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The persecuted; The current disarray among Canada's refugee officials may be causing drastic slip-ups, if two cases of Coptic Christians seeking asylum here are any indication.

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Page: B1 / Section: :

A family of Coptic Christians who fled from Egypt to escape religious persecution has been told they cannot stay in Canada, even though the Federal Court of Canada found the Immigration and Refugee Board's Refugee Protection Division made "many errors" in ruling against them.

The couple has been waiting almost three years to have their case settled, and now has two toddlers, both Canadian citizens.

Their lawyer, Chantal Desloges, predicts it may well be another three years before their fate is finally determined. If the case ends in deportation, their children will either have to return "home" to an Egypt they have never seen, or stay in Canada without their parents.

The family's case has highlighted many difficulties in Canada's refugee system, particularly for Egyptians claiming religious persecution. According to one advocate, about 100 Egyptian Coptic families are in hiding in Canada or waiting for a refugee hearing. In 2006, 36 of 71 refugee claimants from Egypt were accepted into Canada.

Several are in Ottawa, but they are unwilling to come forward for fear of reprisals against family left behind in Egypt, or arrest if they are here in Canada illegally.

Just four months ago, another Coptic Christian was sent back to Egypt, after the Refugee Protection Division decided it did not believe his claim he would be tortured there. Then, just a few weeks after, clandestine videotapes were made in Egypt that showed the man with deep open wounds on his back. Galvanized, then-Immigration minister Monte Solberg issue a temporary resident permit that allowed the man to return.

Ms. Desloges, who also represented this man, said: "I was ... infuriated that several levels of our government had labelled this man as a liar and refused to open their eyes to the reality in Egypt."
"The fact that we were able to obtain objective proof of torture in this case was quite remarkable -- how many others are there who don't obtain this proof and just disappear after removal?"

The 57-year-old man is now working as a waiter in Toronto. He has asked that his name not be used because he fears reprisals against his family in Egypt.

His reticence about making his name public puts the Egyptian government in a difficult position, says Mahmoud El Saeed, Egypt's ambassador to Canada. With no name, how can Egyptian officials go after the police that this man says tortured him?

The BBC recently carried stories about a video circulating on the Internet showing Egyptian police torturing a man and "those officers are now in prison," says Mr. El Saeed. "I'm not telling you there are no problems. There are extremists on both sides. There are no angels."

Still, Mr. El Saeed says, most refugee claimants exaggerate so they can immigrate to Canada.

In another current case, 30-year-old Atef Botros says he and his wife, Mona Khalil, 26, fled their apartment in Alexandria, on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, in June, 2004, after Muslim extremists broke in and beat him in front of his wife, who was pregnant with their first child. The couple moved in with an uncle in Cairo, then left for Canada a few months later, applying for refugee status when they landed in Toronto.

According to documents submitted to the Refugee Protection Division, Mr. Botros tried to telephone for help just before the attack, but found his phone lines had been cut.

His wife ran to the apartment balcony, screaming for help. Several neighbours came to their aid, including a nearby Muslim, who offered a glass of water.

The couple reported the incident to police, but officials refused to pursue it, saying the matter was "too sensitive."

"They threatened to kill me, as well as my wife and our as-yet-unborn child," Mr. Botros said in the documents to the refugee protection division.

For almost three years now, the family has been living day-by-day in their Mississauga apartment. Mrs. Botros, who had been an accountant in Egypt, has just recently started working in a coffee shop. Mr. Botros, also an accountant, now works as a coffee machine technician.

Mr. Botros is voluble about their situation, but his wife sits silent as two-year-old Carol, and her little brother, Kyrellos, clamber into her lap. Mrs. Botros looks away as she hears her
husband tell their story yet again, gazing out the window or down at her hands. Finally, tears slide down her cheeks.

"I lost my life," she told the Citizen. "But here it is still better," she said through interpreter Majed El Shafie, himself a religious refugee. He added: "She would be afraid for her children and her husband (if they were to return)."

Mr. El Shafie was born in Cairo to a prominent Muslim family, but converted to Christianity when he was 18, much to his relatives' horror. They now refuse to have anything to do with him.

He was arrested in Egypt shortly after he became involved in fighting for the civil rights of Egyptian Christians. He says he was tortured, sustaining deep wounds to his back.

Through Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, he was accepted as a political refugee, and eventually settled in Toronto where he developed One Free World, a human rights organization focused on religious persecution. Most of its clients are Christian, but it has represented Jewish and Muslim clients as well.

Egypt is roughly 90 per cent Muslim, with the remaining 10 per cent is largely Coptic Christian, a branch of the Orthodox Christian church that originated in Egypt and dates back to the first century.

Egypt's legal system is derived largely from the Napoleonic Code, but family law is primarily based on the religious law of the individual concerned, which for most Egyptians is sharia, or Islamic, law.

There have been persistent reports throughout the Middle East of Muslim men luring or kidnapping young Christian girls and forcibly converting them to Islam. Christian families claim their daughters have been abducted and held against their will; Muslims say the girls went of their own volition.

Mr. El Saeed denies that there are concerted plots to convert Christian girls, but Mr. Botros said he got caught up in just such a situation when his church in Alexandria asked him to help a 24-year-old university student, Amira Magdi, who disappeared without any word to her family. When Ms. Magdi finally got in touch, she said she had been forced to marry a 60-year-old man and threatened with death if she were to return to Christianity.

At the request of his priest, Mr. Botros arranged to spirit Ms. Magdi away at 4 a.m. while her husband was at prayer. He took the shaken woman to his house where Mrs. Botros tried to comfort her, and her own family came to visit before she was whisked off to a monastery for safekeeping.

The next morning, attackers broke into the Magdi home and beat the family, including the girl's younger brother, who told them about Mr. Botros, and pointed out his house.
Before long, the gang was pounding on Mr. Botros's door.

Despite this testimony, Canada's Refugee Protection Division ruled in 2006 that Mr. Botros was not entirely credible, that Egyptian police could have given him any protection he needed and that the family would have been safe enough moving to Cairo, a city of seven million; they did not need to be in Canada.

The Federal Court confirmed that ruling Feb. 2, 2007, even though Judge Johanne Gauthier ruled the Refugee Protection Division made "many errors" in assessing Mr. Botros's credibility and whether Egyptian authorities would be able to protect him and his family.

Three weeks ago, on April 5, the Botros's lawyer, Ms. Desloges, filed an application with Citizenship and Immigration Canada asking that the family be allowed to remain in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

So why does the Canadian government have such trouble believing the refugee claimants?

Melissa Anderson, spokeswoman for the Immigration and Refugee Board, says the Refugee Protection Division relies on reports from a variety of sources, including Amnesty International, the Red Cross, and the U.S. State Department. Canada also has its own research staff and reports on various countries.

But the burden of proof is on the claimant, not on the government.

Ms. Desloges says the U.S. State Department's country report glosses over problems in Egypt because it wants to maintain good relations.

"They sugar coat the truth," she says, "and then in Canada we ... get the impression that it's not so bad."

Consequently, she says, a board member hearing a refugee claim is likely to be skeptical.

"The persecution of Christians in Egypt is not officially state-sanctioned, but the Egyptian government relies heavily on the Muslim fundamentalist vote, so it turns a blind eye to the mistreatment," says Ms. Desloges.

"It also does not help that the Christians themselves are afraid to speak out, and will sometimes even deny being persecuted for fear of making their situation even worse."

In most cases, the Refugee Protection Division "panel" that hears these cases is made up of just one person. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2001 called for an appeal division, but that was never implemented. According to the government website: "The current system is fully in accord with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and international obligations and remains fair and
generous even without an appeal on merit."

The Federal Court can look over a few cases, as it did in the Botros case, but its scope is limited to reviewing the refugee board procedures, not the case itself.

"It's totally inadequate," says Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees. "Nine out of 10 cases don't even get leave to appeal."

Even if the court finds the board has made mistakes, "it has to be unreasonably wrong" before the court can overturn it, Ms. Dench says.

"That leaves a whole lot of wrong."

Nicole Demers, Bloc Quebecois MP for Laval, has submitted a private members bill that would require the Refugee Appeal Division to be set up at last. In the past week, her bill passed committee and will now go back to the House of Commons.

But the problems don't end there. The RCMP have charged one immigration judge with allegedly offering to approve the refugee application of a South Korean woman in exchange for sex. A second member also stopped hearing refugee cases after complaints of misconduct of a sexual nature against him. In Quebec, an adjudicator admitted to taking money for approving immigration applications.

In the past few months, Immigration and Refugee Board chairman Jean-Guy Fleury resigned when it became clear the Conservative government wanted to appoint some adjudicators itself.

Then in March, the five-member advisory panel that recommends qualified candidates for adjudicators also resigned over the issue of whether the government of the day should make direct appointments of adjudicators. In the meantime, roughly one third of the 156 positions on the board are now unfilled and the backlog of cases is growing larger every day.

For Ms. Desloges, the bottom line is the claimants, particularly the man who was deported even though he said he would be tortured.

When she first saw the pictures of his wounds, she says, she cried.

"I keep those two pictures on my desk just to remind me every day what a responsibility I have to my clients -- when it goes wrong, how wrong it really goes."
Photo: 1
will have to return to Egypt, a country they have never known, if their parents, Atef Botros and Mona Khalil, aren't allowed to stay in Canada. They said they fled Egypt to escape persecution.

Photo: An Egyptian man, now living in Toronto, shows the wounds he says he got when he was deported back to Egypt after a failed refugee bid in Canada. The man, who does not want his name used, was later readmitted to Canada on a special permit.

Photo: Majed el Snafie displays the scars on his back that he says are the result of torture he endured while in Egyptian custody.

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================================================================================
Faith On Fire: While traditional churches in the West face plummeting attendance, the demographic centre of Christianity has shifted irrevocably to Africa, Asia and Latin America, where a fiery fervour is changing the faith -- and political landscape -- forever.

Saturday, March 3, 2007
Page: B1 / Front

Series: *Faith* on *Fire*

The early warnings were little more than background noise. The local Anglican newspaper reported the controversy over blessing same-sex unions; the Citizen carried a brief about Rome and Beijing squaring off which had the right to ordain Catholic bishops.

News reports about a British Airways employee insisting on her right to wear a small gold cross didn't amount to much more than the occasional Internet posting. Nothing like that was happening here in Canada, after all.

Then, in Tanzania this month, African bishops refused to take communion with their liberal Anglican brethren, determined to split the church permanently if necessary, rather than accept homosexuality as anything other than abjectly evil.

Suddenly, it became clear that the grinding sound behind the news came from a tectonic shift around the world. Canada -- indeed, all of North America and Europe -- is on the cusp of a religious revolution as Latin America, Asia, and Africa rise to dominate the Christian faith.

Almost two-thirds of Christians now live in the global south and a rapidly growing number are Pentecostals, who embrace a supernatural view of life that the secular West has laughed off since the Enlightenment.

They are also known as charismatics, revivalists, or renewalists for their spirited worship. They sing, dance, laugh uproariously, even swoon and mumble or shout in an unintelligible prayer language known as speaking in tongues. For them, it is not frightening, but ecstatic, like a first crush on God.

Most Pentecostals in the global south believe in faith healing, exorcism, prophecy and the imminent end of the world. But most significant is their deep identification with the Bible, especially
its supernatural world of miracles and demons, coupled with the dire physicality of human life. Disease, hunger, thirst and oppression are never far away.

These Pentecostals' zealous commitment to scripture has no real equivalent in the secular West, but then neither does their poverty.

"It takes a miracle to survive in Sierra Leone," says Joel Carpenter, director of the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity at Calvin College in Michigan. "There is no electricity, no doctors ... the kids don't have shots. If you get sick, you pray."

The Bible directs its followers to spread the word of God and Pentecostals answer that call with some of the most aggressive missionary work in the world. One-third of Guatemalan Pentecostals try at least once a day to convert someone.

Because they believe the godless will be condemned to an eternal lake of fire, they bring the same urgency to their conversions that a firefighter would bring to rescuing someone from a burning building, perhaps more.

Michael Wilkinson, a specialist in Canadian Pentecostals and associate professor at British Columbia's Trinity Western University, says the whole purpose of ecstatic worship is to energize the believer for missionary work.

"Most outsiders think the purpose (of Pentecostalism) is to have this experience with God and speak in tongues. But the spirit empowers them to be witnesses to their faith, which is all about mission."

Revivalists now make up one-quarter of the world's two billion Christians and their numbers are growing by 19 million a year. Canada has about 4.4 million, and, by all reports, their numbers are growing here too.

This new Christianity is already having a global impact. In Sicily, it has empowered women to stand up to centuries of machismo. In Latin America, it has given the poor a toehold to climb out of poverty. In Canada, it is offering Inuit and Indian groups a new way to deal with generations of anger towards government.

In all, it is "a major reconfiguration of our most fundamental values and patterns of perception," says Harvard scholar Harvey Cox.

Initially, western right-wingers may be delighted at this huge -- and hugely conservative -- influx of fresh troops in the ongoing "culture wars" with liberals.

But both liberals and conservatives alike in Europe and North America may find they are challenged to see the world in a new way as this spiritual renewal undercuts the notion that only plain-daylight rationalism is a legitimate point of view.
Reason is one way to explain the world, but not always the best or fullest. Margaret Poloma, a sociologist at the University of Akron in Ohio, is "spirit-filled" herself and describes revivalists as "transrational."

It might be new for North Americans and Europeans, but for millions of others, especially in Africa, it goes back generations.

Andrew Walls, an internationally recognized scholar on the spread of Christianity, served as a missionary for 30 years in various African countries, where talk of demons, witches, dreams and visions is commonplace.

He says the Bible is filled with references to the supernatural world; western Christians have just chosen to ignore those verses for the past few centuries.

"People bracketed out large segments of the Bible, which is not an Enlightenment book."

To make Christianity jibe with reason, the world was divided into matters of the spirit and matters of the material world. Any crossing over between them was mediated by theology.

Most people outside the secular West see no such division. "Jesus talks a lot about demons," says Mr. Walls. "They are in his world, the world (of the apostles) and very much part of the world these people live in."

Nor are they quaint cultural artifacts like leprechauns or guardian angels. They are a pressing pastoral issue. "What do you say to someone who says, 'I am a witch. I kill people. I killed three babies. How do I stop?' I have never seen the answer to that in any textbook of pastoral theology."

Pentecostals and renewalists talk about divine healings and exorcisms, but they do not always have a rigid, either/or view of the outcome.

For Pentecostals, a divine healing may be metaphoric or metaphysical. A believer would not necessarily have to be cured of AIDS to feel healed of his grief about having the disease. Similarly, deliverance or exorcism might get rid of a particular demon, or the evil of hunger and bad crops.

Zambian President Frederick Chiluba invited several ministers to "cleanse" the presidential palace of evil spirits and publicly dedicated the country to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Ghana Airways conducted a deliverance service to save the organization from its chronic money troubles.

Pentecostal churches are probably the most important detox centres in Latin America, much more important that Alcoholics Anonymous, says Andrew Chesnut, a history professor at the University of
Houston.

"Faith healing cannot be overestimated. It's really the engine driving this," he says.

Nor should it be dismissed as fakery or simply the power of suggestion. "It's a real kind of healing. Even if we can't believe, they believe they were healed. If it is attributed to Jesus, I don't really think it matters. Who am I to question their faith?"

Christianity has always differed from its Abrahamic siblings, Islam and Judaism, in that it does not have a list of requirements for day-to-day living, nor does it have a single centre like Mecca or Jerusalem.

When St. Peter decided that Gentiles would not have to be circumcised to follow Christ, he enabled Christianity to spread by infusing indigenous cultures rather than overcoming them. In the past two millennia, the centre of Christendom has moved from the Sinai throughout the Mediterranean, to Europe, then to the northwest coast of Africa, and most recently, south to the middle of the continent.

Mr. Walls began writing about this shift almost 40 years ago, believing it to be the most significant since the first century after Christ's death, but most other scholars pooh-poohed his theory.

Then in 2001, historian Philip Jenkins published The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity and the world finally woke up.

Mr. Jenkins, professor of religion and history at the University of Pennsylvania, wove together some startling statistics: Africa went from 10 million Christians in 1900 to 360 million -- or 46 per cent of its population -- by 2000; he calls it "the largest religious change in human history in such a short period."

Some of that is simple demographics: African countries have the highest birth rates in the world at about 42 per thousand, meaning that, in the next 20 years, African Christians will almost double to 633 million, at which point they will outnumber their North American counterparts three to one.

Latin American and Asian birth rates are in the healthy 20s, meaning 640 million Latin Americans will be Christian by 2025, up from 480 million now. About 460 million Asians will be Christians, up from 313 million, not accounting for China, where underground churches may have as many as 100 million Christians, far more than the government's official count of 15 million.

By contrast, Europe's birth-rate barely replaces its population at 10 births per 1,000, and Canada stands at a measly 12 per thousand.

Not only are there fewer faithful, but their faith is tepid at
best. England reports 27 million Anglicans, almost half the country's population, but only 2.7 million of those show up for services on Sunday.

But this is not to say all of Britain's churches are empty. On the contrary, many are jam-packed with immigrants bringing their heartfelt faith back to the countries that once sent out missionaries to convert them in the first place.

In England, a Nigerian leads the largest church built there since the beginning of Christianity, packing in as many as 12,000 Londoners over three services every Sunday. Matthew Ashimolowo hopes to build a 10,000-seat facility and establish a bank "to empower God's people economically" within five years. He says he is trying to reach out to white people, so they can see past the cultural differences of African Christianity. "The problem is, they see us as a black thing, not a God thing," he has said.

But this Nigerian influence is a double-edged sword. British Anglicans, who pride themselves on their tolerance, are at a loss over what to do about Nigeria's primate, Peter Akinola, whose vociferous objection to gay clergy and same-sex blessings has brought the church to the brink of schism. Archbishop Akinola has demanded that any church blessing gay couples be banned, even though the head of the church, Rowan Williams, does not agree. Several conservative churches in Canada and the United States have broken with their local diocese and realigned with African churches on the issue.

In the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, Nigerian Sunday Adelaja claims his Pentecostal church Embassy of God has 25,000 followers despite hostility from Europeans that is pointedly racist. "Even the Orthodox priests say to me, 'Go and play basketball, go and play soccer, but don't try to teach us how to live.'"

In Latin America, Catholics still dominate with 490 million, more than any other region in the world. But, by the bishops' own reckoning, something like 8,000 faithful a day leave for the more lively, personable faith of the barrios. The late Pope John Paul II described the erosion as an "invasion of the sects," that is robbing Latin America of its Catholic culture and destroying its social cohesion, according to a report from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, based in Washington, D.C.

The Catholic church has only recently released its political grip in many Latin countries. Until 1880, Brazilian non-Catholics were not allowed to become members of Parliament.

The church has been notoriously rigid on everything from social justice movements and birth control, in spite of the grinding poverty of its followers, so much so that Pope John Paul II was booed and heckled in an 1983 visit to El Salvador.

But the coup de grace is likely the lack of priests -- just one for every 6,300 people. Mexico tried solving the problem by ordaining
more deacons, clergy who are a step below priests and are allowed to marry. But Rome grew concerned that the deacons might be too left-leaning and put a stop to it.

By contrast, Pentecostal churches have virtually no hierarchy, spreading from person to person, not institution to institution.

"If a new shantytown springs up on the edge of Sao Paulo today, by tomorrow there will be a Pentecostal church, and by the end of the week there will be five different ones. But it will take the Catholic church about a year to establish an effective presence there," says sociologist Paul Preston, who teaches at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, as well as the Federal University of Sao Carlos in Brazil.

The Pentecostal church tells people over and over that God loves them, has a special mission for them in life, and wants them to be happy and healthy here on earth. God’s gifts of the spirit -- miracles, healing, deliverance -- are abundantly available to everyone, not just the chosen few.

Pentecostals preach that family planning is a Christian duty. Wives are told to respect their husbands, but men are admonished not to gamble, get drunk, beat their wives and children, or play around with other women. They are to bring their paycheques back to the family.

If a husband adheres to just a few of these rules, it can make the difference between a family’s survival or failure in a teeming city.

In the Catholic Church, women cannot be ordained as priests, but Pentecostals allow pretty much anyone to lead their worship. This avenue for women’s voices gives them confidence to grow more involved in society at large. Evangelist Brazilian Benedita da Silva rose from an impoverished background to advocate for women’s rights and became Brazil’s first black female senator.

In all, says Mr. Chesnut, "There is a strong demand for hands-on, tangible, palpable religion, the opposite of abstract. It is very body-centred."

If some people find it distasteful or dubious, "that's more about social class."

Or maybe it’s more about the limits of skeptical western culture. "They were never disenchanted. We are, but they weren't. That's the thing."

But in recent decades, millions of impoverished people in developing countries slammed headlong into the modern world as they streamed into the cities, leaving their homes and families, and often their traditional religious practices, in the countryside. Not only is it difficult to find any real employment, but governments, corrupt or inept or both, cannot provide adequate medical care, clean water, or electricity, not to mention civil rights, universal
education, or stable government. The slums surrounding Lagos, Nigeria, are so dangerous few people go into them without a guide.

In the midst of this grief and anxiety, as many as 300,000 might gather for an all-night revival meeting. One denomination alone, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, claims five million followers, as well as a university, a television station, and movie studio whose Christian-themed movies outsell regular films at the box office.

South Korea, another country torn by war, has the largest church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel church with 800,000 members, certified by the Guinness World Records. The church's lead pastor, David Yonggi Cho, set another world record in 1997, attracting 1.5 million people to a Christian rally in Sao Paulo, Brazil, believed to be the largest in the history of Protestant churches.

In 1958, just five years after Korea's civil war ended, Mr. Cho was an impoverished Seoul pastor. He began his church in a colleague's living room, with only one other person in attendance -- an elderly woman trying to get in out of the rain.

Today, the church has a facility the size of a sports stadium in downtown Seoul, a television station, a university, and a welfare "town" for the young, elderly, homeless and unemployed. Full Gospel even has its own mountain, dotted with little huts for solitary prayer and fasting, that attracts more than one million visitors a year, 50,000 of them foreigners. Mr. Cho's reach extends far beyond Korea. In 1976, he established Bethesda Christian University in Anaheim, California, and in 1992, he reached his crowning glory when the World Assemblies of God Fellowship, 50 million strong in 60 countries, elected him chairman, the first non-American to hold the post.

Korea is fertile ground for Christianity in general. Only the United States sends more missionaries abroad.

Not everyone applauds these churches. Some require their desperately poor followers to tithe, or give a set amount to the church regularly. The leaders warn them that God will not reward them if they don't cough up. One Latin American church offers miracles for cash.

"The pastors can basically do whatever they want with the money," says Samuel Bayo Arowolaju, a Nigerian-born expert in African churches now living in suburban Chicago. "The pastors of this church become superheroes or kind of mini-gods."

Some leaders also preach what is known as prosperity gospel, which North Americans might remember from the infamous Jimmy Bakker and his mascara-encrusted wife, Tammy Faye. They used to exhort their followers to pray for a Cadillac, right down to specifying the colour.

In Africa, Christianity rubs up against Islam, also a proselytizing faith. The numbers of Africans animists, and others following
traditional religions, are dwindling, meaning Christians and Muslims must try to convert each other, often with dire results.


Mr. Jenkins' book about the next Christendom made the same point. As the world realigns by religion, "a worst-case scenario would include a wave of religious conflicts reminiscent of the Middle Ages, a new age of Christian crusades and Muslim jihads," he said. "Imagine the world of the 13th century armed with nuclear warheads and anthrax."

Their struggle has already made for some of the ugliest religious persecution in modern history. In the last 50 years, there has been more martyrdom and persecution than in all previous Christianity combined, says Mr. Jenkins.

People flee to Europe and North America where, sadly, more conflict awaits. Immigrants are shocked at the liberal secularism of their new countries, and the host countries, in turn, are shocked at the outspoken rigidity of the newcomers.

This divide between orthodox and moderate within faiths could become more dangerous than friction between faiths, says Harvard religion scholar Harvey Cox. "After all, (Mahatma) Ghandi was killed by a Hindu, and (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak) Rabin by a Jew," he told a recent conference in Montreal.

As tensions grow, the liberals of each tradition try to "dialogue" and "build bridges." It works -- with liberals in other faiths. Meanwhile, the respective orthodoxies are pushed to greater extremes to defend and define themselves.

Last summer, Toronto resident Tarek Fatah resigned as communications director of the Muslim Canadian Congress, saying he was receiving death threats for his liberal positions. A few months later, the congress asked Ontario's attorney general to take action to stop "thinly veiled death threats" fundamentalist leaders had issued against moderate Muslims.

Christians -- except doctors who perform abortions -- generally need not fear for their lives. But the "culture war" in the United States is bitter nevertheless and some people wonder if it hasn't spread to Canada.

In Ottawa, the National House of Prayer and the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, connected to the powerful U.S. group Focus on the Family, are joining the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Real Women of Canada and the Laurentian Leadership Centre, an Ottawa offshoot of the Christian university Trinity Western, to
work together on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and reproductive policy.

Dana Robert, a professor of world Christianity at Boston University, wonders how to prevent Christianity's innate flexibility from becoming its fatal flaw.

"How do we keep it open without making (Christians) feel they must turn to a fundamentalist alternative in order to be heard?"

"By refusing to discuss religion in the public square, Europeans marginalized it and pushed it underground. They ignored it and now it's coming up to bite them."

The scholar Andrew Walls believes this discussion will fall to North America because Europe simply will not be able to work this out. Its Christian decline has been so steep, and its sensitivity -- or wariness -- of other faiths, such as Islam, is so acute that it just can't comprehend the enormity of Christianity's new deal.

"In circles of good Christians, there are frequently anxious inquiries from decent churchgoers on how it can all be stopped," but that just won't work, he says. "I think we will have to work towards a new synthesis, a new negotiation of Christianity and culture. That negotiation will now include a whole range of people who were not included in previous negotiations."

Now, with their newfound power, those excluded parties may be brutally political. Perhaps that is why The Economist and The Wall Street Journal have a sudden interest in China's newfound fondness for faith.

"Once you have a certain size, then you become political," says Mr. Walls. "Churches are political units, sections of civil society. Once you exercise power you are in the political game. The question is, 'How do you do it?'"

Mr. Walls is hoping Christians of different backgrounds will listen to each other and come to a wider understanding of Christ. "The worst case would be if they ... shatter into separate Christianities, becoming concerned with power and self seeking rather than with the will of God."

Mr. Jenkins, who has updated his first book and published a second, The New Faces of Christianity, agrees the implications of a newly-realigned Christianity are more complex -- and hopeful -- than they first seem.

"It's misleading to think we will be entering a new dark age," he said in a recent interview. "We exaggerate the darkness."

"What I am really saying is, yes, there is a very different kind of Christianity and you're not going to like parts of it but it's kind
Frank Kajfes' church frowned on him from the day he was born.

Poor, illegitimate, abandoned and, later, gay -- none of it was likely to get much comfort from a Roman Catholic priest in the northern Quebec mining town of Rouyn-Noranda.

Today, at 60, he is lounging 15 floors above the winding Rideau River, in a sprawling Ottawa condo that he shares with his partner of 31 years, Bryan Wannop. He is a devoted churchgoer, probably because his church, St. John the Evangelist Anglican on Elgin Street, helped the couple celebrate their wedding last year -- in fact, apologized for not being able to actually carry out the service.

Last year, the two were married at the Glebe Community Centre after a service at St. John in which they chose the music, their best men read the lessons, the homily was about gay marriage, the minister asked them to come to the front, as the congregation gave the couple its blessing, and pastor Garth Bulmer thanked them for sharing their day with them.

"To this day, it sends shivers down my back," says Mr. Kajfes.

What a long, long journey it has been for both of them, Mr. Kajfes coming through early years of poverty and insecurity, and Mr. Wannop, now 70, through the days of deep shame when homosexuality was still illegal.

In 1942, Frank's mother Marie left an abusive marriage. Four years later she met a Yugoslavian man, and a year after that, she gave birth to Frank out of wedlock. The baby was a scandal in the town, and an embarrassment to the family she had left behind. Her daughter Jeannette, a devout Catholic, did not invite her mother to her wedding.

When Marie suffered a heart attack, she begged her husband, Frank Senior, to allow the boy to be baptized. He reluctantly agreed although he still forbade his son from attending a Catholic school. So, every Monday, little Frank and the other "errant Catholics," would learn their catechism, or doctrines of the church, and have
their confession heard. Like most boys, they tried to make up flamboyant and shocking sins, but, like most parish priests, their pastor had heard it all.

When Frank was 13, his mother was on the brink of death. But the priest refused to come to the house to give her the Last Rites -- he regarded her as living in sin.

The next few years were even worse. His father went on a job and he was never heard of again.

Mr. Kajfes turned to his relatives in town, but nobody was interested in having him unless he could pay room and board. Finally, his employer at the Radio Hotel gave him a room at the back and let him have his meals in the hotel restaurant as he completed a year of teachers college. Finally, with this skill under his belt, he was able to get out of town and teach.

"By the age of 18, I vowed not to have anything further to do with the church, and I didn't for 45 years," says Mr. Kajfes. "It was a sad, sad story."

Meanwhile, Mr. Wannop was growing up in rural British Columbia where he was not terribly religious, nor was he much aware of what it meant to be gay.

It wasn't until he was 27, in 1964, that he really knew for sure that he was attracted to men, not women. "It wasn't a spiritual struggle, but it was a moral struggle. I felt terribly guilty. In fact, I would go to church and beg forgiveness."

Worse, it was still illegal. In 1967, just a year before the young minister of justice, Pierre Trudeau, would be successful in striking the crime from the books, Mr. Wannop was arrested at Nepean point. He had to tell his minister and boss, both of whom wrote letters to the judge who withdrew the charges on the condition he take counselling.

"I could not believe the acceptance. I felt the immense of them not saying, 'get the hell out of my house.'

Eighteen months of counselling freed him of the guilt.

A few years later, he met Mr Kajfes and they stayed together ever since.

Mr. Wannop attended church faithfully at St. George's on Metcalfe Street but Mr. Kajfes refused to go anywhere near it. When the tenor of St. George's took a decidedly anti-gay tone, Mr. Wannop switched to St. John's, but his partner still would have nothing to do with it.

Then in 2004, after a 31-year silence, his sister, Jeannette, got in touch. She wanted to come visit, and she wanted to go to his church.
"I blanched. I don't do church." He went along anyway, and he even went to the altar rail during communion, although he put his hands across his chest, indicating he didn't want to receive.

The next year, his sister came back, and off they went to church again.

This time he found himself reaching for the bread in communion. The priest gave him a quizzical look and he nodded. She winked and gave him communion. When the cup of wine came along, he took that as well.

"I don't know what the hell happened."

"Ever since I have been a rabid Anglican activist," he says. "I found a spiritual home, a community that accepts me."

"Jesus said one thing: love. Frankly, nothing else matters, That's my theology."

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Bryan Wannop, left, and Frank Kajfes were married at the Glebe Community Centre after a service at St. John the Evangelist Anglican church on Elgin Street. They chose the music, their best men read the lessons, the homily was about gay marriage, and the minister asked them to come to the front, as the congregation gave its blessing. 'To this day, it sends shivers down my back,' says Mr. Kajfes.

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The persecuted; The current disarray among Canada's refugee officials may be causing drastic slip-ups, if two cases of Coptic Christians seeking asylum here are any indication.

Saturday, April 28, 2007
Page: B1 / FRONT
in the National Gallery of Canada

Photo: Church

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Smudging ceremony marks interfaith service welcoming the city's new Catholic archbishop; Today, Archbishop Terrence Prendergast will be officially installed before an invited congregation of 700 and as many as 600 more.

Tuesday, June 26, 2000,
Page: C3
Section: City

John Corston stopped going to mass when he was about 12 years old, around the same time he started drinking.

Yesterday, after 50 long, hard years of coming to grips with addiction, despair, God and the church, Mr. Corston became one of the first natives to welcome a new Roman Catholic archbishop to Ottawa with a sweetgrass ceremony.

He and four others from the Ojibway-Cree, Mohawk and Algonquin nations gathered at the entrance of Notre Dame cathedral on Sussex Drive, and proceeded down the centre aisle burning a "medicine" of dried tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar and sage in an abalone shell.

As they diffused the smoke with an eagle feather, they purified the gathering of more than 1,000 at an interfaith celebration welcoming Archbishop Terrence Prendergast who will replace the retiring Archbishop Marcel Gervais.

The Indian ceremony, also known as smudging, is intended to help people set aside negativity and bring a pure heart to the occasion before them.

It was particularly poignant, given the Ojibway man's background. Mr. Corston's mother and aunt were taken away from their Northern Ontario home near the town of White River to a residential school where she was forbidden to speak in Ojibway, even to her sister.

Yet, as an adult, she not only hunted and trapped to feed the family, she attended mass every Sunday, taking her son John with
her. She was the one person who made him feel really loved.

But drinking was a way of life for her and before long, it engulfed John, too.

By the time he was in his 30s, he had left Northern Ontario, drifting from province to province, living on the street, addicted to drugs.

"I was dying, but I didn't care. I didn't care for anyone or anything."

He attributes his change of heart to a moment in New Brunswick when someone simply said a prayer for him. He heard: "I am your father. I love you. I will gently set you free. Trust me."

"Hearing those words changed my life."

In 1998, he founded the Kateri Native Ministry of Ottawa, which works toward harmony between the church and First Nations, and to incorporate native culture and traditions into the Catholic tradition.

In his sermon, Archbishop Prendergast acknowledged the pain of the residential schools, saying, "we repent of these failures and ask God to guide us in reconciliation."

In a church still mastering the delicate dance of theological continuity and cultural change, the entire service seemed particularly surefooted.

A prayer in French followed the smudging ceremony, reminding everyone that this is the city's first anglophone archbishop in living memory. It wasn't so long ago that Ottawa's French and Irish Catholics loathed each other so much the Irish built their own church just a few blocks away, St. Brigid's on Murray Street.

Next there was a warm and genuine welcome from John Baycroft, Ottawa's Anglican bishop emeritus, who is on various committees trying to find common ground to reunite the two churches after the Protestant Reformation of the 17th century.

Finally, Ottawa Mayor Larry O'Brien, a voice from the secular world, welcomed the archbishop.

The service, which coincided with the 160th anniversary of the archdiocese, offered no communion, thereby sidestepping the issue of having to refuse non-Catholics the host. But archdiocese spokesman Gilles Ouellette says this celebration, preceding today's formal installation, was held to accommodate as many people as possible, not to dodge a socially awkward moment.

The official installation starts today just before 10 a.m. when about 700 invited guests will be seated in the cathedral. The public is welcome to take the remaining 600 or so seats, but they are
warned to come early especially as parking is reserved along 
adjacent streets.

Preceded by incense, a large cross and an ornate Gospel book, 
bishops from across Canada will walk down the aisle. Jean-Claude 
Cardinal Turcotte of Montreal, and Marc Cardinal Ouellet of Quebec 
City will be in the procession with Papal Nuncio Luigi Ventura, the 
Pope’s diplomatic representative in Ottawa, bringing up the rear, 
attended by his secretary who will hold any documents he may read 
from.

As the installation begins, Archbishop Prendergast will stand 
outside the cathedral doors, attended by Master of Ceremonies Father 
Daniel Berniquez and two adult acolytes, or servers.

The heavy wooden door will be fitted with a microphone so everyone 
inside can hear the new archbishop knock, while his predecessor, 
Archbishop Marcel Gervais, welcomes him in.

He will kiss a crucifix, and then make his way up the centre aisle, 
and down both sides, sprinkling the area with holy water.

The nuncio will lead him to a chair while the papal bull or 
documents from Rome naming him archbishop are read aloud, and then 
he will be taken to his official “throne," a heavily carved wooden 
chair upholstered in gold fabric.

A solemn mass will follow, and then a more casual period when the 
new archbishop will greet wellwishers at the church door on Sussex. 
A relatively informal buffet lunch will be held at the Westin Hotel 
afterswards.

The new archbishop will fly to Rome later in the week for the 
Imposition of the Pallium, when Pope Benedict XI will bestow a 
narrow band of wool, woven from the fleece of lambs who are bound 
(gently) in white satin ribbons and blessed on the Feast of St. 
Agnes.

Despite the long history of the Ottawa archdiocese, Archbishop 
Prendergast is only the 10th leader, so his installation comes with 
great fanfare.

The city has about 350,000 Catholics, almost half the urban 
population, but many just roll their eyes at the pageantry and 
ritual. The symbols seem empty, or, worse, full of a triumphal, 
ostentatious pride.

Laura Sheahan, a Catholic author and senior religion editor at the 
online site beliefnet.com, says a lot of modern-day Catholics wonder 
about the pomp, "Is this what Jesus would have wanted?"

When Sean Cardinal O’Malley replaced Bernard Cardinal Law after sex 
abuse scandals rocked Boston, he made a point of simplifying his 
robes for the occasion, and joked that scarlet robes of his office 
would be best worn hunting with the aim-challenged U.S. vice
president Dick Cheney.

But Jacques Dumas, the sacristan at Notre Dame, holds a different view.

As we spoke earlier this week in the spacious sacristy adjacent to the main church, he carefully laid out the chalice and crozier, or shepherd's hook, to be used today, both from 1847. The silver chalice was a gift from Pope Pius IX and the wooden crozier was used by Ottawa's first bishop, Bruno Guigues. Neither were the most precious nor most ornate pieces in the cathedral's vaults, but they were deemed the most appropriate for the day.

As a recent student of theology and a consecrated lay member of the Oblates, Mr. Dumas sees Catholic symbolism as a system of landmarks in a modern world.

But its meaning is increasingly lost, even for the devout.

"They don't disrespect it but they don't understand it. We have to educate people to keep our roots. If we don't have tradition, we don't have a past, you don't know who you are."

"We see the past as not good, (but) we can't comprehend the present without a context."

For John Corston, there is one constant. "Christ didn't separate me from my people and traditions. Man did that. But He brought me back to them."

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Those who gathered at last night's service at Notre Dame Cathedral blessed lit candles and listened to words from the new archbishop, Anglican bishop emeritus John Baycroft and Ottawa Mayor Larry O'Brien.

Corston, who founded a ministry that works toward harmony between the church and First Nations, participated in last night's ceremony.

/ Daniel Beland, an Algonquin native, left, performs a sweetgrass ceremony at a multifaith service. The ceremony welcomed Archbishop Terrence Prendergast. The ceremony was intended to help people set aside negativity and bring a pure heart to the occasion before them.
Sacred heritage; As under-utilized churches begin closing, heritage activists fear the loss of important pieces of our cultural history.

Saturday, December 22, 2007
Page: B1 / FRONT
Section: Go

BY THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

The thousands who daily rush by the old Bronson church probably have no idea how much work went into every single stone. They might not even know its name: Erskine Presbyterian. Built in 1901. Erskine has been empty for a few months now, another in the procession of once-majestic churches crumbling and closing their doors. Ottawa -- like most of Europe and North America -- is losing more of its history every day.

Sandy Smallwood is an Ottawa developer and heritage activist whose offices are just a few blocks down Bronson in a meticulously restored Victorian home. "Every time you go by a church, stop and look at the stones," he says.

"Each one of those blocks of limestone is beyond my capability to even lift. Yet it was hand cut, beautifully squared. Each one is a work of art. If you think of the time that went into making each one of those stones, and then think that a bulldozer can come in and knock them down in a few hours and cart them off to a landfill site...

"It's tragic when you think of the blood, sweat and tears that went into creating those structures -- beautiful keystones, the stained glass, the quarter-sawn oak panelling and pews. It's sad to see such wonderful craftsmanship being destroyed."

By 2016, Quebec will have lost half of its 2,000 churches, and Ottawa may be heading the same way, says Michel Prévost, the University of Ottawa's chief archivist and a 30-year veteran in the war to preserve the region's heritage. "It's just the beginning."

Despite this rapid attrition, only about 15 of the 250 or more Christian churches in the Ottawa area are protected by heritage designations.

In addition to Erskine, several more of Ottawa's founding congregations have succumbed:

1 St. James Hull, the first Anglican Church in the area, closed in 2006. The stone building on Place du Portage at Rue St-Jacques was
built in 1901 and its cemetery, where many of the city’s founding fathers are buried, dates back to 1801.

1 First United Church, built in 1911 at Kent and Florence streets, closed its doors this spring and is now renting space at an Anglican church in Westboro.

1 St. Brigid’s Roman Catholic Church on Murray Street closed amid much acrimony when the archdiocese decided against restoring the 117-year-old church despite the congregation’s best efforts at fundraising. The church was deconsecrated in the autumn, but former parishioners still drop by, asking the new owners if they can just sit and pray for a moment.

More closings are likely on the horizon. The Anglican Church recently reviewed all 137 churches in the 47,000 square kilometres of its Ottawa diocese. Several inner city parishes were tagged with the ominous moniker, "vulnerable urban location" and some rural parishes were dubbed "final generation," meaning they would not have to close but neither would they get any funds to stay afloat -- an ecclesial "do not resuscitate" order.

The designation outraged elderly parishioners such as Anne Senior of St. Thomas in Fitzroy Harbour. She told the diocese’s annual meeting that it was like hearing from her church family, "... you have a disease. You are dying and there is no hope of surviving. And, by the way, the family is withdrawing all support."

Ottawa’s 110 or so Roman Catholic churches are likely to face a similar review as Terence Prendergast, the new archbishop, travels throughout the archdiocese getting to know each parish. In his last posting in Halifax, Archbishop Prendergast audited all the churches, deciding which had to close. When he left earlier this year, Haligonian Catholics were fighting his order to close St. Patrick’s, built in 1883.

Msgr. Kevin Beach, spokesman for the archbishop, would not say whether Ottawa would have a similar shakeup, although he did say the archbishop is getting a sense of "where we’re at and where we should be going."

"No bishop wants to close a church," says Msgr. Beach. "In some cases, families have been there for generations. The hard fact is that there are more churches than we can use."

Some of the people who are so militant about saving these heritage buildings are not churchgoers, much less contributors to the collection plate. "Where’s the contradiction here?" asks Msgr. Beach ruefully.

Church leaders say they are in the business of saving souls, not buildings. Rev. David Giuliano, head of the Canadian United Church wrote to congregations across the country, telling them to worry less about buildings and budgets and more about the "suffering of the world around us."
"Our hope is not for our survival, or even growth. I am praying that our preoccupation with getting people into church is transformed by a passion for getting the church out into the world."

Heritage advocates believe church elders miss the point. "It's more than just going to church," says Mr. Prévost. "People have to be aware of that. It's part of the history of the country. When the first people arrived, the first thing they did was build a chapel and a cross. The Ukrainians, Irish, English, Scots, they all came with a part of their religious heritage.

To Mr. Prévost, the church belongs to the people, not the priests: "Even if we aren't going to church, our ancestors -- grandfathers and great grandfathers, our parents -- they paid for it by way of the collection plate, and also by their time, as they built or painted or cleaned the church."

David Flemming, president of Heritage Ottawa, acknowledges, "From a strict biblical sense, you don't need a big church. It's where people gather and worship and it's a community. You could do it in a cave."

"I have some sympathy with church leaders who say, 'We're not in the heritage business.' Well, they're not, but they do have a certain responsibility to the ones they own."

But clergy balk at suggestions that a church should hold endless pancake suppers to raise money for repairs. Even congregations who want to hang on to their churches are often too elderly and few in number to keep it going. For them, it's downsize or die.

Heritage advocates admit these lovely old buildings are devilishly difficult to convert. Churches made into homes have an air of diminishment, as the television blares on the former altar, and the dishes pile up in what was once the sacristy. A church converted into a bar can look maliciously debauched. Museums are quietly respectable, but they don't make any money. Cirque de Soleil uses the soaring spaces of a Quebec City church to practise acrobatics, but how many wealthy circuses are there?

Even if society is no longer religious -- maybe particularly if it isn't -- the language of religious symbol tells us where we come from. The pantheon in Rome is still standing, long after its gods have faded away, says Peter Richardson, author of the recent book, Canadian Churches: An Architectural History. Mr. Richardson is former vice chair of Ontario Heritage Foundation, an architect, and emeritus professor at the University of Toronto in the department for the study of religion. "We would be incredibly poorer if we did not have the remains of some of the great buildings of antiquity that were used for religious purposes.

"Those things are unbelievably important to our understanding of who we are. The heritage aspect of church buildings ... cannot be trumped simply by functional considerations ... how many people are
using it, are they paying their way, and so on."

Our secular society has little inclination to worship at church and less to maintain any building that is earning its keep, either in profit or function, preferably both.

Yet we do have a sense that we are missing something. Everyone decries suburban roads lined with strip malls and box stores, and every bride wants to be married in a little chapel that really looks like a church. We have not entirely lost the sense of meaning; it is just that we have lost the language of symbol, says Mr. Richardson. "We don't really know what a church is saying to us."

Mr. Richardson's book has not been out more than a month, and already five of its featured churches have been lost. A famous cathedral in Fredericton was hit by lightning and an arsonist burned a famous church in Nunavut designed to look like an igloo.

The book closes with St. Stephens in the Field in Toronto. "It's a beautiful and very important building historically, but it is likely to be unable to rescue itself. I haven't yet heard anyone say, 'let's compromise, let's save the building.'"

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First baptist church

n angel surveys the Rideau Convent Chapel, which was reassembled inside the National Gallery of Canada, after the convent was torn down in 1971 to make way for development on Rideau Street.

St Baptist Church at Laurier and Elgin streets in downtown Ottawa, celebrated its 150th anniversary this year.

St. John's in the Wilderness church, left and above, in the Outaouais, has an aging and shrinking congregation.

Photo: St. John's in the Wilderness church

/ St. Stephen's Anglican Church in Buckingham, one of the many small churches in the Outaouais, was built in 1899 of stone.

/ St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church was built in 1889 and closed by the archdiocese earlier this year despite the congregation's efforts to save it.

/ With shrinking church