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## Faith as a Cornerstone: Resilience, Adaptation, and Cultural Cohesion in Slovak Immigrant Communities in Canada<sup>1</sup>

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In the wake of increasing secularization and religious pluralism, the Slovak-Canadian community offers a compelling case study on the role of religion and religious institutions in shaping immigrant identities and contributing to broader societal cohesion. Drawing upon an interdisciplinary array of scholarly works, historical documents, and statistical data, this paper aims to explore the multifaceted relationship between the Slovak diaspora in Canada and their religious affiliations. It delves into the historical background of Slovak immigration to Canada, the social and cultural impacts of religious practices, and the complex interactions between religious identity and modern secular Canadian society. Our approach reveals that religious institutions serve not merely as spiritual sanctuaries but also as vital agents in preserving cultural heritage, fostering social integration, and contributing to the moral fabric of Canadian society at large. Our findings suggest that religiosity among Slovak-Canadians serves as a microcosm that reflects broader themes in the dialogue between faith and multiculturalism in contemporary Canada.

Slovak-Canadian Community, Religious Traditions, Religious Institutions, Social Cohesion, Cultural Preservation, Religious Influences.

### I. Introduction

The Slovak diaspora in Canada, while not as numerically large as some other ethnic groups,<sup>2</sup> offers a fascinating lens through which to explore the complex dynamics of religion, culture, and identity in a multicultural society. Over the years, the role of religious institutions among Slovak-Canadians has evolved yet remained significantly impactful, making it a fertile ground for academic inquiry. This paper aims to delve into this intricate tapestry, focusing on how religious practices and institutions have influenced the Slovak-Canadian community and, by extension, the broader societal landscape in Canada.

In understanding the religious life of Slovak-Canadians, one must consider a variety of factors ranging from historical immigration patterns to contemporary social.<sup>3</sup> These factors

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<sup>2</sup> Data from the last available census indicate that less than 73,000 Canadians claimed Slovak origin. See: Kirschbaum, S. J.: Slovak Canadians. In: *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada. (12.06.2008; Last Edited 10.09.2019). Available at: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/slovaks>

<sup>3</sup> Hrešková, E. – Hock, R.: Slovak Catholics in Canada: The role of the Church in preserving the Slovak identity. In: *Central European Journal of Canadian Studies*, 2018, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 137-148.

coalesce to form a unique religious landscape that is not only a testament to the community's resilience and adaptability but also a reflection of the transformative power of faith in immigrant communities.

The paper is anchored in an extensive heuristic analysis of existing literature and several interviews conducted with key members of the Slovak-Canadian community, thus adopting a qualitative methodological approach.<sup>4</sup> To gain a deeper understanding of the nature and significance of religion in the Slovak immigrant experience in Canada, it is important to recognize the immense contributions of the Slovak-Canadian scholars of Slovak Immigration. Most notably, Ondrej Mišál from the Lutheran environment, and Prof. Marian Mark Stolarik from the Catholic environment have provided invaluable insights. Moreover, not only the written scholarship of Slovak Canadian scholars has been instrumental, but also their personal conversations and engaged observations<sup>5</sup> with immigrants have been of profound value. For instance, figures such as Pastor Dušan Toth (Toronto, ON),<sup>6</sup> Rudy Bies (Mississauga, ON),<sup>7</sup> Gitka Galat (Welland, ON),<sup>8</sup> Mary Sirotnik, Anne Smith (Stoney Creek, ON)<sup>9</sup> and other have established meaningful connections between academia and the community, by facilitating a better understanding and interpretation of the Slovak immigrant experience in Canada. The choice of a qualitative study is rooted in the belief that the complexities of human experience and social phenomena cannot be fully captured through quantitative metrics alone. The interview provides firsthand insights into the community's struggles and triumphs, thereby enriching the academic discourse on immigrant experiences.

This paper is organized as follows: First, we will provide a historical background of Slovak immigration to Canada and the role of religion in these early communities. Subsequently, we will explore the impact of religious practices on social integration and cultural preservation. Contemporary challenges and opportunities will then be discussed, followed by specific case studies that offer a more granular view of the topic. Finally, the paper will conclude by elucidating the broader implications of our findings for Canadian society at large, informed by a critical analysis of both religious and secular perspectives on communal well-being.<sup>10</sup> The paper is structured to offer both breadth and depth, moving from a general overview of immigration patterns and challenges to a focused case study that serves as a microcosm of the broader community. It seeks to answer several pressing questions: How do Slovak immigrants negotiate their dual identities? What role does religion play in cultural preservation? How has the advent of digital technology impacted the community's efforts to maintain cultural continuity? And most crucial-

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<sup>4</sup> Our current study builds on the partial results of our research published in: Valčo, M. – Valčová, K.: Preserving Tradition: The Importance of Religion in the Experience of Slovak Immigrants to Canada 1. In: *Theologos*, 2023, vol. 25, no. 1, p. 139-151. Our research is supported by the APVV 20-0263 grant „Aktuálne kultúrotvorné, identifikačné a revitalizačné procesy v prostredí etnických minorít: Slováci v Argentíne a Kanade.“

<sup>5</sup> Personal conversations and engaged observations can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of Slovak immigrants and their faith communities in Canada. These conversations can help us to understand how religion has shaped their lives in both positive and negative ways. For example, they can shed light on the ways in which religion has provided comfort, support, and a sense of community to Slovak immigrants. They can also reveal the challenges that Slovak immigrants have faced in maintaining their religious traditions in a new and unfamiliar environment. Engaged observations can also provide valuable insights into the role of religion in Slovak immigrant communities. For example, they can help us to understand how religious practices and beliefs are transmitted from one generation to the next. They can also reveal the ways in which religion shapes Slovak immigrant identities and communities.

<sup>6</sup> Valčo, M.: Interview with pastor Dušan Toth on July 12, 2019, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

<sup>7</sup> Valčová, K. – Valčo, M.: Interview with Rudy Bies conducted on July 18, 2022, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Valčová, K. – Valčo, M.: Interviews with Gitka Galátová conducted on July 19 and 20, 2022, Mississauga, Ont., Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Valčová, K. – Valčo, M.: Interview with Anne Smith and Mary Sirotnik conducted on July 19, 2022, St. Catherines, Canada.

<sup>10</sup> Sheiman, S. B.: *Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion Than Without*. New York: Alpha Books, 2009.

ly, what can be learned from this community's experience that can inform broader policies and practices aimed at preserving cultural heritage in immigrant communities? The objective is to offer a comprehensive yet nuanced understanding of the role of religion in the Slovak-Canadian community, with the aim of contributing to the broader discourse on religion's place in modern, multicultural societies.

## **II. Historical Background of Slovak Immigration and the Role of Religious Institutions**

### *Overview of Slovak Immigration to Canada*

The history of Slovak immigration to Canada is a tapestry woven from various threads: economic, political, and cultural forces that prompted individuals and families to seek a new life in a foreign land.<sup>11</sup> Early immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily drawn by economic opportunities.<sup>12</sup> However, subsequent waves were often propelled by political upheavals, notably the world wars and the Cold War era, leading to a diverse demographic in terms of motivation and religious orientation.<sup>13</sup>

The historical backdrop of Slovak immigration to Canada is characterized by four distinct waves, each marking a unique socio-political context and contributing diversely to the intricate relationship between religion, culture, and identity within the Slovak-Canadian community.<sup>14</sup> The first wave, spanning from 1885 to 1914, saw an influx of around 5,000 manual workers lured by the promise of land grants from the Canadian government. Primarily driven by economic motivations, this wave did not significantly engage in political activities, yet their religious and cultural practices laid the foundational stones for community cohesion.<sup>15</sup> The era encapsulates a relatively uncomplicated, though not insignificant, contribution to the embryonic formation of Slovak identity in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

The interwar years heralded the second wave, estimated to comprise about 40,000 individuals, predominantly young and skilled laborers. These immigrants were motivated by the prospect of accumulating wealth to purchase land in their homeland, Slovakia. The period was also marked by the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, an event initially welcomed by Slovaks.<sup>17</sup> However, the perceived erosion of Slovak autonomy and national identity led to ideological divisions within the Slovak-Canadian community, indicating a more complex political involvement compared to the first wave.<sup>18</sup>

The aftermath of World War II and the Communist takeover of 1948 ushered in the third wave of approximately 20,000 Slovak immigrants, primarily consisting of refugees. This era deepened the political schisms within the community, intensified by the divisive nature of Com-

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<sup>11</sup> Jakešová, E.: *Vyst'ahovalectvo Slovákov do Kanady*. Bratislava: VEDA, 1981; *Emigrants from Slovakia – Immigrants to Canada as an Object of Historical Research*. In *Emigration from Northern, Central, and Southern Europe: Theoretical and Methodological Principles of Research* [Chapter 4, Emigration]. Krakow: Jagielloński Uniwersytet, 1984, p. 209-220.

<sup>12</sup> Reguly, B.: *The Saga of Slovak Settlement in Canada*. The Slovak Canadian Heritage Museum [online], 2000. Available at: <http://www.slovakcanadianheritagemuseum.ca/articles/the-saga-of-slovak-settlement-in-canada/>

<sup>13</sup> Raska, J.: *Freedom's Voices: Czech and Slovak Immigration to Canada during the Cold War*. Doctoral Dissertation [online]. University of Waterloo Space, 2013. Available on the Internet: <http://hdl.handle.net/10012/7862>.

<sup>14</sup> Kirschbaum, S. J.: *Slovak Canadians*, c. d.

<sup>15</sup> Stolarik, I.: *Spomienky Pionierov*. Toronto: Kanadská slovenská liga, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Gellner, J. – Smerek, J.: *The Czechs and Slovaks in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968.

<sup>17</sup> Jakesova, E.: *Slovak Emigrants in Canada as Reflected in Diplomatic Documents (1920–1938)*. In: *Slovakia*, 1991, vol. 35, no. 64-65, p. 7-35.

<sup>18</sup> Kirschbaum, J. M.: *Slovaks in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Ethnic Press Association of Ontario, 1967.

munism and its impact on the homeland.<sup>19</sup> Organizational formations like the Slovak World Congress, established in 1970, began to coordinate Slovak organizations globally, advocating for Slovak freedom and independence.

The fourth and final wave, triggered by the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, consisted of around 13,000 well-educated refugees. Their immigration marked a significant moment in the political activism of the Slovak-Canadian community, adding another layer of complexity to its history. This wave was particularly involved in establishing organizations that reflected their nuanced views on Slovak autonomy, independence, and democracy.

Throughout these waves, Slovak immigrants have predominantly settled in urban centers like Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg.<sup>20</sup> Despite facing challenges in preserving their religious and cultural identity, the community has continued to celebrate its heritage through a plethora of events, activities, and organizations, such as the Canadian Slovak League and the Slovak Catholic Sokol, among others.<sup>21</sup> These institutions<sup>22</sup> not only serve as custodians of Slovak culture and heritage but also act as platforms for political expression, reflecting the community's intricate and multifaceted relationship with its homeland.

### *Overview of the Significance of Religion for Early Immigrants*

Upon arrival, religious institutions often served as the cornerstone around which Slovak-Canadians organized their social and cultural lives.<sup>23</sup> Churches were not merely places of worship but also community centers where Slovak culture, language, and traditions were preserved and passed down through generations. This preservation was particularly critical during periods when immigrants faced strong assimilative pressures from mainstream Canadian society.<sup>24</sup> Within the broad category of religious institutions, there existed a diversity in terms of denominational affiliations. The majority were Roman Catholic, but other Christian denominations and even non-Christian faiths were represented, reflecting the pluralistic religious landscape of Slovakia itself.<sup>25</sup> These divergent practices contribute to a rich, multifaceted religious life that informs our understanding of how faith intersects with cultural identity.

The landscape of Slovak-Canadian history underwent a notable transformation following the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993. The shift towards a socio-cultural mission was paralleled by the burgeoning influence of Slovak-Canadians across diverse sectors – politics, education, sports, music, and film. This diversification, however, did not dilute the community's core cultural and religious values; rather, it expanded the avenues through which these values could be articulated and preserved.

Benefit societies, initially established by early immigrants, have metamorphosed into vibrant socio-cultural platforms, now encompassing activities such as dance groups and art exhibitions. These societies act as microcosms, preserving the Slovak ethos within the broader Canadian

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<sup>19</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: Slovaks in Canada and the United States, 1870–1990: Similarities and Differences. Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: Slovaks in Canada and the United States, c. d.

<sup>21</sup> Kirschbaum, S. J.: Slovak Canadians, c. d.

<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive list of existing Slovak Catholic institutions can be found in: The First Catholic Union. Slovak Catholic Parishes and Institutions in the United States and Canada. Cleveland: The Union, 1955.

<sup>23</sup> Hrešková, E. – Hock, R.: Slovak Catholics in Canada, c. d.

<sup>24</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: Slovak Immigrants Come to Terms with Religious Diversity in North America. In: The Catholic historical review, 2010, vol. 96, no. 1, p. 56-84.

<sup>25</sup> Štatistický úrad SR: Sčítanie obyvateľov, domov a bytov. Náboženské vyznanie [online]. 2021. <https://www.scitanie.sk/k-rimskokatolicnemu-vyznaniu-sa-prihlasilo-56-obyvateľov>. (cit. 28.8.2023).

context. Parallel to this, the clergy – both Catholic and Protestant – have remained pivotal in sustaining the group's collective consciousness and cohesion. Their role extends beyond the spiritual realm, serving as linchpins in the intricate architecture of Slovak-Canadian identity.

Geographic and religious affiliations are intertwined in the Slovak-Canadian community fabric, adding another layer of complexity to their collective identity. For instance, the Slovaks in Toronto may identify themselves based on their region of origin – be it Slovakia or the Lowlands – as well as their religious inclination, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran. This dual axis of identification is celebrated and maintained through events like Slovak Day and various religious holidays, which serve as both cultural and spiritual milestones.

The religious landscape of the community is remarkably diverse, evidenced by an array of Roman Catholic parishes across Ontario and Quebec. From the Slovak Jesuits in Cambridge to Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in multiple locations, these parishes are not just sanctuaries of faith but also strongholds of cultural preservation. In addition to the Roman Catholic establishments,<sup>26</sup> seven distinct communities fall under the Slovak Byzantine Catholic Eparchy in Canada. Locations range from Toronto to Montreal, each adding to the rich tapestry of religious affiliations.<sup>27</sup> An intriguing yet somber note is the unfinished and deconsecrated Slovak Cathedral of the Transfiguration of our Lord in Markham, a monument symbolizing both commendable spiritual aspirations and personal (and political) complexities involved.

The Lutheran Church also has a significant presence, with congregations spanning various cities in Ontario and Quebec. More specifically, what follows have been the main centers of Lutheran faith and worship in Canada: Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ontario; Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Slovak Church in Thunder Bay, Ontario; Nativity Lutheran Church in Kingsville, Ontario; St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Smithville, Ontario; St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Toronto, Ontario; Nativity Lutheran Church in Windsor, Ontario; and Ascension Lutheran Church in Montreal, Quebec. These congregations serve as spiritual havens and cultural repositories, much like their Catholic counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, the post-1993 period has witnessed a shift in the Slovak-Canadian community's focus, from a primarily political orientation to a more balanced socio-cultural agenda. Through various forms of organizational life and religious observance, the community has not only sustained but enriched its multifaceted identity, which remains resilient in the face of the complex demands of diasporic existence. This adds yet another dimension to our nuanced understanding of how religion, culture, and identity continue to evolve in the Slovak-Canadian community, offering helpful insights for our interdisciplinary inquiry. As the Slovak-Canadian community grew and adapted to life in Canada, so too did the role of religious institutions. Early on, they

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<sup>26</sup> The list of Roman Catholic Church parishes includes: Slovak Jesuits in Cambridge, Ontario; St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Thunder Bay, Ontario; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church, Montreal, Quebec; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Slovak Roman Catholic Church in Mississauga, Ontario; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Hamilton, Ontario; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Slovak Catholic Church in Windsor, Ontario; Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in New Westminster, British Columbia.

<sup>27</sup> During the decades of vibrant religious life, seven religious communities belonging to the Slovak Byzantine Catholic Eparchy in Canada emerged: Nativity of the Mother of God Byzantine Slovak Church in Toronto, Ontario; Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Oshawa; Assumption of the Mother of God in Hamilton, Ontario; Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in Welland, Ontario; St. Michael's Byzantine Catholic Church in Windsor, Ontario; Ascension of our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church in Montreal, Ontario. The Slovak Cathedral of the Transfiguration of our Lord in Markham, Ontario, has had a sad history of strife and remains unfinished and deconsecrated.

<sup>28</sup> Valčo, M. – Valčová, K.: *Preserving Tradition: The Importance of Religion in the Experience of Slovak Immigrants to Canada*, c. d., p. 142.

played an essential part in helping immigrants adapt to a new country while preserving their cultural and religious identity. In contemporary times, these institutions face new challenges and opportunities in a secular, multicultural society. They now serve as platforms for interfaith dialogue and broader community engagement, transcending their traditional roles.<sup>29</sup>

### **III. The Multifaceted Role of Religion in the Lives of Slovak Immigrants in Canada**

The religious dimension of Slovak immigrants in Canada is a subject deserving of nuanced consideration. Religion functions not merely as a spiritual endeavor but serves multiple roles that are intricately woven into the tapestry of their diasporic lives. Both Catholic and Protestant denominations<sup>30</sup> have historically acted as pivotal community anchors, offering not only spiritual solace but also cultural and social sustenance.

Mark Stolarik's scholarly contributions, most notably his book "Where is My Home? Slovak Immigration to North America" (2012),<sup>31</sup> serve as an indispensable touchstone for comprehending the intricate dynamics of Slovak immigration, both to the United States and Canada. His historical analysis is not merely a linear narrative but a multifaceted examination of the push and pull factors that instigated Slovak emigration. Stolarik meticulously delineates the economic, social, and political landscapes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that catalyzed the initial waves of migration. His work supplements our understanding by weaving in the conceptual frameworks of chain migration and the formation of ethnic enclaves, thereby providing a more nuanced view of how Slovaks established their communities in North America.

Beyond merely chronicling the historical factors, Stolarik's work delves deeply into the lived experiences of Slovak immigrants, giving due attention to the challenges they faced, such as linguistic barriers, economic hardship, and discrimination. Importantly, his research corroborates the central role that religious institutions and orders, including the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Jesuits, played in ameliorating these challenges. These religious entities were not merely spiritual centers but also educational hubs that provided indispensable support to the Slovak diaspora. The Sisters of St. Joseph, for instance, facilitated educational programs in the Slovak language, thereby acting as stewards of cultural preservation. Similarly, the Jesuit order contributed significantly to the spiritual well-being of the community, offering guidance and even training future Slovak clergy, thereby creating a sustainable religious infrastructure.<sup>32</sup>

In parallel, Stolarik's scholarly article, "Slovak Immigrants Come to Terms with Religious Diversity in North America" (2010),<sup>33</sup> offers a critical lens through which to examine the religious adaptability of Slovak immigrants. Initially grounded in a predominantly Catholic milieu in Slovakia, these immigrants encountered a religious landscape in North America that was decidedly more pluralistic. Stolarik illuminates the cognitive and cultural adjustments required by this community as they engaged with Protestantism and other non-Catholic religious traditions. The adaptability documented in his work is not a mere assimilation into a religious melting pot but a transformative process that broadened the community's religious perspectives. This widening of religious horizons served as a catalyst for fostering a more tolerant and harmonious

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<sup>29</sup> Mihál, O.: *Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada*. Toronto: Slovak Canadian Institute, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Besides Lutherans, of course, there are other Protestant denominations represented among the Slovak Canadians, such as the Reformed (Calvinist) and Baptists. Vojta, V.: *Czechoslovak Baptists*. Minneapolis: Czechoslovak Baptist Convention in America and Canada, 1941.

<sup>31</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: *Where is My Home? Slovak Immigration to North America*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: *Where is My Home?*, c. d., p. 48-50.

<sup>33</sup> Stolarik, M. M.: *Slovak Immigrants Come to Terms with Religious Diversity in North America*. In: *The Catholic historical review*, 2010, vol. 96, no. 1, p. 56-84.

coexistence with other religious communities in Canada, thus enhancing the social cohesion of Slovak communities within a more diverse religious tapestry.

Ondrej Mihal's seminal works (2003; 2005; 2010)<sup>34</sup> meticulously document how Slovak immigrants have maintained robust affiliations with their religious traditions while simultaneously adapting to the Canadian sociocultural landscape. Ondrej Mihal's seminal anthology, "Slovaks in Canada through their own eyes" (2003), serves not merely as a descriptive catalog but as an analytical framework that offers intricate insights into the diverse experiences of Slovaks who have migrated to Canada. The anthology transcends the conventional boundaries of immigrant studies by incorporating personal stories, memoirs, and testimonies that shed light on the myriad dimensions of Slovak-Canadian life. These narratives encompass a diverse array of topics, from the intricacies of migration and cultural adaptation to the manifold ways Slovaks have enriched the societal fabric of Canada. Mihal's work functions as more than an archival repository; it becomes an interpretive lens that brings into focus the individual and collective challenges and triumphs of the Slovak community in Canada. Moreover, the anthology accentuates the indomitable spirit of cultural perseverance, serving as a testament to the resilient efforts of Slovaks in maintaining a vibrant cultural heritage amidst the complexities of diasporic life.

A subsequent, and perhaps more concentrated scholarly endeavor by Mihal, is his 2010 work, "Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada." Here, the author adopts a comprehensive approach to delineate the historical evolution and contemporary realities of Slovak religious life in Canada. Mihal crafts a panoramic vista that encompasses not just the spiritual aspects of religious life, but also its socio-cultural and institutional dimensions. He zeroes in on the manifold challenges confronting Slovaks in their quest to establish religious parishes and churches in their adopted homeland. One of the significant contributions of this work lies in Mihal's astute observation that religious institutions serve as pivotal nodes around which community life often revolves. This point is crystallized in his assertion, "For Slovaks, religious affiliation was often closely tied to their cultural identity, and religious institutions became a central focus of their community-building efforts".<sup>35</sup>

The nuanced role that religious institutions occupy extends far beyond the boundaries of mere spiritual fulfillment or theological discourse. These institutions metamorphose into multifaceted spaces where Slovak immigrants find not just spiritual solace but also avenues for cultural expression and preservation. Mihal poignantly captures the logistical and spiritual struggles faced by Slovaks, particularly those residing in geographically isolated areas, as they strive to establish their religious spaces. His work reveals the dire circumstances created by the scarcity of Slovak-speaking clergy, a situation that led to prolonged periods of spiritual vacuity for this immigrant community.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, in the face of these formidable challenges, the Slovak community in Canada has exhibited a commendable level of resilience and ingenuity. Mihal documents the successful establishment of over 20 Slovak churches dispersed across the Canadian landscape. This religious pluralism within the community is noteworthy; while Roman Catholicism remains the predominant faith tradition, a variety of other denominations – including Lutheran, Greek Catholic, Baptist, and Nazarene – have also found expression. These religious institutions have historically

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<sup>34</sup> Mihál', O.: *Slovaks in Canada through their Own Eyes*. Toronto: Slovak Canadian Institute, 2003; *Slovaks in Canada from Vojvodina*. Toronto: Slovak Canadian Cultural and Heritage Centre, 2005; *Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada*. Toronto: Slovak Canadian Institute, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Mihál', O.: *Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada*, c. d., p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Mihál', O.: *Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada*, c. d., p. 19.

functioned as crucial anchors for cultural preservation and social cohesion within the Slovak community. However, Mihal doesn't shy away from addressing the contemporary decline in the vibrancy of these institutions. He attributes this disheartening trend to an amalgam of factors, including an aging demographic, acculturation among younger cohorts, and decreasing congregational memberships.<sup>37</sup>

*Interview with Anne Smith and Mary Sirotnik: Voices of the Slovak-Canadian Experience*

While scholarly literature and archival materials offer indispensable perspectives for academic discourse, the incorporation of primary data obtained through personal interviews adds an invaluable dimension to our understanding of the Slovak-Canadian experience. Conducted in July 2022 in Stoney Creek, Ontario, the interview with Anne Smith and Mary Sirotnik serves as an intimate lens that grants us the privilege of delving into the lived experiences of individuals within this community. As sisters separated by a considerable age gap, Smith and Sirotnik provide a unique intergenerational perspective that enriches our comprehension of the intricate challenges and rewards associated with preserving cultural and religious identities within the diasporic context. Their testimonies not only humanize the statistical and theoretical frameworks often employed in academic research but also lend an authentic voice to the complexities that characterize the Slovak-Canadian experience. Their insights represent a significant contribution to the corpus of knowledge, filling in the nuanced details that quantitative data and secondary sources might overlook.

Smith and Sirotnik grew up with Slovak as their mother tongue and emphasized the importance of linguistic preservation. This resonates with broader themes in Slovak-Canadian communities concerning the role of language as a vessel for cultural and religious identity. The sisters' experiences further underline the challenges of maintaining one's native language when the social ecosystem gradually shifts towards English. Contrary to what one might expect (based on the accounts of previous interviewees and literature), religion did not play as significant a role in binding the Slovak community together in their experience. Instead, cultural activities and community events held more weight. On the other hand, the sisters confirmed that many of these activities took place in the Parish Hall or on Church premises. While this may not generalize to all Slovak-Canadians, it adds a layer of complexity to our understanding of how religion interacts with other social forces to shape community life. In the experience of the sisters, religion seemed to have played more of an indirect role in the lives of the Slovak community.

Both sisters were active in cultural preservation efforts, even contributing to exhibits and publications. Their actions echo a wider trend in Slovak-Canadian communities, often led by second or third-generation individuals passionate about safeguarding their heritage. The role of the Slovak Canadian Heritage Museum<sup>38</sup> and other organizations in these efforts cannot be overstated. Their interview offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by Slovak organizations and families. Smith and Sirotnik discuss the internal divisions and lack of a unified vision that have led to the disintegration of community organizations. This reflects broader challenges in maintaining cohesiveness in immigrant communities, further complicated by the evolving definitions of family and community in a diasporic context.

The experiences of Smith and Sirotnik also highlight the generational shifts within the Slovak-Canadian community. While they have strived to maintain connections with their heritage,

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<sup>37</sup> Mihal', O.: *Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada*, c. d., p. 187.

<sup>38</sup> More info can be found at the official website of the Museum: SLOVAK CANADIAN HERITAGE MUSEUM. Official institutional website. Available at: <http://www.slovakcanadianheritagemuseum.ca/>

they acknowledge a decline in community participation and linguistic proficiency among younger generations. Their experience, seen in the light of the broader changes in Slovak-Canadian communities, paints a vivid picture of a community at a crossroads, grappling with the complexities of cultural and religious preservation in a multicultural landscape.

In light of the above discussions, the role of religion in the lives of Slovak immigrants in Canada is multifaceted. It serves as a linchpin for cultural identity maintenance, a coping mechanism during the challenging phases of immigration, and a nucleus for community building. This multifaceted role is particularly evident in communities like the St. Cyril and Methodius Slovak parish in New Westminster, where religious services provide not only spiritual solace but also function as significant social events.<sup>39</sup>

#### **IV. The Importance of Institutionalized Forms of Religious Experience**

To sum up, religious institutions play significant roles in the lives of Slovak immigrants to Canada:

##### *Churches as Hubs of Community Life*

The role of churches in the Slovak-Canadian communities are not only places of worship, but they also serve as social, cultural, and educational hubs. Church activities often go beyond the liturgical, extending into social events, educational programs, and charitable activities. These institutions are essential in maintaining a cohesive community, as they offer a space where various aspects of Slovak-Canadian life – spiritual, cultural, and social – intersect and flourish.<sup>40</sup>

The role of robust communal structures in the preservation and propagation of Slovak religious traditions within the Canadian diaspora cannot be overstated. Indeed, the interplay between religious institutions, such as Slovak churches, and cultural organizations serves as the linchpin in the efforts to sustain a vibrant Slovak heritage in an increasingly globalized and secularized Canadian society.

Slovak churches in Canada function as more than mere spiritual sanctuaries; they are pivotal social and cultural hubs that facilitate the assembly of Slovak-Canadian communities. These religious institutions offer a myriad of opportunities for social interaction and collective engagement, thereby mitigating the sense of isolation that can often accompany the immigrant experience. The Slovak language, an integral part of the community's identity, finds a revered space within these churches. Services conducted in Slovak serve to bridge generational gaps, as they cater to older immigrants who may not be proficient in English and younger members who are keen to maintain their linguistic heritage.

In addition to spiritual enrichment, these churches are custodians of cultural legacy, staging an array of Slovak festivals and religious observances. Celebrations of significant liturgical events, such as Easter and Christmas, are not just religious rites but become expansive cultural festivals that incorporate Slovak customs, music, and culinary traditions. These events serve dual purposes: they are spiritual gatherings that reinforce religious beliefs and they are cultural celebrations that affirm the community's connection to their Slovak heritage.

Moreover, it's worth noting that these religious and cultural organizations often collaborate in a symbiotic manner to ensure the holistic well-being of the community. For example, cultural

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<sup>39</sup> Lenovský, L. – Slobodová Nováková, K.: Culture – Religion – Ethnicity (Alliance of Identities in the Environment of Foreign Slovak Communities). In: Religions, 2021, vol. 12, no. 10: 883. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12100883>

<sup>40</sup> Hrešková, E. – Hock, R.: Slovak Catholics in Canada, c. d.; Mihál, O.: Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada, c. d.

organizations might use church facilities to host language classes, folklore dances, or heritage festivals. This mutualistic relationship amplifies the reach and efficacy of both types of organizations in fulfilling their respective, yet interconnected, missions.

The observance of religious festivals and events constitutes an integral mechanism for the safeguarding and perpetuation of Slovak religious traditions within the Canadian multicultural tapestry. These celebratory occasions serve as both liturgical milestones and communal rendezvous, presenting invaluable opportunities for Slovak immigrants to coalesce, thereby fostering a communal environment conducive to the sharing and exchange of faith as well as cultural practices.<sup>41</sup>

The celebrations of Easter and Christmas, in particular, assume an elevated significance within the Slovak-Canadian community, acting as pivotal annual events that encapsulate a wealth of religious, cultural, and social traditions. These festivals are not merely religious observances but become expansive cultural canvases, adorned with a rich palette of traditional Slovak customs, culinary practices, and artistic expressions.

Special foods, often prepared following time-honored recipes passed down through generations, become not just gastronomic delights but edible symbols of a shared heritage. These dishes serve as culinary repositories of cultural memory, linking the diasporic community to their ancestral homeland. Decorative elements, ranging from intricately designed Easter eggs to festively adorned Christmas trees, not only embellish the celebrations but also function as material culture artifacts that carry the imprints of Slovak craftsmanship and aesthetic sensibilities.

Moreover, these celebrations frequently incorporate distinctive Slovak rituals, prayers, and hymns, rendered often in the Slovak language, thereby augmenting the spiritual resonance of the occasion while simultaneously fortifying the community's linguistic ties to their native land. At Christmas, Slovak Canadians practice unique customs such as keeping a carp in the bathtub, attending midnight mass, and enjoying a traditional Slovak dinner on Christmas Eve. On Easter, special customs including "šibačka" and "oblievačka" are observed. These involve women getting playfully whipped on the legs with a ribbon-adorned stick, sprayed with perfume, and soaked in water on Easter Monday. There is also an assortment of festivals and events held in Canada to celebrate and showcase Slovak culture, like the Niagara Folk Arts Festival, the Czech & Slovak Festival in Toronto, and the annual Family Picnic in Mississauga. Traditional Slovak music, food and dances are often available at these festivals. In addition, the Slovak Canadian Heritage Museum and the Canadian Slovak League are organizations that work to preserve and promote Slovak culture in Canada.<sup>42</sup> They organize various events, workshops, and exhibitions to educate people about Slovak culture. By partaking in these traditions and events, Slovak Canadians can retain their bond with their heritage, and pass it down to succeeding generations. The meticulous preservation of these unique customs and traditions within the context of these religious festivals serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and adaptability of the Slovak-Canadian community, who find in these celebrations a dynamic and evolving platform for the expression and transmission of their complex religious and cultural identities.

#### *Religious Leaders as Cultural Ambassadors*

The clergy within Slovak-Canadian communities often don a multiplicity of hats, rendering their roles considerably more complex and expansive than mere religious functionaries. They

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<sup>41</sup> Čulen, K.: The Cult of SS. Cyril and Methodius amongst the Slovaks in U.S.A. and Canada. In: Slovakia, 1972, vol. 22, no. 45, p. 98-113.

<sup>42</sup> Sutherland, A. X.: The Canadian Slovak League: A History, 1932-1982. Toronto: Canadian Slovak League, 1984.

ascend to the status of cultural diplomats, adeptly navigating the intricate nexus between the theological and the ethnographic dimensions of the community's identity. This unique position allows them to serve as crucial conduits for the dissemination and reinforcement of cultural heritage, thereby contributing to the sustenance of a coherent and robust collective identity.<sup>43</sup>

While their primary mission remains spiritual guidance and pastoral care, these religious leaders ingeniously incorporate elements of Slovak history, folklore, and language into their sermons, liturgies, and educational programs. In doing so, they offer a nuanced blend of spiritual and cultural nourishment that appeals to the multi-generational tapestry of the community. This integrative approach serves not only to fortify the religious convictions of their congregants but also to instill a deeper appreciation for their Slovak roots and traditions.

Beyond the confines of the church, the influence of these clergy extends into the broader sphere of civic life.<sup>44</sup> Through community outreach initiatives, interfaith dialogues, and even political advocacy, they bring a spiritual and ethical dimension to public discourse. Their impact in these areas is not to be underestimated, as it serves to reinforce communal cohesion, facilitate social integration, and perpetuate the complex tapestry of Slovak-Canadian traditions and values. Such influence is substantiated by scholarly works that explore the roles of religious leaders in immigrant communities.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the clergy often collaborate with secular Slovak cultural organizations, thereby maximizing their reach and amplifying their impact. Whether it's co-hosting cultural events, participating in social justice campaigns, or offering ethical guidance in communal disputes, their roles are increasingly interdisciplinary, reflecting the multifaceted needs of a diverse and evolving community.

### *Religious Education and Identity Formation*

Religious education serves a dual purpose: doctrinal instruction and identity formation. Sunday schools and catechism classes are not merely venues for religious instruction; they are also crucibles where the younger generation's Slovak-Canadian identity is molded. Here, religious and cultural education are interwoven, making the process of identity formation holistic and Slovak-culture sensitive. The integration of religious teachings with cultural elements ensures that the faith of the younger generation is intimately tied to their heritage.

### *The Church and Social Activism*

Beyond the spiritual realm, churches in Slovak-Canadian communities are often involved in social activism. Whether it's advocating for immigrant rights (as was the case of Valika Tothova's and Dusan Toth's help to immigrants, not merely of Slovak origin, in Toronto metropolitan area), participating in community outreach, or engaging in charitable endeavors, these institutions extend their influence beyond the pulpit. This social activism not only underscores the church's role as a moral guide but also fortifies its position as a cornerstone of the community, grounding it in the ethics of care, compassion, and social justice.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kona, M.: *Slovak Americans and Canadians in American Catholic Who's Who, 1911–1981 and Slovak Ethnicity*. Wilmette, Ill.: K & K House, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Valčo, M.: Interview with pastor Dušan Toth on July 12, 2019, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

<sup>45</sup> Raska, J.: *Freedom's Voices: Czech and Slovak Immigration to Canada during the Cold War*, c. d.; Valčo, M. – Valčová, K.: *Preserving Tradition: The Importance of Religion in the Experience of Slovak Immigrants to Canada 1.*, c. d., p. 147-148.

<sup>46</sup> Zubek, T. J.: *The Influence of Slovak Catholics in the United States and Canada on Their Social and Religious Environment*. In: *Slovak Studies*, 1984, vol. 24, no. 1, p. 139-175.

### *Church Publications and Media*

Church publications, whether print or digital, play a crucial role in the preservation and dissemination of Slovak-Canadian identity. Newsletters, bulletins, and websites often feature articles that highlight community achievements, advertise events, and discuss issues relevant to the community. These platforms serve as an additional educational tool, enriching the community's understanding of its heritage and the broader role it plays in Canadian.<sup>47</sup>

Religious institutions in Slovak-Canadian communities are multi-dimensional entities that serve as the bedrock of communal life. They are not merely houses of worship but intricate tapestries where the spiritual, cultural, and social threads of the community are woven together. These institutions, through various forms of engagement – ritualistic, educational, social, and media-based – act as significant agents in the preservation and transmission of Slovak-Canadian identity.<sup>48</sup> They function as a robust platform for community building, socialization, and mutual aid, as well as a keystone for preserving cultural and ethnic identities. The lack of Slovak priests remains a significant challenge, but recent appointments have sparked renewed senses of community identity and belonging. The practical interplay between religion, culture, and ethnicity exemplifies the complex relationship between Slovak immigrants and their adopted homeland, offering a rich tapestry of mutual support and connection.

### *Intergenerational Transmission of Religious Values as a Critical Pillar in the Preservation of Slovak Religious Traditions in Canada*

The transmission of religious values and practices across generations stands as an indispensable cornerstone for the enduring preservation of Slovak religious and cultural traditions within the Canadian diaspora. It is in the domestic sphere, largely under the aegis of parental and grandparental guidance, that the formative indoctrination of religious tenets and cultural norms occurs.<sup>49</sup> The role of elders in this process transcends mere religious instruction, evolving into an expansive pedagogical endeavor that incorporates storytelling, the enactment of familial traditions, and active engagement of the younger generations in religious ceremonies and community events.

Storytelling, in particular, offers a potent medium for the conveyance of collective memory and traditional wisdom. Through these narratives, not only are biblical and religious tales passed on, but also stories of the family's journey, struggles, and triumphs, deeply embedded within the religious and cultural milieu from which they sprang. These stories serve as both ethical compass and cultural map for younger generations, offering them grounded perspectives on the complexities of faith, identity, and belonging.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, the ritualistic participation in religious practices and events acts as a form of experiential learning, immersing the youth in the phenomenological aspects of their faith. These practices often incorporate a synthesis of pre-Christian and Christian elements, embodying a rich tapestry of customs and rituals designed to invoke divine favor in areas such as health, fertility, prosperity, and divine protection. These rituals thus serve dual functions: they are both spiritual supplications and cultural artifacts, embodying a complex web of religious and cultural significances.

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<sup>47</sup> Mihál', O. – Štarkbauerová, M.: *Slovak Canadian Personalities: Footprints across the Snow*, c. d.

<sup>48</sup> Kirschbaum, J. M.: *Slovaks in Canada*, c. d.; Stolarik, M. M.: *Where is My Home? Slovak Immigration to North America*, c. d.

<sup>49</sup> This theme was common in almost all of our interviews and informal interactions with Slovak Canadians. Arguably strongest was this notion in our interview with pastor D. Toth. Valčo, M.: Interview with pastor Dušan Toth on July 12, 2019, c. d.

<sup>50</sup> Valčová, K. – Valčo, M.: Interview with Anne Smith and Mary Sirotnik conducted on July 19, 2022, c. d.

While it is indeed noteworthy that the active religious participation among younger and middle-aged Slovak-Canadians may exhibit varying degrees of intensity, an undercurrent of 'latent religiosity' persists. Even those who may not identify with overt religious practice often retain a deeply ingrained set of values, ethical frameworks, and worldviews that are profoundly shaped by religious teachings. These encompass not merely notions of the divine but also extend to conceptual paradigms concerning morality, the nature of good and evil, and life strategies, all of which collectively constitute a nuanced, albeit less visible, form of religious engagement. Therefore, the act of passing down religious and cultural values serves as more than a mere preservationist endeavor; it functions as a complex form of cultural and spiritual capital, continually renewed and renegotiated across generations. This intergenerational dialogue ensures the vitality and adaptability of Slovak religious and cultural traditions within the ever-changing Canadian landscape, safeguarding their relevance and resilience for future generations.

## **V. Challenges Faced by Slovak Immigrants in Preserving Their Religious Traditions in Canada**

The endeavor to preserve religious traditions among Slovak immigrants in Canada is a complex undertaking, beset by an array of obstacles that span cultural, social, political, and educational spectra. These challenges not only impede the immediate practice of faith but also possess long-term implications for the sustenance of Slovak religious traditions in a diasporic setting. A nuanced understanding of these intricacies is instrumental in devising supportive frameworks aimed at the preservation of these traditions.

One of the most immediate challenges faced by Slovak immigrants is the language barrier. A proficient grasp of the English or French language is often a prerequisite for meaningful engagement in religious activities and efficacious communication with fellow congregants. The linguistic divergence can render the religious texts, liturgical practices, and sermons less accessible, thereby diluting the spiritual experience and potentially leading to a decline in religious participation. Social factors, too, can be impedimental. The absence of a robust social support system and social isolation, particularly in regions like Western Canada, can erode the collective sense of community essential for religious engagement. Such isolation can result in diminished attendance at religious functions and a gradual waning of faith-based community interactions.

Political barriers come into focus when one considers issues like discrimination or limited access to resources. As evidenced in a study by Hrešková and Hock (2018),<sup>51</sup> the lack of governmental recognition and financial support has palpably curtailed the capacity of Slovak Catholics in Canada to sustain their religious practices. Educational constraints, often overlooked, can prove to be significant hindrances. A deficit in religious education or training, especially for those unfamiliar with the liturgical language, can hamper full participation in religious rites and ceremonies. For example, the absence of comprehensive religious education in the Slovak language posed significant challenges for Slovak Orthodox immigrants striving to maintain their religious traditions in Canada. Generational differences and economic pressures can also compromise the preservation of religious traditions. Younger generations may not exhibit the same level of commitment to religious practices as their elders, and economic exigencies can divert attention and resources away from religious observances. In addition, there are significant cultural barriers that manifest in multifarious ways, such as doctrinal and liturgical differences between Slovak religious practices and those prevalent in Canada. These variances can engender misun-

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<sup>51</sup> Hrešková, E. – Hock, R.: *Slovak Catholics in Canada*, c. d.

derstandings and conflicts, thereby inhibiting the seamless transplantation and preservation of Slovak religious traditions.

### *Secularization in Canadian Society*

In the context of an increasingly secular Canadian society, the religious and cultural proclivities of Slovak immigrants encounter several challenges that demand nuanced examination. Unlike Slovakia, where religiosity is often deeply enmeshed in the social fabric, Canada's secular orientation may not be particularly conducive to overt expressions of faith. This contrast in religious climates poses tangible difficulties for Slovak-Canadians in establishing and maintaining communities that share and nurture their religious traditions.

The existential challenges to religious identification among Slovak-Canadians are not confined to adult immigrants but extend to the younger generation as well. Data from Statistics Canada (2021; 2022)<sup>52</sup> corroborates this trend, revealing a gradual shift toward secular identification and complex entanglements between religious and ethnic identity among younger Slovak-Canadians. This societal inclination toward secularism prompts pivotal questions about the role of religion in the future of the Slovak-Canadian community.

As we have observed before, religious affiliation, from an integrative perspective, serves as a form of social capital that can facilitate the adaptation of immigrants to their new setting. Hence, a decline in religious adherence could ostensibly affect social cohesion and impede the preservation of Slovak culture in Canada. Conversely, this decline could also signify a broader assimilation into the increasingly secular ethos of Canadian society. As Slovak-Canadians become progressively assimilated, the religious institutions serving these communities confront their own set of challenges. For instance, the potential loss of religious traditions among younger generations not only threatens the practice of faith but also has ramifications for the transmission of Slovak cultural heritage, which is often intertwined with religious norms. Without a committed congregation, churches face operational and financial difficulties that can further accelerate the decline in religious engagement. However, it would be overly reductionist to view this landscape solely through a lens of decline and loss. Adaptive strategies employed by religious institutions, such as modernizing rituals or leveraging digital platforms for outreach, underscore the resilience of these communities.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the internal dynamics of the Slovak-Canadian community, external perceptions also merit attention. Misconceptions and stereotypes about Slovak-Canadians and their religious practices can influence policy decisions and integration strategies. Consequently, a nuanced understanding based on empirical data is indispensable for policymakers who aim to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that religion presents for Slovak-Canadians.

Thus we can see that the landscape of religion among Slovak-Canadians is complex and ever-evolving, influenced by broader societal shifts, generational differences, and the complexities of immigrant life. While recent data suggests a decline in religious identification, the role of religion in cultural preservation and community building remains significant. Looking forward, adapting religious practices to modern sensibilities and leveraging the cultural aspects of

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<sup>52</sup> Statistics Canada. Religion by immigrant status and period of immigration: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts – Statistique Canada (2021). Statistics Canada [online]. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=9810034501>; Statistics Canada. The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity [online]. Statistics Canada (2022). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Mihál, O.: Religious Life of Slovaks in Canada, c. d.

religion can offer pathways for sustaining the community's unique heritage in an increasingly secular society.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This paper has undertaken an in-depth exploration into the role of religion as a multi-dimensional construct in shaping the experiences and identities of the Slovak-Canadian community. Through an interdisciplinary lens that interweaves history, sociology, and religious studies, we have unearthed that religion is not an isolated aspect of Slovak-Canadian life but an integrated facet of cultural identity and social cohesion. Our research confirms that religious practices and traditions have acted as cultural anchors for Slovak immigrants in Canada. For Slovak immigrants to Canada, religion was not a separate entity from culture, but rather an integral part of it, an expression of cultural identity, a way of being Slovak in a new and unfamiliar environment. The preservation of traditional customs, the celebration of patron saints, the use of the Slovak language in religious contexts, and the incorporation of folk music and dance into religious celebrations were all important ways for Slovak immigrants to maintain their cultural identity and sense of community in Canada. The complexity of the immigrant experience is mirrored in the amalgamation of religious rituals with Slovak folklore, language, and communal celebrations. The resilience of the community in maintaining these traditions, despite challenges such as a shortage of Slovak priests, underscores the latent religiosity that continues to be a crucial aspect of their identity.

We have also emphasized the significant contribution of religious institutions, fraternities, and various Slovak-Canadian organizations in preserving religious and cultural traditions. These organizations extend beyond the walls of spiritual sanctuaries, serving as pivotal platforms for social interaction, mutual aid, and the reinforcement of a collective Slovak identity. The paper has underscored the need for an interdisciplinary approach in understanding the multi-layered experiences of immigrant communities. The symbiotic relationship between religion, culture, and identity serves as a testament to the complex realities that shape the diasporic experience. It also calls for an appreciation of the role of cultural heritage in crafting unique identities, an aspect that scholars and policymakers should not overlook. The findings also open a window into broader ethical and societal implications. The role of religious practices in fostering societal integration and multicultural cohesion suggests that the Slovak-Canadian experience can offer valuable insights into the dialogue between faith and multiculturalism in contemporary Canada.

### *Possible Future Directions*

While this paper has provided a comprehensive view, further research could explore the evolution of religious practices among younger generations of Slovak-Canadians and compare it with other diasporic communities. Investigating how digital platforms could aid in the preservation of religious and cultural traditions could also be an avenue worth exploring.

Another possible direction is to explore the role of religion in contemporary multicultural Canadian society. Here we would like to recommend select ideas from the book "An Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion Than Without It" by Bruce Sheiman.<sup>54</sup> The book presents a nuanced and compelling argument for the constructive role of religion in society, despite the author himself not being a devout believer. Sheiman identifies as an "aspiring theist," advocating for the multifaceted benefits – psychological, emotional, moral,

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<sup>54</sup> Sheiman, S. B.: *Atheist Defends Religion: Why Humanity is Better Off with Religion Than Without*, c. d.

communal, existential, and physical – offered by religion. He argues that while atheism tends to focus on a deconstructionist critique of religious dogma, it often neglects to acknowledge the positive social and ethical contributions of religion.

In Sheiman's perspective, religion confers a unique blend of meaning and morality that is not easily replicated by secular means. While science may elucidate the "how" of the universe, religion tackles the "why," offering existential meaning that science cannot provide. This distinction between lowercase truth (facts and knowledge) and uppercase truth (meaning and purpose) is pivotal. Moreover, Sheiman defends the moral framework religion offers, noting that although morality can exist independently of religious belief, religion enhances moral behavior and community cohesion.<sup>55</sup> For instance, religious activities are found to be associated with greater social interaction, thus strengthening communal bonds and ethical standards. The notion that humans are created in the image of a divine entity, central to many religious doctrines, serves as an ethical cornerstone that often leads to acts of sacrifice and compassion.

Sheiman's argument is particularly relevant for our discussion on the societal implications of religious communities, such as the Slovak Canadians. It underscores the idea that religious institutions are not just repositories of faith but are crucial actors in social cohesion, ethical development, and the provision of existential meaning. This lends a layer of complexity to the study of religious resilience in communities, suggesting that such resilience is not merely a cultural artifact but also a cornerstone of societal well-being. Therefore, in a multicultural society like Canada, religious communities not only contribute to the mosaic of cultural diversity but also play an indispensable role in shaping ethical landscapes and fostering communal harmony.

In summation, the role of religion (in both its explicit and implicit forms) in the Slovak-Canadian community is neither peripheral nor ornamental. It is a vital, living aspect of cultural identity and community cohesion. It provides a framework within which socialization occurs, mutual aid is rendered, and a resilient sense of Slovak identity is nurtured. As Canada continues to grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by its multicultural tapestry, the Slovak-Canadian community offers a compelling microcosm of the enriching dialogue between faith and multiculturalism.

## **Der Glaube als Grundpfeiler: Widerstandsfähigkeit, Anpassung und kultureller Zusammenhalt in slowakischen Einwanderergemeinschaften in Kanada**

Katarína Valčová – Michal Valčo

Im Kontext der zunehmenden Säkularisierung und des religiösen Pluralismus bietet die slowakisch-kanadische Gemeinschaft eine faszinierende Fallstudie zur Rolle von Religion und religiösen Institutionen bei der Formung von Einwandereridentitäten und der Förderung gesellschaftlicher Kohäsion. Diese Studie zieht eine interdisziplinäre Auswahl an wissenschaftlichen Werken, historischen Dokumenten und statistischen Daten heran, um die vielschichtige Beziehung zwischen der slowakischen Diaspora in Kanada und ihren religiösen Bindungen zu untersuchen.

Die Arbeit vertieft sich in den historischen Hintergrund der slowakischen Einwanderung nach Kanada und die sozialen und kulturellen Auswirkungen religiöser Praktiken. Sie zeigt auf, dass religiöse Einrichtungen nicht nur als spirituelle Zufluchtsorte dienen, sondern auch als unverzichtbare Agenten bei der Bewahrung des kulturellen Erbes, der Förderung sozialer Integration und dem Beitrag zum moralischen Gefüge der kanadischen Gesellschaft insgesamt. Unsere Erkenntnisse deuten darauf hin, dass die ausgeprägte Religiosität unter den Slowakisch-Kanadiern als ein Mikrokosmos fungiert, der breitere Themen im Dialog zwischen Glauben und Multikulturalismus im zeitgenössischen Kanada widerspiegelt.

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<sup>55</sup> This notion is supported, among others, by arguably one of the most famous Canadian philosophers, Charles Taylor. See Taylor, C.: *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Die Arbeit betont auch die Bedeutung eines interdisziplinären und nuancierten Ansatzes für die Erforschung von Einwanderergemeinschaften. Die komplexe Wechselwirkung zwischen Religion, Kultur und Identität in der Gestaltung der Erfahrungen dieser Gemeinschaften sollte nicht unterschätzt werden. Zusätzlich hebt die Studie die anhaltende Bedeutung der Bewahrung und Feier des kulturellen Erbes in Einwanderergemeinschaften hervor.

Die Slowakisch-Kanadier haben trotz Herausforderungen wie dem Mangel an slowakischen Priestern in Kanada eine bemerkenswerte Widerstandsfähigkeit bei der Bewahrung ihrer religiösen und kulturellen Traditionen gezeigt. Die Ankunft neuer slowakischer Priester hat das Potenzial, das Gemeinschaftsgefühl der Gemeinschaft zu erneuern, da sie einen Raum für gegenseitige Unterstützung und Verbindung bieten.

Die Arbeit trägt zur breiteren Diskussion über den Platz der Religion in modernen, multikulturellen Gesellschaften bei und unterstreicht die Idee, dass religiöse Institutionen nicht nur Ablagerungen des Glaubens sind, sondern entscheidende Akteure in der sozialen Kohäsion, der ethischen Entwicklung und der Bereitstellung existenzieller Bedeutung. Diese Einsichten sind insbesondere relevant für unsere Auseinandersetzung mit den gesellschaftlichen Implikationen von religiösen Gemeinschaften, wie den Slowakisch-Kanadiern. Sie fügen der Untersuchung der religiösen Widerstandsfähigkeit in Gemeinschaften eine Schicht der Komplexität hinzu und legen nahe, dass diese Widerstandsfähigkeit nicht nur ein kulturelles Artefakt, sondern auch ein Grundpfeiler des gesellschaftlichen Wohlergehens ist. In einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft wie Kanada tragen religiöse Gemeinschaften nicht nur zur Vielfalt der kulturellen Landschaft bei, sondern spielen auch eine unverzichtbare Rolle bei der Gestaltung ethischer Landschaften und der Förderung des gemeinschaftlichen Zusammenhalts.