inter-faith dynamics. However,

sponsored refugees often attend at least some church services out of a sense of obligation to their

sponsors and to demonstrate gratitude to the supporting congregation. Some sponsored refugees

are unclear of the expectations of sponsors and CIC and sponsoring groups should be explicit in

explaining the sponsoring group's motivation and in Canada's belief in the freedom of religion.

The multicultural nature of Canada's urban centres provides a number of diasporic

immigrant communities that sponsored refugees can access. These are most prominently found

within religious communities because minority religious institutions function to promote cultural

heritage and act as a form of resistance to the dominant Christian society. Sponsored refugees

living in large multicultural urban centres, therefore, no longer need to rely entirely on their

sponsors as a form of social capital. Non-Christian sponsored refuges that are sponsored to rural

communities with a normalized Christian orientation often find it more difficulty to integrate into

the community without converting to Christianity. As a result, they may be more likely to leave

the community shortly after the sponsorship term has come to an end. That is not to say that

sponsoring groups in rural communities should not sponsor because they are often the most

active sponsoring groups. The distinction between urban and rural sponsorships also points to

the important place of religion within the resettlement and integration process.

The relationship between Christianity and the PSR program cannot be summarized in a

simple equation that explains conversion trends or motivation. This study has highlighted that a

variety of patterns exists and has demonstrated instances of inter-faith interaction, wherein, a Christian sponsoring group went so far as to drive the Muslim refugees they were sponsoring an hour away so that they could attend a mosque and connect to people of their own religious and ethnic background. In another instance, Muslim sponsored refugees were not interested in attending a mosque when invited by their Christian sponsors because they saw more value in connecting with the Christian community that was assisting them. And yet, a Buddhist sponsored refugee, who came to Canada as a child, recounted stories of maintaining his Buddhist identity but attended church services with his sponsor, at the encouragement of his parents, who wanted him to integrate into Canadian culture. The story of Christianity within the PSR program is complex and often ironic. It is not the same story that was told during the early years of the program and given the changing role of religion in Canadian society the direction the story of the PSR program will take is yet to be revealed.

<u>Areas of Further Research</u>

Some areas of further research have been highlighted throughout this essay. The relationship between religion and the PSR program is clearly complex and requires more attention. A quantitative survey of conversion rates of sponsored refugees would provide a wealth of information that is currently unavailable. Statistics on the religious affiliation of refugees that are sponsored through the PSR program would also be of benefit, however, as demonstrated, religious identification is not easy to quantify because there are a number of social and cultural implication that affect religious identification. Furthermore, some might argue that the role of religious identification in the PSR program is irrelevant in comparison to the program's goal of providing humanitarian assistance. Further research on distinctions between urban and rural sponsorship in Canada would develop our understanding of how multiculturalism

and diasporic religious communities affects the settlement experience immigrants. Follow-up research on the Hmong and Khmer communities would develop our knowledge on the lasting influence of sponsoring groups and would add to the discussion of religious conversion as an adaptive strategy. More research is also needed to examine the demographics of non-Christian sponsoring groups and gain a better understanding of the type of groups that are sponsoring and where their motivation lies. This is especially important given the study's discussion on the dwindling number of Christian sponsoring groups and ageing congregations. This research could have important policy implications and make an enormous contribution to the success of Canada's private sponsorship of refugees program.

APPENDIX A

PSR Figures (1979-2007)

Year	Landings
1979	13,893
1980	21,244
1981	4,405
1982	5,863
1983	4,161
1984	3,976
1985	3,881
1986	5,222
1987	7,437
1988	12,387
1989	21,631
1990	19,307
1991	17,433
1992	8,960
1993	4,768
1994	2,822
1995	3,121
1996	3,073
1997	2,658
1998	2,140
1999	2,332
2000	2,905
2001	3,570
2002	3,045
2003	3,254
2004	3,115
2005	2,976
2006	3,337
2007	3,581

*This table was compiled using statistics provided in the CIC Summative Evaluation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, CIC statistics provided by the Canadian Centre for Refugees list serve and Treviranus and Casasola, 2003.

APPENDIX B

<u>**Chronological History of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program***</u>

1978 Implementation of the *Immigration Act*, which introduced private sponsorship as a new mechanism for individuals to be involved in resettling refugees.

1979 - 1980 Indochinese resettlement movement. Over 60,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled in Canada in 1979 and 1980. Thirty-four thousand of them were privately sponsored.

1986 Award of the UNHCR Nansen medal to the People of Canada in "recognition of their major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees".

1994 Creation of the NGO-Government Committee on the Private Sponsorship of Refugees, comprised of six SAH representatives and six CIC representatives. The Committee provides a forum for government and SAHs to consult, discuss and make decisions on broader policy and operational issues.

1994 - 1998 Project FOCUS Afghanistan, whereby some 1,800 Afghan Ismaili refugees were successfully settled in Canada. This project was the first example of a "blending" of government and private resources and was viewed as a cost-effective use of government resources.

1997 Negotiation of a new Sponsorship Agreement, to replace the existing "Master Agreement".

1998 Introduction of the Humanitarian Designated Classes, including the Country of Asylum class, thereby expanding the categories of people eligible for resettlement.

1998 The report of the Legislative Review Advisory Group ("Not Just Numbers") was released. The three-person advisory group had been commissioned to come up with proposals for a new *Immigration Act*.

1998 Creation of the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP).

1999 Arrival of over 7,000 Kosovar refugees evacuated from Macedonia, under UNHCR's Humanitarian Evacuation Program.

2002 Introduction of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which allowed for greater flexibility and access with respect to who can participate in private sponsorship outside of the SAH network.

2002 Establishment of the Winnipeg Private Refugee Sponsorship Assistance Program, whereby the City of Winnipeg set aside $250,000 of municipal funds as an assurance fund to encourage sponsorship.

2003 Arrival of the first group of refugees selected to come to Canada through group processing. Canada and the UNHCR identified entire refugee populations and resettled these populations in

the same community. In this year, two groups of refugees, 30 Sudanese and 17 Somalis, arrived in Canada from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya.

2005 Creation of the NGO-Government Sub-Committee, a sub-set of the NGO-Government Committee. The Sub-Committee is comprised of representatives from the sponsorship community, and meets more frequently than the NGO-Government Committee. The responsibility of the Sub-Committee is similar to that of the Government Committee, however the Sub-Committee focuses on more specific operational and policy issues and brings these issues to the NGO-Government Committee.

(*Taken directly from the Summative Evaluation of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program Final Report, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Published April, 2007.)

APPENDIX C

<u>**Sponsor Interview Questions**</u>

1. How long have you been involved in refugee sponsorship?
2. What motivates you?
3. What role does religion play in the sponsorship process?
4. Do you talk about religion to the sponsored refugee? This does not necessarily mean proselytizing but could also mean asking questions about their faith, bringing up issues of religion.
5. What implications do you think talking about faith with the sponsored refugee has?
6. How comfortable are you talking about religion? Is it something that you do on a regular basis?
7. Has being part of a sponsoring group changed the way you see people of different religious backgrounds?
8. Have you received any training material or workshops about inter-faith relationships? Did you find it adequate?
9. Should training in interfaith interactions be given to sponsoring groups? When ?
10. How do you select who you sponsor?
11. Do you take into consideration the religious background of the sponsored refugee when choosing whom to sponsor?
12. If the refugee is of a different religious background do you encourage them to seek out that religious community?
13. Has this group learned any lessons from interfaith sponsorship?
14. Do you think the Private Refugee Sponsorship Program is effective in reaching its objectives?
15. How might it be improved?
16. Do you think the sponsored refugee feels a sense of obligation or responsibility to convert?
17. How do you think your relationship with the sponsored refugee might change if they were Christian? Has the experience of sponsorship been unifying or dividing for your congregation?
18. What has being a sponsoring group taught you about your own religion?

APPENDIX D

Sponsored Refugees Interviews Questions

1. Were you aware that your sponsoring group was affiliated with a Christian organization before arriving in Canada?
2. Did you have any concerns about this before arriving?
3. Before arriving in Canada what was your perception of religion in Canada?
4. Did you sponsorship group make it clear that there is freedom of religion in Canada?
5. Do you think it is important to belong to a religious community?
6. How does the sponsorship group choose who they sponsor?
7. What do you think motivated your sponsorship group to sponsor?
8. Would you have preferred to be sponsored by a secular organization?
9. Did you plan to maintain the religion that you subscribed to in your homeland before coming to Canada? How did you plan to maintain it?
10. Do you still subscribe to the religion of your homeland?
11. Have you joined a religious community?
12. Do you continue to associate with your sponsoring group?
13. What was your relationship like with your sponsoring group while you were being sponsored?
14. How has it changed now that your sponsoring has come to an end?
15. Did you receive invitations to participate in church functions? Did you accept and how did this make you feel?
16. Did you ever feel pressure from the sponsoring group to learn about Christianity?
17. Did you feel you a sense of responsibility to the sponsoring group?
18. Did you ever talk about religion with your sponsoring group? Did you share your own religion with them?
19. Did you ever feel uncomfortable around your sponsoring group? Why?

APPENDIX E

List of Acronyms

CCCRR – Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees
CCR – Canadian Council for Refugees
CIC – Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CG **–** Constituent Group
GAR – Government Assisted Refugees
JAS **–** Joint Assistance Sponsorship
MCC – Mennonite Central Committee
PSR **–** Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program
RSTP – Refugee Sponsorship Training Program.
SAH – Sponsorship Agreement Holder
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

APPENDIX F

<u>Sponsorship Agreement Holders- April 2008</u>

*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Diocese of Charlottetown
*Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Antigonish
*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Halifax
*Roman Catholic Bishop of Saint John*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of Ottawa
*Roman Catholic Diocese of Peterborough
*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. for the Diocese of St. Catharines in Canada
*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of the Diocese of Hamilton
*Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of the Diocese of London in Ontario*Roman Catholic
Episcopal Corp. for the Diocese of Toronto in Canada
*Roman Catholic Bishop of Thunder Bay
*Roman Catholic Archiepiscopal Corporation of Winnipeg
*Corp. Archiepiscopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface
*Roman Catholic Archiepiscopal Corporation of Regina
*Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon
*The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton
*Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary
*La Corporation Episcopale Catholique Romaine de Grouard-McLennan
*The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver
*Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria,
*Anglican Diocese of Nova Scotia & P.E.I.,
*The Anglican Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador
*Diocesan Synod of Western Newfoundland
*Diocesan Synod of Fredericton
*Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Algoma
*Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Ottawa
*The Incorporated Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Ontario
*Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron (Anglican Diocese of Huron)
*Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Toronto
*The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Niagara
*Anglican Diocese of Rupert's Land
*The Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle
*Synod of the Diocese of Saskatoon
*Synod of the Diocese of Calgary
*Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton
*Anglican Synod of the Diocese of New Westminster
*Anglican Diocese of British Columbia
The Afghan Association of Ontario
Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration Community Support Organization
Babylon Ethnic Society Incorporated
*Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec
*Baptist Union of Western Canada
Calgary Ethiopian Community Association

Canadian International Immigrant and Refugee Support Association
Canadian Labour Congress
*Canadian Lutheran World Relief
Canadian Ukrainian Immigrant Aid Society
*Canadian Unitarian Council
Carrefour d'immigration rurale Inc.
*CAUSE Canada
Chaldean Refugees Assistance Committee
*Christian Aid Mission
*Christian Reformed World Relief Committee Canada
Concerned Citizens and Friends of Sierra Leone
*Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches,
East Kootenay Friends of Burma
*Emmanuel Free Reformed Church
Ethiopian Association in the Greater Toronto Area & Surrounding Regions
*Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Toronto`
*H.S. St Mary Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church
*Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Edmonton,
Focus Humanitarian Assistance Canada
*The Free Methodist Church in Canada
*Governing Council of The Salvation Army in Canada
*Islamic Foundation of Toronto
*Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada
*Mennonite Central Committee Canada
*Manitoba Interfaith Immigration
*Council Inc. (Welcome Place)
The Oromo Family Association of Edmonton
Oromo Refugees Resettlement Services Network
*The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada
*The Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland
*The Presbyterian Church in Canada
Sierra Leone Immigrant Resettlement and Integration Centre (SLIRIC)
Sierra Leone Canada Watch (SLCW)
Sierra Leone-Canada Friendship Association
*St. Maratken Community Society, Inc.
Ukrainian Canadian Congress
*The United Church of Canada
*Victory Christian Fellowship of Calgary N.W.
Welfare Committee for the Assyrian Community in Canada
World University Service of Canada (WUSC) – Student Refugee Program
*World Vision Canada

(* Indicates a religious affiliation)

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