

**Religion and Immigration in Canada: Exploring the Role of  
Religious Institutions in the Integration of African Christian  
Immigrants in Canadian Society.**

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## **Abstract**

Religion plays a critical role to immigrants as it provides a platform for identity, support and sharing. Religion especially for the African Christian community has been a strong pillar on which important decisions are made on migrating from one country to another. This research paper studies the African Christian immigrant population in Canada and the distinctive role played by religion and religious institutions in their integration into Canadian society. The paper attempts to answer the questions of how religious institutions encourage and facilitate the integration of African Christian immigrants into Canadian society and how the immigrants from Africa change and adapt their beliefs, religiosity and practice while in Canada. My choice of the above was to confirm whether observations of religion being a key factor of integration of immigrants in other countries would be similar in Canada.

The study notes that the role of religion and its influence on African Christian immigrants has been underemphasized as it does not feature prominently, hence the lack of scholarly research. Despite this, the study indicates that the African Christian immigrants face numerous challenges of which they continuously look for solutions. The church provides one of the places from which the solutions are sourced from. The solutions are noted as being either economic or social that assist the integration of the immigrants into the host society. The religious institutions are seen as good reference and networking points that the host society can rely on and hence the immigrants seek the important services from these institutions. As part of the networking done by the religious institutions, participation in community activities enables the immigrants to participate actively in the host community activities or religious practices which in turn enables them to adapt or change to the host community's ideals.

The study proposes the need to have comparative research conducted in different continents such as Asia, Europe and Gulf to examine if similar traits have been observed so as to conclude the importance of religion on the settlement process of immigrants. Additionally, further studies can be done to establish if religion can also be an obstacle towards successful integration of new immigrants into the host communities.

*Key terms:* Religion; immigration; integration; African immigrants; Christians/Christianity.

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## **Dedication**

This paper is dedicated to all immigrants in Canada. May you overcome all challenges and achieve your desired success.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Religion is critical in every country and especially to new immigrants looking to find and keep a connection to their identity, spirituality, beliefs and God. For most Christian immigrants, the comfort, satisfaction and sense of belonging that comes with finding a place that unites worshippers from across the globe cannot be underestimated. Most immigrants, whether coming in as students, refugees, asylum seekers, skilled workers among others, often look for spiritual communities for support and help. The assistance offered could be in the form of a job, accommodation, settlement, the learning a new language, and social integration as they make their way in the new country. While some people continue to practice their religion in the new adoptive country, others choose or are compelled to change their faith or religious affiliation. However, among many other challenges, finding a religious institution that one can eventually fit into can sometimes be a difficult and time-consuming task, while the anticipated comfort is not guaranteed. For instance, Convention refugees who are classified as people who flee from their home country for reasons that include fear of persecution (Woodgate, et al 2017) are more likely to face challenges in finding a new church in which they will eventually settle and feel comfortable, if fleeing religious persecution in their home countries. Connor (2014) notes that as immigrants move across international borders, they find themselves among religious minority groups while others find it hard to keep up with cultural cues such as observing religious holidays and accessing worship centres.

Religion is not just about ideas; it is also about performing practices that give those ideas a collective meaning. He adds that while religion can play an important role in the migrants' decision-making especially on the start and endpoints of the migration in addition

to integration into the host society, it entirely depends on how active the migrants are in terms of religious practices.

This research paper intends to study the African Christian immigrant population in Canada and the distinctive role of religion and religious institutions in their integration into Canadian society. As will be revealed later in this paper, this particular community, like any other group of immigrants, is faced with a myriad of challenges that can delay or potentially ruin their chances of being fully integrated into their new host country. Hence, I seek to analyze some of these challenges by looking at the religious as well as economic factors. These factors are intertwined as they both determine how the migrants will settle in the new host country. Religion brings about the sense of identity and furthermore assists in enabling the migrants settle faster through identification and connecting them to residential areas as well as economic opportunities. Hence the two factors are seen as significant contributors and as they affect the way in which the migrants settle in Canada. This study will also show that most of these immigrants are largely motivated to carry on with their faith, religious and spiritual beliefs that are often intertwined with their relationships to their countries of origin. These are important factors especially when developing coping strategies. In seeking to establish a connection with the already settled immigrants to fully fit into Canadians society, these immigrants will consequently turn to church and engage in religious activities as some of the first approaches, their cultural differences notwithstanding. Although there is very limited literature addressing this particular community, scholarly research and available studies suggest that it is during this period that religious institutions offer much-needed assistance.

In addition, the paper will also show that the phenomenal growth of congregations can be attributed to Christian immigrants throughout Canada. While conducting his research on an African immigrant church in Alberta, Aechtner (2015) observed that the Christian

African immigrants had a significant role to play in this growth. Aechtner quoted the church leader who asserted that while countries such as Canada once cherished Christianity, and were its emissaries to non-western peoples, the reverse is now the case. This is what the participant had to say; ‘the seed that they planted in Africa germinated, and we want to bring that seed back to its roots’. This could be construed to mean that African immigrants are reviving Christianity in Canada.

This paper is therefore guided by the following questions;

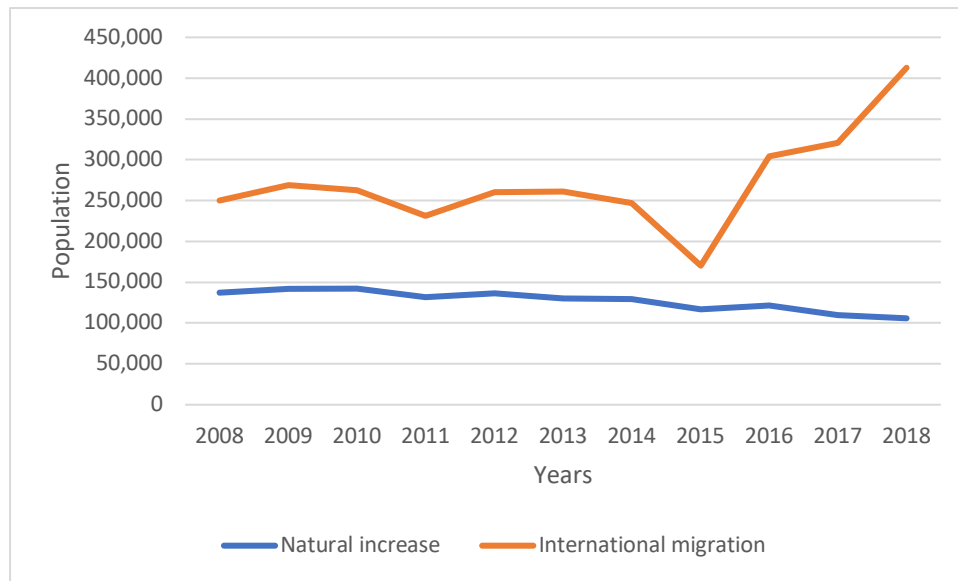
- How do religious institutions encourage and facilitate the integration of African Christian immigrants into Canadian society?
- What are the religious changes of African Christian immigrants upon arrival to Canada? (How do immigrants from Africa change and adapt their beliefs, religiosity and practice?).

This paper has two broad sections. In the literature review section, I will give an overview of religion, immigration and integration and situate African immigrants within these concepts. I will then describe my research question/statement of the problem and incorporate the recurring themes of social, economic and religious integration which I will then critique. I will end my paper with a discussion, including the limitations of this and other existing studies and finally give my suggestions and recommendations.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past five years, more than 1.3 million new immigrants have come to call Canada home, with few other countries especially in Europe admitting more immigrants on a per capita basis than Canada (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2017). Moreover, Canada's population has long included a large proportion of immigrants. Since Canadian Confederation in 1867, the proportion of immigrants has never fallen below 13 per cent (Statistics Canada 2017), and this proportion according to Morency et al, (2017) has been continually rising over the past 30 years to 20.7 per cent in 2011. Additionally, in March 2016, the Government of Canada announced its intention to welcome up to 305,000 new permanent residents, the highest projection in decades, well above its norm of 250,000 (Reimer & Hiemstra, 2018). According to the 2018 Canada Statistics, the country's population growth rate stood at 1.4% fueled by natural increase and the international migratory increase (Stats Canada, 2018). The same statistics indicate that it is a fact that since the mid-1990s, international migration has consistently been a main driver of population growth in Canada and it is estimated that between July 2017 and July 2018, the country accepted 412,747 migrants into its population. Table 1 presents the data on population growth for the natural increase and the international migration. It is worth noting that there was a sharp decline in the year 2015 for migrants but since then there has been a steady increase in the number of international migrants into Canada while there is a slow decline on the natural increase.

**Table 1: Population Growth in Canada**



Canada's contemporary immigration policy which dates back to the mid 1980s when the government of Canada adopted a policy of immigration growth to counter an aging population and low birth rates has been sustained for over two decades, the increased levels of immigration appear to have borne the desired effect (Janzen, et al, 2012). However, it is important to mention that the initiative does not apply to the case of the Syrian refugee crisis<sup>1</sup> (Stats Canada, 2019).

## 2.1 The General Canadian Integration Approach

As Edmonston (2016) contends, Canada is a nation primarily composed of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. Therefore, he notes, an understanding of the long and complex immigration history is indispensable in order to appreciate the present ethnic background and the contribution of immigration to the country's population change. In

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<sup>1</sup> Canada in an exceptional and time-limited situation responded to a request by the United Nations to help in settling the displaced Syrians. According to the 2016 Census, approximately 25,000 Syrian refugees landed between January 1, 2015 and May 10, 2016 and were still living in Canada on Census Day. Among these, 53 per cent were assisted by the government.

an attempt to answer the question, ‘why does Canada have immigration? Satzewich & Liodakis, (2017) have quoted journalist Daniel Stoffman who says:

“There are official reasons, real reasons and ideal reasons. Officially we could not survive without immigration and we would be foolish not to have more of it. As no evidence exists to support the official version, Canadians are supposed to accept it on faith.” (p 93.)

But as stated earlier, there are various factors that lead people to immigrate and depending on the reason, immigrants move to a new country as students, skilled workers, refugees, asylum seekers or even missionaries. On the other hand, Canada has an open-door policy to immigrants from all walks of life and the reasons for immigration are wide and varied. The Immigration Canada Services Website (ICS) states that other major benefits include better opportunities for employment, business, study, permanent residence as well as personal growth<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, the 2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration acknowledged that Immigration is a defining feature of Canada, and immigrants currently represent one in five people in Canada. Thus, the report notes that Canada is a world leader in managed migration with an immigration program based on non-discriminatory principles, where foreign nationals are assessed without regard to race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion or gender (IRCC, 2018).

As presented in the Annual Report of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2018), Canada’s immigration plan for the period 2019 – 2021 is to encourage more immigrants who are skilled to contribute positively towards the growth of the economy. For this plan to successively be implemented, the IRCC also partners with the federal, provincial and territorial partners including other key implementers such as settlement service providers

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<sup>2</sup> The 2011 National Household Survey in Canada indicated that 56.9% of the migrants were from Asia and Middle East, 13.7% from Europe, 12.5% from Africa, 12.3% from the Caribbean, Central and South America.

to assist in permanent resident admissions. Prince-St-Amand (2016) has also stated that Canada is one of the most welcoming societies among immigrant-receiving countries and has been ranked first among 38 countries for its policies on anti-discrimination. In line with this, he states that the country has scored high in the policy areas of Family Reunification (4th), Education (4th), Labour Market Mobility (5th) and Access to Nationality (8th) (p 4).

## **2.2 Challenges and Barriers to Integration**

### **2.2.1 The Religious Factors**

As Chiswick (2014) observes, religious considerations affect the decision to immigrate as well as the choice of the destination country, and religious behaviors change as immigrants adjust to the economic context of their new country. Hence, the process of integration (Breton, 2012) into a new socio-cultural environment can lead to new perspectives on one's religion, and individuals may question if some of their religious beliefs and practices are properly religious or if they derive from their ethnic or national culture. Breton advances his argument by stating that immigrants and especially, members of the second and subsequent generations, in their attempts to fit into the new social and institutional environment, tend to change the ways they view and experience their religion.

In addition, he notes that newcomers and minorities may find that some members of the established community maintain a social distance from them, that they face rejection and hostility. Creese (2011), whose finding was echoed by Kitavi (2017) notes that immigrants from countries in sub-Saharan Africa who have settled on Canada's West Coast despite their various national origins, are actively engaged in creating a new collective "African Community" within their adopted homeland. She adds that racial and gender discrimination, social isolation (exclusion), and the devaluing of foreign educational credentials by potential employers often contribute to downward mobility for African immigrants (p 39). Frazier et al (2010), in their study also lists racial inequality, unemployment rates, income inequality,

educational attainment, occupational inequality, residential segregation, and home ownership rates as some of the barriers that African immigrants encounter in their journey towards full incorporation into Canadian society. The lack of Canadian work experience by the newcomers which Chuba (2016) refers to as soft skills or labour market cultural capital is also another challenge that immigrants have to navigate in order to be fully integrated. Another challenge identified by many researchers is the language barrier. Chuba laments that it cannot be gainsaid that language skill is quintessential for success in the labour market. African-trained immigrants whose mother tongue is neither English nor French find it even harder to avoid over-qualification and job mismatch. But perhaps (Breton, 2012) the most benign manifestation of the reluctance to accept newcomers consists of pressure on members of the minority to conform and to relinquish their background. This, notes Breton, is especially the case if the minority religious culture is considered inferior or backward. More threatening and difficult are the experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and social aggression (verbal or physical).

On the question of religious accommodation, David Seljak (2012) observed that many public institutions – including the Ontario Human Rights Commission have found themselves having to rethink the protection of religious freedom and the promotion of religious diversity. He has proposed that these institutions needed to counter traditional forms of intolerance and discrimination and instead be sensitive to emerging forms of intolerance rooted in transnational conflicts. In his opinion, attention to Canada's new religious diversity provides an opportunity to see for the first time the outlines, qualities, and limitations of the Canadian secular human rights regime and its protections of religious freedom and diversity. On the concept of reasonable accommodation, Bromag (2012) indicates that misunderstandings about this very concept served to fuel debate of religious accommodation and discrimination creating a climate of animosity and mistrust towards new immigrants, as well as existing

cultural/religious communities. But Beyer (2012) has stated that if reasonable accommodation was not to be a guiding concept for addressing the question of how, in Canada as elsewhere, religious diversity is best addressed or understood, then there is a need to legitimately ask what the alternatives might be.

### **2.2.2 The Economic Factors**

Immigrants' contribution to Canada's economy and society continues and this is expected to increase in a context of inexorable population aging (Yssaad & Fields, 2018). Preisbisch & Hennerbry (2011) had previously observed that although Canada's immigration policy includes humanitarian and social concerns, attracting skilled workers for economic purposes was paramount. This assertion is supported by John (2019) who notes many immigrants to Canada nowadays are filling in the gap that the birth rate produces in the needed supply of younger workers, especially with respect to their children who are either born in or mostly raised in Canada. He adds that in embracing the Express Entry program, Canada is attracting higher skilled immigrants with sufficient language skills, work experience, and education. Three years earlier, a report by the Conference Board of Canada predicted that eliminating immigration would have a negative impact on the Canadian economy by 2040, owing to the country's small population and aging population. But despite being famous for its Federal Skilled Worker Program, (which includes the immigration of skilled workers through Express Entry), Canada shows disappointing results in the economic and social outcomes of the integration of skilled immigrants (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). The authors also state that although recent immigrants to Canada are the most educated and highly trained immigrants to date, they, nonetheless, continue to face difficulties in the settlement process. Thomson (2010) had argued that settlement and integration is a two-way process, which requires commitment on the part of the immigrants to

adapt to life in Canada and a supportive attitude on the part of Canadians to welcome new people and cultures.

At the same time, a survey conducted in 2013 by the Ottawa Local Integration Program on the economic integration of immigrants revealed that while immigration is good for business and economic growth, immigrants, and in particular recent immigrants, are experiencing high levels of unemployment and underemployment (OLIP, 2013). Hence, the survey discovered that there has been a negative impact on both Ottawa's economic prospects and immigrants' integration outcomes. For instance, Yssaad & Fields (2018) observed that immigrants born in Africa make up about 10 per cent of Canada's immigrant labour force aged 25 to 54. There was a little change in their overall labour-market conditions in 2017 compared with the previous year. Their report further states that the employment rate for this group of immigrants was 72.5 percent in 2017 which was a slight increase as compared to previous years. Their unemployment rate was also little changed in 2017, at 11.2 per cent, and was higher relative to other immigrants.

Meanwhile, in relying on the work of other scholars, Kaushik & Drolet (2018) have outlined other major factors that are considered to be the biggest challenges to effective social and economic integration of skilled immigrants. They include: (a) lack of information and guidance; (b) lack of recognition of foreign credentials; (c) lack of recognition of previous work experience or employers' requirement for Canadian experience; (d) lack of language skills; (e) difficulties in obtaining references; (f) prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination; (g) cultural integration; (h) social and emotional support; and (i) health and wellbeing (p 3). Others barriers highlighted by OLIP (2013) that are unique to Ottawa, the country's national capital include systemic discrimination – stemming from subtle hiring practices that put immigrant job seekers at a disadvantage (e.g. expecting certain answers, hiring through established networks, etc.). But on a positive note, projections show that

immigration will remain a major contributor to future demographic growth. From 2031, more than 80 per cent of this growth is projected to come from immigration compared to about 67 per cent in 2011(Yssaad &Fields, 2018).

### **2.3 Addressing the Barriers to Effective Integration / Solutions to Integration**

Population projections by Statistics Canada indicate that immigrants would represent between 24.5 per cent and 30 per cent of Canada's population compared with 20.7 per cent in 2011. These would be the highest proportions since 1871 (Stats Canada, 2017). As Garang (2012) explains, the removal of visible and/or invisible barriers to immigrants' successful integration into Canadian society requires a joint approach from policymakers, resettlement agencies, the education and business sectors, as well as immigrant communities. Garang further notes that recent newcomers are faced with several challenges, including financial difficulties, weak cultural integration, lack of employment, and stress and trauma resulting from experiences of war in their countries of origin, hence the realization of full integration of new Canadians into the mainstream society requires settlement agencies and other stakeholders to reassess programs designed to settle immigrants. In other instances, he notes that extreme poverty, family breakdown, social exclusion and language deficiency are also some of the factors hindering African immigrants' integration.

In shifting attention from the challenges to possibilities and progresses, OLIP (2013) suggests there is need for employer and immigrant support through among other initiatives development of tools, guidelines and supports, more training for both parties and support more collaboration between actors. OLIP further calls for public education, communication and awareness building by among other efforts;

- Recognizing and broadcasting the value of immigrant talents,

- Flipping dialogue: from “Canadian experience” to the “benefit of international experience”
- Connect the stakeholders in a virtual space for easy sharing of information
- Create a story book on Ottawa successes.

In line with this argument, (Prince-St-Amand, 2016) while acknowledging the challenges, argues that the government is committed to sustaining immigration levels that support economic growth, adapting to settlement program to deliver better economic outcomes and a whole-of society-approach to immigrant integration. In addition, he attributes the successful integration to a unique (integration) model which is premised on mutual adaptation by newcomers and Canadian society. Inclusive laws and policies, as well as enabling programs, are in place to support this model, while federal, provincial/territorial and municipal governments play a central role to facilitate immigrant integration, in partnership with many societal actors in diverse communities across Canada.

Overall, Prince-St-Amand (2016) observes that Canada has a positive integration story which includes stronger economic outcomes by those selected for the labour market, (the Provincial Nominee and skilled workers), having one of the highest naturalization rates in the world, active volunteering by immigrants, an outstanding performance by the second generation immigrants who perform better in higher education as well as political engagement where established immigrants (who arrived before 2011) have a comparable voting rate of 66 per cent compared to 67 per cent for Canadian born. Further, Griffith (2017) states that competing priorities have driven shifts in Canadian immigration policy over the decades as policies have generally moved toward greater skills-based immigration, diversification and removal of racial restrictions, expansion of the role of provincial governments, increased focus on integration services, and greater refugee resettlement.

## 2.4 Religion and Immigration in Canada

Based on the Immigration Act of 1976, a shift in Canada's immigration policy occurred in the mid-1980s, from targeting primarily European countries to being aimed at a broad range of source countries which has resulted in a great diversity of languages, cultures and religious backgrounds (Reimer & Hiemstra, 2018). Similarly, Wolfart (2015) states that here as elsewhere, growing religious diversity has come with immigration. In line with this assertion, Connor & Koenig (2013) argue that newcomers in Canada have been credited with keeping religion alive and whether one is a Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Jew or Hindu among many other religions, 'immigrant faith' is what unites most people in the new country (Connor 2014). In defining immigrants, Connor (2014) refers to them as movers, migrating across international borders, sometimes to a country nearby or sometimes halfway around the world, and as people move, so do their gods. This is well captured in the following statement:

“People take their religion with them, changing both the religion they left behind in their home country and profoundly changing the religious landscape of the new country they enter. Among those who decide to take the plunge and move abroad, some may have few choices of where to move, while others may have several options available to them. All the while, religion can play an important role in their decision-making, how they meaningfully understand their migration journey, and who helps them get established in the destination country.” (Connor, 2014, p 8-9).

Similarly, Reimer & Hiemstra, (2018), contend that the importance of immigration for Canadian religious groups are hard to over-emphasize and the growth or decline of these groups is based on three factors: fertility, immigration, and switching/conversion. A broader look at other countries reveals that many countries are going through profound transformations with regard to religions – that have been referred to as a 'soft revolution'

(Goujon et al. 2014; Goujon & Bauer 2015). ‘Revolution’ because it affects Christianity which has long been considered a central element of the cultural foundation of these countries (Halman & Riis 2003) and ‘soft’ because it is neither violent nor sudden, nor is it an organized movement but rather a development that progresses gradually but surely through different societal and demographic mechanisms. Broadly, Chiswick (2014) observes that people who belong to a dominant religious group in their country of origin, whether their attachment to that religion is deep or marginal, are motivated to migrate primarily in search of economic opportunity. If their religion is not dominant in the destination, however, they must adjust to their new status as members of a minority religious group.

On the other hand, Connor (2014) observes that the stories of immigrant faith occurring in real time and in the real world illustrate the importance of religion within the lives of immigrants, and religion is not merely one aspect in immigrants’ lives as it can encompass everything.

Frederiks (2016) also suggests that researchers have investigated and continue to investigate the transformation of religion and religious communities in the context of migrants’ experiences; with specific research on how migration has influenced the faith, practices and community formation of people who migrate and what significance faith and religious communities hold for migrants when coping with stress, insecurities and challenges of migration. Keeping in mind that an immigrant’s faith is a moving faith, as Connor (2014) states, immigrants thus inevitably find themselves among religious minority groups. Others find it hard to keep up with cultural cues such as observing religious holidays and accessible worship centres on every block or neighbourhood once present in their country of origin may not line up with the new society’s calendar or religious infrastructure (Connor, 2014). Chances of the immigrants adapting or including new faiths into their own are high or even in worst case scenarios fully adopting the host’s faith practices as a substitute to theirs in order

to be accommodated into the society. This is an avenue that can be explored further while examining the changes that immigrants' religions face in the context of integrating them.

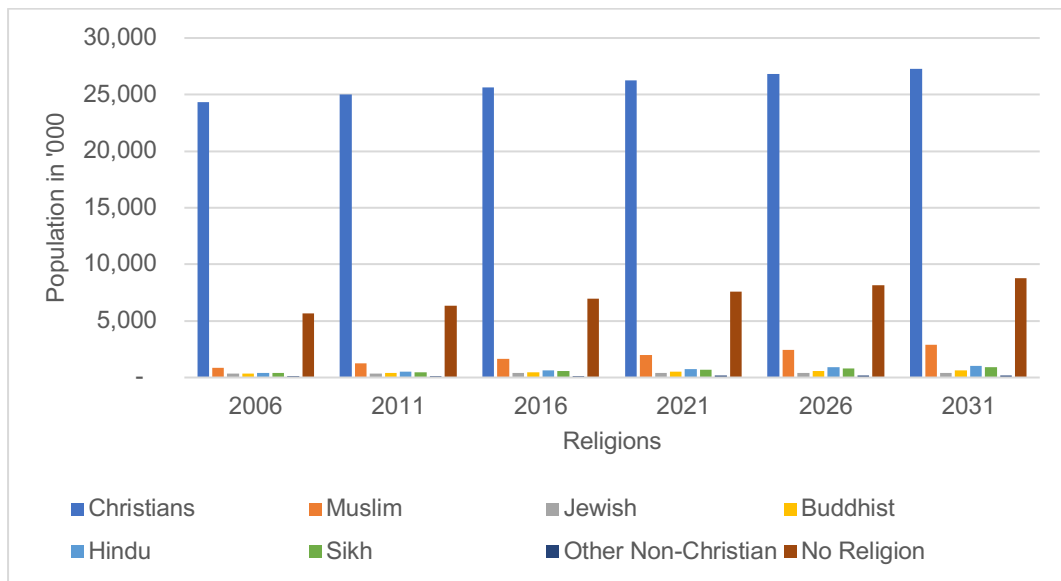
Connor (2010) further describes the three movements of immigrant adaptation as disruption, assimilation and facilitation: three phases which can be differentiated in the larger immigrant adaptation process, but they can also be useful tools for the analysis of a variety of other immigrant outcomes. In linking these three movements to religion, Connor notes that migrating internationally disrupts the regularity of religious participation among immigrant, but this change is more attributed to an individual than to religious contextual changes from origin to host societies. Connor (2010) also suggests that although immigrants do not assimilate en masse to the dominant religious beliefs in the new society, they do religiously in terms of frequency of religious participation. Although this form of assimilation does not occur equally for all religious groups in all national contexts, Connor says that religious participation is also found to facilitate the incorporation process.

In line with this argument, Reimer & Hiemstra (2018) note that immigration is changing the religious landscape in Canada. It is estimated that 69 per cent of the Canadian population growth is accounted for by immigration, and this is expected to increase to 90 per cent in 2050.

## **2.5 Religious Composition in Canada**

Mata (2010) presents data on religious affiliations in Canada for 2006 and projects them to 2031. The data as presented in Table 2 below, indicate that the majority of the population is affiliated to Christianity with a representation of over 70 per cent of the total population as at 2006. This is expected to decline to 65 per cent as at 2031. The proportion of persons with no affiliation to any religion is projected to increase from 17 per cent in 2011 to 21 per cent in 2031.

**Table 2: Religious Affiliations in Canada**



Morency et al (2017) state in a report on population projections for Canada and its regions, 2011 to 2036 that the proportion of people who report having no religion in the total population will continue to increase, and could represent between 28.2 per cent and 34.6 per cent in 2036 (compared with 24 per cent in 2011). This proportion would be similar to Catholics (between 29.2 per cent and 32.8 per cent in 2036, down from 2011 38.8 per cent). By 2036, Catholicism would remain the religion with the largest number of followers. This is according to population projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036.

Further Morency et al (2017) projects the number of people affiliated with non-Christian religions could almost double by 2036 and could represent between 13 per cent and 16 per cent of Canada's population, compared with 9 per cent in 2011. The Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths, which are over-represented among immigrants compared to their demographic weight in the population as a whole, would see the number of their followers grow more quickly, even if it would continue to represent a modest share of the total Canadian population. The 2011 National Household Survey however indicates that 78.4 per cent of the immigrants who came prior to 1971 identified as Christians. In contrast,

immigrants arriving between 2001 and 2005 were only 41.7 per cent Christian, and 47.5 per cent from 2006 to 2011.

## **2.6 Religious Switching of Christian Immigrants**

Chiswick (2014) observes that religious affiliation identifies the group to which one belongs, which one can join or leave, and in which one can participate with varying degrees of intensity. Beyer (2012) argues that the large majority of the overall population in Canada is at least culturally Christian or of Christian background. However, Morency et al (2017) note that the religious profile of Canada's population has undergone some profound changes in recent decades. In the 1981 Census, approximately 90 per cent of Canadians self-identified as Christians. Thirty years later, in 2011, this proportion had decreased to 67 per cent. During this period, the proportion of people with no religious affiliation rose from 7 per cent to 24 per cent and the proportion of people who reported a non-Christian religion increased from 3 per cent to 9 per cent. While the trend toward disaffiliation among Christians—and Protestants in particular—has been a factor in the increase of the unaffiliated population, immigration from countries with diverse traditions will have played a large part in the increased proportion of people with a non-Christian religion.

In their survey of religious switching of immigrants in Canada, Malenfant et al (2017) observe that religion is not a fixed attribute of immigrants and that they are religiously mobile after their arrival in Canada. Chiswick (2014) supports this argument by noting that religious discrimination or stigmatization can be a significant motivation to switch religious affiliations and immigrants may thus be self-selected for religious dissenters, especially minority groups seeking a destination where their religion is preferred or tolerated (or at least practiced by a large group). However, according to Riemer & Hiemstra (2018), less is known about the degree to which these immigrants participate in institutional religion, and whether they become less active over time as part of their integration into Canadian society. But Connor

(2014) argues there is no doubt that an immigrant's faith changes after he or she moves to a new country. But how does it change? In seeking to answer the question, Connor (2014) says that first, the act of moving to a new country disrupts the religious patterns of immigrants.

As an immigrant adjusts in the early days to his or her new home, finding a religious group may not always be the highest priority. He says migration can be a spiritual event, but this does not necessarily result in a religious revival among immigrants because in fact, quite the opposite situation seems to occur. But, according to Goujon et al (2015), the change in the number of persons in the different religious affiliations through conversion is important, and the most common 'switch' is from various religious to 'no religion'. Goujon et al (2015) documents that between 1981 and 2011, the percentage of Christians in the population of Canada reduced from 90 per cent to 67 per cent while during the same period the share of the population reporting no religion increased from 7 per cent to 24 per cent while the population belonging to non-Christian religions increased from 3 per cent to 9 per cent<sup>3</sup>.

In light of Goujon's view, Breton (2012) argues that the role of religion in their lives evolves over time, an evolution that involves not only their personal lives and religious experience but also their relation with their community and the larger society and the fact of recognizing that one's religion is distinct from one's ethnicity is likely to be accompanied by other changes in the way in which individuals relate to their religion: changes in one's attitudes, religious identification and participation.

However, according to Bibby (2011) and Thiessen (2015), immigrants are more religiously active than are the Canadian-born who are increasingly likely to claim no religious affiliation and are increasingly unlikely to attend church or religious temples. Hence, immigrants are bolstering attendance and participation in congregations across

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<sup>3</sup> These trends were projected to continue into the next decade by Statistics Canada and Pew Research Center in 2013.

Canada (Bibby, 2011). An analysis by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life indicates that two-thirds of Canadians (including adults and children) identify either as Catholic or as Protestant, both Christian groups have seen substantial erosion in their shares of the Canadian public. Results of the analysis further show that the percentage of Canadians who identify as Catholic has dropped from 47 per cent to 39 per cent over the last four decades, while the share that identifies as Protestant has fallen even more steeply, from 41 per cent to 27 per cent. Concurrently, the number of Canadians who belong to other religions – including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity – is growing and collectively, these smaller religious groups account for more than one-in-ten Canadians (11 per cent) as of 2011, up from not quite one-in-twenty (4 per cent) in 1981 (Pew Research, 2013).

To further illustrate the religious switching phenomenon, Morency et al (2017) note that among immigrants, the Catholics and Protestants represent indeed a diminishing share from 75 per cent in 1981 to 43 per cent in 2011), while non-Christian affiliations are growing from 9 per cent in 1981 to 26 per cent in 2011. The data for 2011 show an overrepresentation of the non-Christian religions among the immigrant population when compared to the total Canadian population and an underrepresentation of the Catholic, Protestant and No religion groups. The Chinese population for instance which makes one of the largest immigrant groups in Canada is likely to have its religious affiliation increased over time, with some becoming Christians or Buddhists (Skirbekk et al. 2012). This study is based on the analysis of Chinese immigrants (with a large majority being non-religious at the time of arrival) in Canada over three consecutive censuses.

At the same time, Beaman (2017) states that though not unique to Canada, the rise of the number of people self-describing as nonreligious or 'nones' has raised a new complication in the study of diversity. In her opinion however, Chiswick (2014) indicates

that people who self-report ‘no religion’ may nevertheless seek spiritual experience and have a belief system that guides their morality. Whether this is considered to be “secularism,” “humanism,” or simply “no religion,” for analytical purposes it is best viewed as a religion in its own right.

## **2.7 Role of Religious Institutions in Integration of Christian Immigrants in Canada**

According to Janzen et al (2016), Canadian churches have a long history of supporting immigrants and refugees in settling and integrating into Canadian society, and overall, religious groups can provide a sense of community among immigrants (Couton 2011; Tse, 2011) and can support cultural adaptation (Dwyer et al, 2013). Similarly, many Christian congregations within Canada intentionally seek to integrate new Canadians into their worship experience and organizational life with varying degrees of effectiveness and intentionality (Wilkinson 2009; Janzen et al. 2012). However, there is little research on how churches help to settle and integrate new immigrants in Canada, yet the research that is available suggests that they play a significant role (Tse et al, 2011). But what’s lacking is research that answers the question of how churches support immigrants vis-a`-vis government and non-governmental immigrant service organizations (Janzen et al, 2015). At the same time, Janzen et al (2012) had earlier on noted that very few studies have considered the processes and outcomes of recent immigrant integration within Canada’s most common religious settings—Christian congregations.

Hence, this has prompted Reimer et al (2016) to pose the following questions: what role do churches play in large cities when other service organizations are present? Does their role differ when other service organizations are not present?

A study by Angus Reid (2014) indicates that immigrants often seek and find help, both material and spiritual, from Canadian religious communities, which are evidently

integral in new Canadians' journeys into their new lives in this country. In addition, Tse (2011) observes that ethnic religious communities connect newcomers with their home countries but also help them establish belonging in their new country and the religious spaces in which these communities worship, in transnational migration contexts they serve as sites where immigrants can find an alternative sense of familyhood, belonging, and home.

He adds that migrant religious groups in North America have often been construed by geographers and sociologists of religion as communities that enable migrants to integrate in host countries. According to the 2014 National Denomination Survey Report on the role of churches immigrant settlement and integration in conducted Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and Moncton among 200 denominations, an estimated 87 per cent of the 38 denominations that completed the survey revealed that immigrant congregations have the same status as any other established congregation, while 71 per cent indicated that they tangibly support the establishment of congregations for immigrants and refugees who are from a specific ethnic background (Stobbe & Janzen, 2014). The study also revealed that the top three regions of the world from which immigrants originated are South-East Asia and Pacific, Africa and Latin America. However, immigrants also originated from many other regions around the world. Religious institutions therefore can contribute to integration by softening public opinion and creating more welcoming communities (Appleby, 2011). Faith communities therefore promote the perspective that immigrants are contributors to the country, not threats.

In addition, Breton (2012) states that religion and the religious community can play an important role in assisting members of minorities who experience a failure of social integration because of non-receptive and even hostile attitudes on the part of members of the receiving society. In conclusion, Breton notes, Canada admits individuals from all over the world under a variety of different categories: refugees, skilled immigrants, live-in caregivers,

provincial nominees, family class immigrants, business immigrants and migrant workers. However, the immigration system is still complex and undergoing rapid changes as there are a number of economic, political and demographic factors shaping the contemporary immigration system (Satzewich & Liidakis, 2017).

In their observation, Mensah & Williams (2014) noted that Ghanaians, a predominately Christian community, and Somalis, who are predominantly Muslim, are amongst the largest Black African communities in Canada and for both groups, religion is an integral part of their lives. In this respect, Agekyum & Newbold (2016) observed that religious places such as churches and mosques provide avenues for people to interact with each other, promoting trust and solidarity between and amongst members. The study further revealed that the religious sites operated as spaces for healing and provided avenues for active participation in certain rituals such as praying, dancing and worship. This was therapeutic for most of the followers of religion. Connor (2010) supports this theory by indicating that migrants who regularly attended religious groups had better mental health compared to those immigrants regularly participating in other forms of civic life such as ethnic associations, sports or leisure clubs amongst others. (p 48).

An Interdenominational Guide to Action published in 2015 following a research on the role of churches in immigrant settlement and integration in Canada suggests that in order for churches to be effective in working with newcomers, they must implement structures. The structures that emerged from the research include informal support which entails relational support and friendship, introducing them to formal programs such as classes and housing and forming partnerships by collaborating with other churches and groups.

## **2.8 Integration of Christian Immigrants in Canada**

Although previous studies have examined the role of religion in immigrant integration, little systematic knowledge is available on how much and through which

mechanisms religion facilitates or hinders immigrant socioeconomic and cultural integration. (Kogan et al, 2019). In relation to this point, Bloom et al (2015) had earlier expressed other sentiments by stating that little was known about the impact of religiosity and the role of religious group cues in shaping attitudes towards immigration. But according to McAndrew & Voas (2014), religion may integrate migrants in three ways: through providing a cultural identity consonant with a new national identity; in enabling socio-economic participation; and by reinforcing values promoting social order. Etherington, (2019) further argues that religion is one aspect of “social capital” that may influence earnings, and religious affiliation is important when members of the group have shared values, “such that they place greater emphasis on education, the virtue of work, or honesty and other personal characteristics that are rewarded in the labour market. García-Muñoz & Neuman (2012) also observed that the religious practices of immigrants most likely combine components of the two types of social capital. Church services, prayers and religious rituals provide worshipers with a familiar cyclical rhythm and represent continuity between life in the home country and life in the host country while also helping them to establish new ties with the native population and adapt to the new country of residence.

But according to Janzen et al (2012) the first requirement for effective immigrant integration is to create vision. Vision, the researchers note, includes three dimensions of intentionality, resources and principles and values and provides direction as to the kind of social system that is to be desired. Equally important is the creation of social structures that facilitate immigrant inclusion. These social structures provide opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions between immigrants and Canadian-born and connect both to resources needed to adapt to their changing environments (Janzen et al, 2012). Other requirements highlighted by the authors are the adoption of rituals that facilitate cultural inclusiveness, as

well as offering language accommodations in multiple formats and setting as language barriers are a challenge in the integration of immigrants within congregations.

A poll conducted in 2018 by Angus Reid on the religious freedom in Canada, however, found that across three measures - freedom of religion, respect for religious minorities, and harmony among religious groups in Canada, four-in-ten immigrants said Canada performed better than the country they came from. The poll also showed that just over half (55 per cent) of Canadians said religion had a positive effect on the world overall, while immigrants were twice as likely to strongly agree with this sentiment.

## **2.9 Determinants of Religious Practice among Christian Immigrants**

One of the potential indicators of religious observance is how frequently churchgoers attend church. This is according to a study conducted in the United States by Massey & Higgins (2010) who also established that beyond mere attendance, is actual membership in a specific congregation of worshipers. Their detailed analysis of data on religious practice also indicated that the decline was less pronounced among Protestant Christians who stood apart from other immigrants in terms of levels of devotion. The study also established that even before departing for the United States, Protestant immigrants attended religious services far more frequently than other religious groups, Christian or non-Christian. In Canada however, the attendance of religious services is on the decline although Fadden (2009) says that majority of Canadians still identify themselves with a faith tradition. Changes in patterns of immigration are, however, changing how Canadians express their faith, he adds. According to Wilkins-Laflamme, (2014) the reasons for individuals perceiving religious involvement as worthwhile can be multiple. She adds that in areas where religious decline has been underway for some time, evidence is building that religion does not disappear entirely, but rather the size of the actively religious group begins to stabilize at lower levels. Brenner (2011) however states that attendance is a common indicator of religiosity, used as a

predictor in a wide variety of sociological models to “control” for religious belief, fervency, behavior, and practice. Meanwhile, participants in Kitavi’s (2017) study on how the Catholic church in Saskatoon was helping immigrants adapt to Canada suggested to the newcomers that they should take their religion seriously and not forget to exercise their faith when in Saskatoon. For faith and spirituality sustains and keeps people moving during moments of challenge. Pew Research (2018) in their research on religious commitment also established that Christians in sub-Saharan Africa are most likely to say religion is very important in their lives.

### 3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Immigration is vital for Canada's future. As indicated by Simmons & Bourne (2013), about two-thirds of Canada's population growth is accounted for by immigration, a trend which is projected to reach 90 per cent by 2050. Undoubtedly, Canada is one of the world's major immigrant receiving nations even though other countries can legitimately make that claim (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2017). Hence, many individuals around the world are interested in moving to Canada in order to find a better life for themselves and their children and an estimated quarter of a million immigrants are allowed into the country every year so that they can pursue these dreams (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2017). Equally important is the fact that Canada unlike many countries has a very progressive policy on immigration which allows these immigrants to come in. However, new immigrants are faced with several challenges that range from cultural barriers and the difficulty in adjusting, finding a suitable job, adapting to new cultures, lack of social integration and mobility, discrimination and racism. Breton (2012) also notes that in some instances there are changes in religious attitudes and practices and the very fact of being an immigrant or a refugee may heighten the awareness of one's religion, while before emigration, the religious and cultural identity could be taken for granted.

But as they make their way into their host country, immigrant populations feel the need to be settled and become fully integrated in their new community and often look for religious communities for support. While these communities and other religious institutions fill the missing gap, some immigrants still find it difficult to fit in and adjust and adapt to the changing circumstances. Moreover, although Canada is considered religiously diverse, some immigrant and racialized communities still face stereotypes and discrimination, especially when it comes to religious differences (Beaman, 2017; Nangia, 2013), despite the fact that discrimination is against the law. For instance, Ibrahim (2018) states that the 2014 General

Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization measured self-reported violent victimization which includes three types of offences: sexual assault, robbery and physical assault. Individuals who reported no religious affiliation experienced higher rates of violent victimization (113 incidents per 1,000 population) than Christians (67 per 1,000 population). This difference was mainly attributable to age; people with no religious affiliation were typically younger, with more than one-third of them being between the ages of 15 and 29 years, the age group most at risk of violent victimization (Perreault 2015). Additionally, the rate of violent victimization among individuals who reported a religion other than Christianity (72 per 1,000 population) was not significantly different when compared to Christians. (Ibrahim 2018).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the challenges facing African immigrants during their integration and settlement and the role that religion and specifically religious groups (congregations) and religious institutions undertake to ensure the successful integration of these immigrants. Thus, considering these challenges that immigrants and newcomers are exposed to and which may impede their smooth settlement and integration into the Canadian society, the research questions I intend to explore are;

- How do religious institutions encourage and facilitate the integration of African Christian immigrants into Canadian society?
- What are the religious changes of African Christian immigrants upon arrival in Canada? (How do immigrants from Africa change and adapt to their beliefs, religiosity and practice?).

### **3.1 Critiques on Social, Economic and Religious Integration**

#### **3.1.1 Economic Integration**

Tossutti (2013) suggests that region or country of origin is strongly correlated with variations in labour force participation rates. He adds that African immigrants encounter the most formidable barriers to labour market entry, regardless of where they live in Canada.

Further, he notes that compared to their male counterparts, women are more disadvantaged as they work in less well-paying jobs. The main reasons for this disturbing pattern, he says, are grounded in a lack of recognition of their foreign credentials and employment experiences, as well as employers' negative perceptions of African accents. Parental responsibilities presented special challenges for women seeking to retrain or upgrade their skills.

In the province of Québec for instance, the government states that in order to fully contribute to demographic growth, immigrants must permanently settle in Québec. However, a certain proportion of them leave Québec after a few years. For example, the retention rate in January 2019 of immigrants admitted to Québec from 2008 to 2017 was 73.7 per cent. Certain characteristics of immigrants, particularly their language proficiency and immigration category, influence their decision to stay in Québec. This is according to the 2019 public consultation on the Quebec Immigration Planning for the 2020-2022 period.

### **3.1.2 Social Integration**

Integration, according to Canadian scholars is a two-way process whereby groups and individuals participate and interact with others at all institutional levels (Wong & Tezli, 2013). In addition, the researchers argue that the notion of integration in Canada is often contrasted with the notion of assimilation, a more popular concept in the United States, which scholars argue is more of a one-way process of absorption and conformity. Baldesarra (2014) on the other hand observes that while social integration focuses on the ability of newcomers to participate in social institutions such as learning English to be able to effectively use and access education, police, and social welfare institutions, the process of integration requires both economic and social support where these groups of newcomers and individuals (Wong & Tezli, 2013) have full and equitable access to, and participation in, power and privilege within major societal institutions. Equally important, when using the language of assimilation, integration is synonymous with secondary structural assimilation where diverse

ethnic and 'racial' groups are able to participate freely at all institutional levels of the larger society (Wong & Tezli, 2013). But while Canada has reported positive newcomer outcomes, there are many other immigrants who arrive with complex needs such as low literacy levels where according to the IRCC, a significant number of permanent residents report no knowledge of English or French which are the official languages. Moreover, Kaushik & Drolet (2018) have observed that often it is believed that the settlement and integration of skilled immigrants is moderately easy in Canada, and that skilled immigrants do well in Canada after a brief adjustment period. However, owing to numerous barriers, effective integration of skilled immigrants in the mainstream society can also be a challenge.

As earlier indicated, some of the major factors that are considered to be the biggest challenges to effective social and economic integration of skilled immigrants include lack of recognition of foreign credentials, lack of recognition of previous work experience or employers' requirement for Canadian experience, lack of language skills prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination among others (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). Thus, there is more pressure on the settlement system to respond to these complex newcomers needs.

### **3.1.3 Religious Integration**

As Connor (2014) notes, Canada has a religiously mixed population with a slight majority of immigrants having a Christian affiliation. But a survey conducted in 2018 by Angus Reid indicates that Canada's religious landscape has shifted in recent decades, as its composition has grown more diverse with each decade. The research further revealed that almost four in 10 immigrants to Canada are "religiously committed." In other words, they are largely certain in their beliefs, and most likely to attend religious services, pray and read a sacred text regularly. This assertion, as Kitavi (2017) notes is the same for African immigrants, whose practice of Christianity is central through their frequency of attendance at

religious activities, prayer meetings and reading of sacred texts. In the African view she observes, to be religious means that one cannot separate religion and one's way of life.

Mulattris (2009) expressed a somewhat similar opinion by stating that religion was an important factor in the settlement process of African immigrants. In a case study on Francophone African Christian immigrants in the city of Edmonton, he observed that religious groups filled in the gap left by the government and francophone organizations. These groups he added were used by the newcomers to attempt to solve their own challenges. Further, his study revealed that the four major characteristics of these institutions were that they were the principal support of the majority of African newcomers settled in Edmonton. The institutions according to Mulattris impacted positive social changes such as welcoming of newcomers, housing etc, were deeply rooted by their African values, the leadership is somewhat familiar with the Canadian culture and were monoethnic.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This study explores the role of religion and religious institutions in Canada in the integration of Christian African immigrants to the new society. As Griffith (2017) observes, Canada has long been a country of immigrants, largely selected for their ability to contribute to economic development. Additionally, he states that the Canadian model of integration which is based on coherent immigration selection, settlement, citizenship, and multiculturalism policies has been largely successful in terms of integrating newcomers to Canada. However, this process of integrating newcomers to Canada and the creation of an inclusive Canadian society is a complex undertaking that involves many players working together in various formal or informal partnership arrangements (Meinhard & Hyman, 2012). The Federal government has however been and in most cases continues to be, the leading force behind immigration policy and practice, setting admission levels, defining admission procedures, and managing the admission system (Hiebert & Sherrell, 2011).

The church as institution has largely been credited for helping newcomers through a number of initiatives and as Tsang (2015) notes, churches are important in the initial settlement process. Dwyer et al, (2013) conducted a research on immigrant integration and religious transnationalism in Richmond City in Canada between the years 2010 and 2012. One of the research objectives was to explore the social, cultural and religious activities of the faith communities and their role in the social integration of the immigrants. The research based on 22 religious' institutions within the City indicated two main areas in which these institutions encouraged and facilitated integration of immigrants in Canada.

As indicated by earlier scholars, Beattie & Ley (2003,) Waters & Teo (2003), and Ley (2008), religious institutions acted as important sites of integration for migrants through their provision of services. The study of the 22 institutions noted that the religious institutions played a primary role in providing spiritual, social and cultural activities for the members.

Some of these services were provided not only for the members but were also open to outsiders who had not enrolled in the religious institutions. Activities identified that were not limited to group members included care for the elderly, youth programs and emotional support to the communities. As noted by Dweyer et al (2013), churches surveyed indicated the conducting of services in different languages to ensure they accommodated majority of the residents including new immigrants. The study further noted that the religious institutions conducted outreach and inter-faith initiatives that integrated migrants across different institutions. The persons interviewed in the study emphasized the extent to which they enjoyed good relationships with their neighbours of different faiths. Additionally, emotional support was key in enabling the immigrants settle in quickly. This could be one of the significant factors that has led to an increase in African churches in the country. As a result of these activities, they encouraged both the current members and new members including new immigrants to participate and hence integrate with the community at large. These activities significantly contributed towards connecting the migrants to communities, building their social capital and ensuring smooth integration into the Canadian community.

Creese (2011) indicates that African immigrants identified different activities that forged interconnections amongst themselves in Canada. Churches were seen as the primary or initial venues for developing friendships and support networks outside the African community that were critical in creating stronger sense of belonging. By sharing the same faith and beliefs, the African immigrants saw the church as a central pillar to their livelihood as they faced exclusion and marginalization on other fronts. The importance of the churches is manifested in a study conducted in 2010 on twelve different “African” churches located in different municipalities in Greater Vancouver. The churches were found to have African pastors with congregations from diverse countries and services mainly conducted in English language. The growth of such African churches cannot be ignored as they have become the

front line for providing informal support to new immigrants plus referrals to different service agencies, schools and community centers. A clear example noted by Creese (2011) was a fundraising being conducted in 2010 by the Calvary Worship Center in New Westminster to construct a new African church to cater for different congregations. The construction of this would eventually establish a more physical presence in the community and also fulfil its role of integrating African immigrants forging connections across different races, ethnicity and national origin. Esses et al (2010) longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada noted that participation in religious services was an important predictor of how immigrants indicated if their expectations had been met in Canada. The religious institutions were a key part in enabling the immigrants to settle in Canada. The key indicators in the survey were social networks, presence of diverse religious organizations, faith-based programs, relationships between the religious communities and municipalities, and collaboration between the religious institutions.

The survey by Esses et al also (2010) indicated that the institutions provided opportunities for fellowship, involvement and celebrations thereby providing avenues for developing social networks. These networks became the primary social groups through which referrals, child-care and business opportunities were exchanged. This linkage within the same religious institution was also extended to persons in the broader community hence contributing to the social capital. The institutions provided a range of services to new immigrants to assist them in the settlement process. These were both formal and informal programs such as finding adequate housing, language lessons, volunteer services in community programs amongst others. Hence by providing such opportunities in various programs, the religious institutions assist the immigrants integrate into the larger society.

In addition, Esses et al (2010) noted that the religious institutions were key in meeting the immigrants short and long terms settlement and integration needs. Consequently, their

relationship with the municipalities and religious communities was also a critical component in the integration process. Being an important factor in successful integration of the migrants, the religious institutions were seen as having mutually beneficial partnerships with municipalities that was key in town planning processes. Through such partnerships the streamlining of new settlement areas for the immigrants are addressed at early stages and hence the towns are accommodative of the immigrants.

In the 2011 discussion paper by the International Organization for Migration on *Engaging Religious Communities*, it was noted that integration related support was commonly required by newly arrived migrants but also by those who had already stayed longer in the country. The research conducted in member European countries showed that almost all religious representatives received questions and requests for support on every-day issues that included education, employment, youth and family life from the migrants. Many of the respondents in the study indicated their preference to seek migrant support and assistance from a religious institution or community than from a distant official with a different background. The religious leaders were also seen to have regular contacts with public officials and services and hence their role as integration agents was critical.

Although this research was conducted in Europe, the importance and similarities of the role that religious leaders and institutions play in the integration of immigrants cannot be ignored.

Janzen et al (2012) also analyzed findings of a national survey that offered a baseline of how and to what extent local Canadian Christian congregations were responding to this cultural diversity, as the cultural face of Canada was changing. The survey particularly explored how churches were integrating immigrants within the life of their local congregations. In viewing the integration of immigrants within local congregations through a systems change lens, the scholars established that this perspective allowed for a more holistic

analysis of immigrant integration within congregations, at three broad levels. These are: (1) promoting a church vision in which immigrants not only passively belong but also change the very character of the church, (2) creating church structures (or forms) that facilitate the integration of immigrants, and (3) adopting church processes (or functions) that facilitate immigrant integration. These findings affirm that congregants, church roles and activities and other religious engagements are important and cherished among the Christian immigrants as a growing congregation and play a critical role in assisting immigrants to access their new society as well as facilitating their settlement.

Further studies conducted by Tsang (2015) on the impact of Christian churches on Chinese immigrants in Jamaica reveal similar traits. In Tsang's study, the role of the church is emphasized as being critical to the integration of Christian Chinese migrants. The churches were seen as institutions that enabled persons of similar beliefs to gather together and hence create a sense of belonging to the community. The churches provided stability for new immigrants in Jamaica as they played a critical role of enabling the immigrants access critical social and economic networks that were a stepping stone in getting different services in the new country.

Tsang (2015) goes ahead to classify the different aspects that the church plays in the integration process of the Chinese immigrants. This is also as a result of the government not being able to provide adequate integration or settlement services for immigrants. The first category noted in Tsang's study is that the churches provide institutions that share the same language, beliefs and ethnic backgrounds. As a result of these, they foster a sense of community through bonding with persons with similar ethnic backgrounds. Second classification in Tsang's study is the role of networks established by the churches on which the immigrants benefit from. These strong networks often become service providers of settlement services such as assessment, orientation, referral assistance, accommodation and

employment opportunities. Of importance to note is that these services were not only provided at the initial stages of integration of the immigrants but also throughout their stay in Jamaica.

In understanding why, the church services provided towards the new immigrants were successful, Tsang (2015) indicated that this was a result of the services being client-centered and unique to the Chinese immigrants, age, financial standing and migration experience. As a result of such classification, the services were bound to be successful in achieving the ultimate role of integrating the immigrant into the community and thereafter to the wider Jamaican community.

Fredericks (2016) notes and also quotes other researchers as having made it clear that religion plays a critical role in the lives of many migrants, both at the individual level and at the communal level. In her writeup, she indicates that the separation from one's community and the feeling of loss and disorientation results in people holding onto faith to lead them. Hence the notion that religious communities play a critical role in bringing the immigrants together and hence enable them to settle faster as they offer organized structures, support and intimacy.

An additional factor as to the importance of religion is noted by Fredricks (2016) quoting the study of Schreiter of 2009 whereby a number of reasons were underlined on the importance of religion on the settlement process of immigrants in host countries. These reasons included religions itself being a reason to migrate, the sustenance or hope that religion offers in times of difficulty, religion as an identity marker, and also to ensure continuity with the past.

Meanwhile, according to Dennis (2017), transnational migration is growing in scope, complexity, and impact and one distinguishing feature of the contemporary global mass population movements is the involvement of religion in the process. Therefore, it is safe to

assume that this drastic increase of movement across borders (and with religious involvement) comes congregational growth and influences on religious participation. In addition, these movements coupled with the (religious) engagements go against the popular narrative that Christianity is declining and its doctrine and practices is of little or no influence in peoples (Canadian) lives.

In citing the well-known observation by a religious scholar John Mbiti that Africans are 'notoriously religious', Aechtner (2015) states that Africans in general and African migrants in Canada exhibit a commitment to a diversity of religions, ranging from Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic, a myriad of Traditional African Religions, to Baha'i, Judaism, Islam, and Rastafarianism. These different faiths he notes frequently spread out through the lives of those in the diaspora, hence reflecting the varied ethnicities and nationalities of migrants. Similarly, García-Muñoz & Neuman (2013) also stated that the religiosity of immigrants is important from a social perspective due to the massive inflow of immigrants into Western countries, who now constitute a significant share of the population in many countries and has hence received increasing attention of social scientists.

However, it is imperative to point out that there is very limited literature on African Christian immigrants in Canada as the most studies that have explored the theme of religion, global migration and their relationship to integration have significantly focused on African immigrants in general. This view was also highlighted by Aechtner (2015) who quoted Afe Adogame's previous observation on the survey of the extensive African diasporic and migration literature which reveals a lack of theoretical and methodological reflection on the role of religion in the context of contemporary diaspora and migration studies. This, according to him, is despite the fact that African diaspora churches facilitate the integration process of new immigrants into the host society and serve as both security and a bastion for cultural, ethnic, and religious identity. Kitavi (2017) also observed that while religion may

have been significant in the settlement of many immigrants in their new homes in most western countries, there is scarce research on the role religion plays in African immigrants' adaptability to Canada and other western nations. The available literature is however consistent with the opinion of Dennis (2017) who suggests that religion plays a significant role in the course of the migrations. She notes that beginning with their decisions to migrate, through to their settlement in the host communities, migrating individuals and groups use religion which offers channels for religious traditions to cross international boundaries. She adds that international migration also enables local religions to establish network ties with transnational religious institutions and personalities.

In exploring the issue of integration, it could be argued that one feature that characterizes the Christian African community in Canada is the belief that these (Christian) congregations create a strong network and the element of a 'family' that immigrants can look up to for support. For instance, Bibby & Reid (2016) in their book *Canada's Catholics* have explicitly noted that although society has become more polarised on the subject of religion, religious faith remains important in Canadian life because groups like Catholics, Muslims and evangelicals are experiencing a tremendous influx of people. In his participant observation study conducted at an African church in Alberta, Aechtner (2015) also found out that the Africans themselves indicated that churches represent an important factor for the social integration of immigrants arriving to the country. Thus, he noted:

"To be sure, the influences of African diaspora religious organizations are not limited simply to meeting incorporeal religious needs within the confines of church, mosque, or synagogue walls. Instead such communities provide practical assistance for migrants in a foreign land; helping members of the diaspora to negotiate evolving identities and answer practical questions about how to live in a country and culture so far from the African continent." (Aechtner, 2015, p4).

As a vibrant religion, Anderson (2010) also notes that African Christians have an infectious enthusiasm. According to him, Christian worship is a joyful experience to be entered into with the whole person. This he asserts, can perhaps be attributed to the culture of the churches in the mother continent. Anderson, also agrees with the opinion of Harold Turner who four decades ago, suggested that African independent churches offer solutions to problems existing in all Christianity, ‘a series of extensive, long-term, unplanned, spontaneous, and fully authentic experiments from which (Christianity) may secure answers to some of its most difficult questions’. (p11). Based on this statement and taking into consideration the contribution of the church towards immigrant integration, one would then argue that some, if not majority of the African Christian immigrants would essentially be motivated to be part of the congregation, not just for purposes of worship and nurturing of their Christian faith, but because the environment creates a ‘family’ bond among them, establishing connection and helping them to overcome the newcomer challenges. In negotiating these challenges, they do so by creating support networks to share their experiences and acquire a sense of belonging within the new community and as Tsang (2015) indicates, social networks within the church have assisted new immigrants in finding accommodation, jobs, amongst other needs. Studebaker (2012) also rightly indicates that churches endeavor to enhance community life. This vision of community life also includes serving and connecting with their neighbors, such as organizing activity days for children in the neighborhood. Some immigrants also chose to become devoted and they do so by going to church every Sunday as well attending the mid-week services that some churches conduct.

At the same time, given the distinctive challenges that some African Christian immigrants encounter, one would assume that they would be more inclined to patron churches with members of their own race as it makes them feel more comfortable and unified as a group. That is, churches that are predominantly Black and African. This as Tsang (2015) states form

part of an identity and culture which are characteristics that distinguish an ethnic church from other churches. Without an identity unity, the group might fear losing its reason to exist; groups can fly apart without it. However, David Seljak, a professor of religious studies at University of Waterloo contends that involving other races in church leadership is critical to a truly integrated church body and a culture that represents all members of the church. (Afolabi, 2018).

The similarity of these characteristics i.e. identity and culture can be seen in Vancouver among a section of the Chinese population. Todd (2018) observed that although an increasingly large number of Chinese immigrants are starting to arrive in Canada as baptized Christians, most of these newcomers have been converting to the Christian faith after settling in Metro. Todd noted that they often did so after experiencing “culture shock” and an “identity crisis” in their newly adopted country. Many begin attending Chinese churches to strengthen their original Chinese identity, especially since services are always available in Cantonese and Mandarin and even though they are serious about their faith, most Chinese Christians in Metro Vancouver hang on to Chinese material culture.

But after examining religious beliefs and practices of new legal immigrants to the United States, Massey & Higgins (2011) discovered that although people do not change their religious beliefs when they migrate internationally, they do change their religious behaviors. They argued that settling into a country of destination is necessarily a time-consuming process that involves learning a new language, mastering a strange culture, and working hard to earn money and get ahead economically, activities that necessarily compete with religious practice for the scarce time at immigrants' disposal.

Meanwhile, numerous studies have tried to explore whether the traumatic act of immigration is leading to changes in the religious behavior of the immigrating individuals (García-Muñoz & Neuman, 2013). There are those who claim to have no religion and do not

subscribe to any denomination. In relying on the findings of Aleksynska and Chiswick (2013) on a European Social Survey, results indicate that on average, the religiosity of immigrants is greater than that of the native born and is also greater than the religiosity of stayers in the European countries of origin. A global survey conducted in 2012 by Pew Research on the religious affiliation of most immigrants also revealed that Christians were clearly overrepresented among international migrants. The movement of Christianity from one culture to another is due to the concept of mission as Robert (2009) observed. Thus, he notes, the history of Christian mission and of churches' particular missions provides a useful framework for grasping the meaning of Christianity as a multicultural global presence in the world.

The Pew Research report which describes migration patterns in every country of the world also makes clear that immigration is changing the religious face of Canada in unexpected ways. In Canada, for instance, four in 10 immigrants who arrived between 2001 and 2011 identified as Christian, according to the National Household Survey of 2011. However, in their opposing viewpoint and in relying on studies done by other scholars, García-Muñoz & Neuman (2013) suggest that the immigration process is inherently disruptive and leads to reduced participation in religious services following the move. The results of a survey on nearly 1,000 immigrants in Québec City in the 1990s conducted by Connor (2008) supports the argument that there was indeed a decrease in religious participation among immigrants upon their arrival to the new society.

Some of the factors attributed to these lethargic tendencies include lack time and also infrastructural opportunities for religious performance, especially if they belong to a religious minority (García-Muñoz, & Neuman, 2013). Other reasons could be as indicated earlier culture shock, that impacts not only on their religious and cultural norms and customs but their mental well-being as well.

## 5 FINDINGS AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

This study examined the role of religion and religious institutions in the integration of African Christian immigrants in Canada. To be more specific, I examined the impact and influence of Christianity on African Christian immigrants in Canada. As a result, it has emerged that the role of religion and its influence on this particular group has been underemphasized as it does not feature prominently, hence there lacks scholarly research that specifically targets them. Although available statistics show that Christianity is still the most popular religion in the country and by large, North America, most studies have broadly incorporated other religions be it Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism among others and the influence they exert on the migrant followers into their research. The limited studies that do exist focus on a narrow range of Christian denominations or within single geographic communities (Janzen et al, 2012). It is therefore evidently clear that that scholars have paid little attention on Christianity and this glaring gap and omission has led to insufficient knowledge on this topic.

Considering the numbers of immigrants is likely to increase (as projected and in line with the government's plan), it would be important for further studies to address this gap and particularly examine African immigrants in the context of religion and particularly the influence of Christianity in their new environment.

This study also finds that despite the challenges of being newcomers, most of these immigrants endeavor to navigate their way into the new country by using available services and resources. The church is one of the first places they go to. This answers the first research question that sought to examine how religious institutions encourage and facilitate the integration of African Christian immigrants into the Canadian society. Since many people regard the church as a house of worship and prayer, it is also a place that fulfils their aspirations, closeness to God and quests their search for an authentic Christian life in their

new home. In answering the second question on religiosity and how the Africans change and adapt to their beliefs and practices, this research has also established that different diversities converge when people from this community participate in church activities, such as volunteering or community work, as well as religious holidays like Easter and Christmas, Some immigrants would also argue that their spirituality, Christian beliefs and faith in God is enriched by being involved in these church activities. For others however, engaging in these religious activities is not the only way to foster their Christian faith.

As demonstrated by Kitavi (2017) in her research on the role that the Catholic Church plays in the adaptation of African Catholic newcomers to Saskatoon, members of the St. Thomas More African Catholic Community Mass in Saskatoon, said that religion was very important to them and in their lives. Their religiosity, Kitavi noted was demonstrated by their frequent attendance at weekday and Sunday masses, participation in church activities both in Africa and in Saskatoon, and the creation of STM African Community Mass to solve some of their challenges and meet their spiritual and emotional demands. Based on this observation, it is evident that it is difficult to separate religion and these Africans way of life as both are closely intertwined. Despite varying opinions, this study has established that religion is an important between immigrants and the host society and this is vital to their integration.

An additional point to note is that most of the research and theory on religion and migration has been from qualitative research mostly in North America. There has been limited research on a comparative nature conducted in different continents such as Asia, Europe and Gulf to examine if similar traits have been observed so as to conclude the importance of religion on the settlement process of immigrants.

Similarly, there is need to qualify how religion can also be an obstruction towards successful integration of new immigrants into the host community. This can be ascertained

through quantitative research by seeking views of the immigrants on their experiences of integration into the host community.

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