Chapter One

“Faith Makes Us Live”

“Faith makes us live, but misery divides us.” Wilbur, one of the 150 people I interviewed during the sixteen months I spent living among the Haitian communities of Miami, Montreal, and Paris, used this proverb repeatedly to capture the cycle of hope and suffering that had characterized his life. After numerous years teaching agricultural conservation and imparting religious instruction in Haiti, Wilbur finally felt forced to flee his homeland in 2000 when the violence and economic stagnation there made it impossible for him to support his family. Still out of work nearly two years after coming to Miami, Wilbur struggled to make ends meet and resisted the temptation to give up hope. Like many other Haitians in Miami, he turned to Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church in Miami’s Little Haiti neighborhood for inner spiritual strength, for a community, and for guidance in the many steps necessary to adapt to a new home, such as looking for a job, learning English, and applying for asylum.

How do people like Wilbur use religious narratives to interpret their migration and adaptation experiences? How do Haitian immigrants create moral communities that affirm their faith and channel their social justice initiatives? How do leaders of Haitians’ religious communities interact with other institutions—governmental and civic—in
three different contexts of Miami, Montreal, and Paris? What, if any, impact do these narratives, moral communities, and religious leaders have on Haitian immigrants' adaptation?¹

This introductory chapter foreshadows how I answer these questions in the remainder of the book. After describing one particular event at Notre Dame d'Haiti that illustrates how this institution has mediated for Haitian immigrants in Miami for more than twenty years, I turn to interview excerpts from Miami, Montreal, and Paris. These examples from each of my field sites demonstrate that, although Haitians may practice similar forms of religious piety in different places, how their faith helps them confront the often miserable conditions that surround them depends on how their leaders interact with other institutions in the United States, Canada, and France. By the end of the book, readers will see that, although Haitians' religious piety undoubtedly provides a great source of hope in all three countries, it is only in Miami that the Catholic Church is poised to make a long-term impact on the socioeconomic adaptation of Haitian immigrants. Understanding the political conditions that have allowed the Catholic Church to pursue its social justice mission for Haitian immigrants more successfully in Miami than in Montreal and Paris draws us into long-standing debates about how religious institutions, as a fundamental part of civil society, contribute to a well-functioning democracy and to people's sense of meaning and well-being.

HAITIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY, 2004

On January 1, 2004, I traveled to the Miami neighborhood called Little Haiti to attend services at Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church. On this date, Haitians all around the globe—both in Haiti and in the many cities of the Haitian diaspora, including Miami—gathered to commemorate two hundred years of Haitian independence. January 1 is also an important Catholic holiday—the feast of Mary, the Mother of God—
and Haitian Catholics practice strong devotion to the Virgin Mary. Given the ethnic and religious importance of this holiday, I was not surprised to see close to 4,000 Haitians gathered on the lawn of Notre Dame d’Haiti for an outdoor Mass that lasted three hours. But what explains why, on this day, the first three rows were filled with white, Cuban American, and African American political leaders from Miami? Why did press coverage of Haitian Independence Day in the Miami Herald highlight the Mass at Notre Dame? Why did the archbishop of Miami, John Clement Favalora, make such an effort to celebrate the Mass in Haitian Creole? Why did so few people attend the civic festival that occurred later in the day just two blocks from Notre Dame?

As described more fully in chapter 3, Haitians came to Miami under extremely disadvantaged circumstances. The influx of tens of thousands of Haitian boat people to Florida, in particular in 1979–81, caused nothing short of a humanitarian crisis. Under the leadership of both American and Haitian priests, the Catholic Church used its financial resources to create a home for Haitians at Notre Dame. Building on the experience of Catholic Charities in Miami, Notre Dame’s leaders then began social programs specifically for Haitians at the Pierre Toussaint Center, a service center that shares a ten-acre piece of property with Notre Dame. Over time, the Toussaint Center attracted millions of dollars in mostly government funding for its programs. Because of its religious and social significance, both politicians and the press in Miami see Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center as the most important institutions in Miami’s Haitian community. When something important happens in Haiti or in Miami’s Haitian community, politicians and the press look to Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center.

Although Haitian Catholics brought strong religious piety with them to Miami, incorporating Haitians into the Catholic Church there required a concerted effort by members of its hierarchy. First, Archbishop Eugene McCarthy (1976–94) and then Archbishop John Clement Favalora (1994–present) recognized Haitians’ deep Catholic
piety and responded to their desire for religious services in their native language—Creole. In addition to learning some Creole themselves—at least enough to celebrate Mass—these bishops also invited numerous priests from Haiti to serve Haitians in Miami. In order to ensure continuing and expanding religious services for Haitian Catholics, the archdiocese of Miami sponsored numerous visas for Haitians to study at Miami’s seminary. These Haitian priests and seminarians—now numbering more than twenty—surrounded Archbishop Favalora on the important holiday of January 1, 2004.

The celebration at Notre Dame on January 1, 2004, marked not only two hundred years of Haitian independence but also a significant amount of progress in the Haitian community in Miami. In the 1970s, Catholic leaders in Miami celebrated Mass for thousands of Haitian asylum-seekers being detained in Krome Detention Center and opened their doors to thousands of boat people who showed up at the church doorstep seeking help. Today, some twenty-five years later, Haitians in Miami have overcome tremendous prejudice in their journey from being what the sociologist Alex Stepick has called “the refugees nobody wants” to becoming proud Haitian Americans with their own institutions, elected political leaders, religious institutions, and distinct cultural identity.

Severe political unrest, albeit with interludes of calm, has plagued Haiti since the 1980s. Although many Haitians eagerly anticipated the celebrations marking the bicentenary of their independence, political conditions had soured to the point where, by the time the eagerly awaited holiday came, few people participated in the civic celebration held down the street from Notre Dame later on January 1, 2004. Attendance at most civic events for Haitians in Miami paled in comparison to such special events at Notre Dame, and even compared to the regular crowds at Notre Dame’s five Sunday Masses.

Despite similar expressions of Catholic piety among Haitians in Miami, Montreal, and Paris, the institutional importance of the Catholic Church in Miami is not paralleled in the Haitian community of
either Montreal or Paris. Differences in the Catholic Church’s financial resources and different relationships between Catholic leaders and state representatives in the three cities—explored in detail throughout this book—help explain the unique institutional contributions of the Catholic Church to Haitians’ adaptation in Miami.

THREE IMMIGRANT PROFILES

Institutions such as Notre Dame can be understood in at least two different ways. First, Notre Dame’s leaders give a public voice to perhaps the least influential immigrant group in Miami, and they founded a social service center to facilitate their adaptation. Second, Notre Dame provides individual immigrants with a moral community in which they can nourish their faith and affirm their dignity. During my sixteen months of fieldwork for this project, I interviewed around 150 Haitians in Miami, Montreal, and Paris and spent countless hours observing at the Haitian Catholic mission in each city, as well as attending social, political, and cultural events in the Haitian community. My research design allowed me to move between various levels of analysis: from individuals’ faith to moral communities and then to institutional interactions between the secular and religious sphere.

The three profiles that follow tell us much about each of these levels of analysis and about important cross-national differences in Haitians’ adaptation. The Haitian community in Miami has a large number of boat people from very humble origins in Haiti, but census and immigration data show that Paris and Montreal also have an increasing number of low-skilled Haitians who have fled Haiti’s economic misery and continuous political upheavals. Many Haitians in all three cities thus face similar hurdles to their adaptation, including difficulty in obtaining legal papers, the burden of working in low-wage jobs, the general handicap of being a racially distinct minority and, as such, a frequent object of discrimination, and the problems associated with living in poor and often crime-ridden neighborhoods.
Although the narratives used by the three people profiled below to describe their struggles are similar, the success with which leaders of the Catholic Church mediate on Haitian immigrants’ behalf with their host societies varies greatly. In a highly globalized world where millions of people cross international boundaries every year, we should not be surprised to find that international migrants often express similar religious sentiments across vast oceans. Therefore, if we are concerned with how such religious sentiments are transformed into institutional support to help immigrants adapt to life in a new home, we would do well to pay attention to how government agencies interact with religious institutions and their affiliated social service centers.

The relationships between mediating institutions and state agencies equate with cooperation in the case of the Haitian community of Miami, conflict in the case of the Haitian community in Montreal, and invisibility in the case of the Haitian community of Paris. A cross-national comparison suggests that Haitians are likely to have greater economic mobility and well-being in Miami than in either Montreal or Paris.

The proverb “Faith makes us live, but misery divides us” simultaneously points to the centrality of faith for Haitian immigrants and to the need to alter the social structures that perpetuate conditions of misery. Questions about how immigrants adapt to a new home are ultimately questions at the heart of what C. Wright Mills identified as the core task of sociology: how do we make sense of the lives of individuals as part of historical processes? Based on a sociological understanding of how political conditions in the three countries affect the institutional actions and interactions that influence Haitians immigrants’ adaptation, this book allows a number of them to tell their stories in their own words. In answering questions about Haitians immigrants’ adaptation in the three cities, I also suggest that sociologists interested in studying religion in a global world should pay attention to how both religious narratives and religious institutions influence modern society.
“WE HAITIANS KNOW HOW TO SURVIVE”

During my fieldwork in Miami, I lived at Notre Dame d’Haiti Catholic Church, which greatly facilitated my becoming fluent in Haitian Creole and having regular contact with members of this church and the political leaders who often visited. Although community leaders generally could speak to me in English or French, I had to take many more steps in order to be able to conduct interviews with ordinary Haitian immigrants, many of whom have very limited contact with Americans of any background. Learning Creole, visiting Haiti, living in Little Haiti, going Mass at Notre Dame—all things few non-Haitians do—were all crucial to building the mutual trust needed to conduct these interviews.

I first met Donald after Mass one Sunday at Notre Dame, and I had many more informal conversations with him during my first two months at Notre Dame. One afternoon, to conduct a more formal interview, I accompanied Donald to his home, which is within walking distance of Notre Dame. Like many other Haitian homes I visited, the living room of Donald’s one-story house contains pictures of his family and religious images. As he described the many struggles he faced in coming to the United States and adapting to a new society, Donald employed his religious beliefs to construct a narrative of hope. He always kept his eyes on his goal—his children’s eventual success in the United States.

For Donald, coming to the United States provided an escape from the extremely difficult living conditions in Haiti. Life is so hard in Haiti, that, as he put it, “It’s like they drop you off in a forest for thirty days with only a fork and they tell you that you have to survive.” Donald first opted to migrate across the Haitian border to the Dominican Republic, where at least a half a million Haitians live. There, he met a Haitian woman, got married, and had four children. However, for Donald, being a Haitian in the Dominican Republic was full of humiliations—
for example, Dominicans openly denigrate Haitians on radio and television. Furthermore, he had few hopes that his children could succeed there, because the Dominican government denies citizenship to children of undocumented Haitians born in the Dominican Republic.°

Although Donald would have preferred to return to his home country, he saw no future for himself or his family in Haiti. First he and then, a few years later, his wife made the treacherous boat journey to Miami. For the first few years, he struggled to survive—moving from place to place, shuffling from low-wage job to low-wage job. Once his wife joined him, they rented a small home and began trying to save money to bring their children over. As Donald recounted, “Many times we would go without eating, or have our electricity or water cut off, so we could send money to Haiti, save to buy a house here, and bring our kids over. It wasn’t easy. But you know, we Haitians know how to survive.”

Long conversations such as this one allowed me not just to identify what hurdles Haitians face—I could see that from census and immigration data and from interviews with leaders—but also to understand how they developed strategies of action to confront those challenges. Interviews with Donald and many others drilled home how many Haitians rely on their faith quite literally to stay alive. Feeling forced to leave Haiti due to extreme poverty and political instability, many Haitians in Miami arrive on boats without legal papers, without education or urban work skills, or without knowing English. In this majority-immigrant and majority-Latino city, Haitians in Miami begin at the bottom of the ethnic ladder. Although not all of the more than 100,000 Haitians in South Florida are poor, Haitian immigrants in Miami nonetheless have lower levels of education than both natives and other immigrants there; as a result, they often wind up at the bottom of the income scale. Further complicating their adaptation, Haitians in Miami are often the brunt of racial and ethnic stereotypes and employment discrimination.

When one first visits Little Haiti—an ethnic neighborhood that emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s as thousands of people like
Donald arrived in Miami—its bungalow-style homes and dilapidated cars reflect its poverty. According to data from the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 50 percent of households in Little Haiti are below the poverty line; 46 percent have less than a high school degree, about half of whom do not even have nine years of schooling.

Despite his family’s poverty, Donald, his wife and children find support from both the religious and ethnic organizations that dot Little Haiti’s landscape and provide crucial assistance for newcomers’ settlement and adaptation. To the extent he and his family are on the way to achieving the American dream of middle-class status, they are bolstered by their religious beliefs, their strong ethnic community, and opportunities for education and work. Although Donald was not particularly religious before he migrated to Miami, he began attending church regularly in order to find the strength not to give in to his frustration at the many bumps in the road. “You know, I work so hard, I am a good person. But some other guy, he does nothing and he gets ahead. How does he do it? I don’t know, by selling drugs or something. So when I felt frustrated, or when I lost my job or had to move, I would go to church and pray, and that would give me the strength to keep being a good person.”

I developed the notion of cultural mediation to indicate how Haitians’ religious faith gives them narratives of hope in a situation where they have little status or political voice. I chose the term “cultural mediation” because the metaphor of mediation seemed to capture how the people rely on their religious beliefs to guide them through struggles in this world, with their eyes all the while fixed on eventually entering another world. Because as newcomers, and not yet citizens or even legal residents, Haitian Catholics’ religious belief and practices bring them into a community in which an established institution of the host society attempts to speak, or mediate, on their behalf with the local and national governments, I also use the term “mediating institution.”

Although Donald had largely accepted that he would never move out
of the low-wage labor market in Miami, he emphasized that, despite his low socioeconomic status, his four children were at the top of their classes at the local public high school, and that the eldest two had won full scholarships to Florida State University. Like many other Haitian parents, Donald emphasized that he had moved to the United States to give his children access to a better education than he had had in Haiti. He also wanted his children also to be part of a supportive religious community, so that they would learn how to make the most of that opportunity. Notre Dame, which has approximately 2,000 regular members, also provides support to many young Haitians who were born in the United States to Haitian parents or who came here as teenagers, like Donald's children. Every week, thousands of Haitians from Little Haiti attend one of the five Catholic Masses celebrated in Haitian Creole at Notre Dame d'Haiti. As this church was founded precisely to provide a home for Miami's poorest immigrant group, both its members and many outside observers refer to it as “the heart of the Haitian community in Miami.”

Every Sunday and often during the week, Donald's children participate in one of Notre Dame's youth groups. Leaders of these youth groups try to build a protective wall around young Haitians to keep them from falling prey to gangs, drugs, and delinquency. Although not all Haitians are as successful as Donald and his children, Donald's experience indicates that, to the extent that Haitians in Miami have overcome their disadvantages, many have done so by spending time in religious groups, regularly attending church, and praying together at home.

Much historical and contemporary literature on immigration to the United States describes how, over time, the descendants of immigrants generally join the middle-class mainstream. The ideas of the melting pot in the United States, Canadian multiculturalism, and French republicanism all theoretically offer immigrants and their descendants the possibility of becoming part of both the cultural and socioeconomic mainstreams. At least for the United States, much research presents
ample evidence that indeed not all immigrants and their descendants have joined the middle class. To challenge the idea that all immigrants enjoy upward mobility, albeit over different periods of time, Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut developed a theoretical perspective called “segmented assimilation.” Segmented assimilation theory predicts that whereas the children of some high-skilled immigrants, such as Koreans or Cubans, may well achieve rapid upward economic mobility, others, such as some Mexicans, Southeast Asians, and Haitians, undergo downward assimilation, joining a relatively permanent underclass sector of society characterized by crime, drugs, and delinquency. The segmented assimilation model also helps specify the mechanisms by which low-skilled immigrants can nonetheless achieve upward mobility, such as by relying on ethnic institutions to provide social norms and solidarity. Research has shown that religious institutions often provide one of the strongest sources of ethnic solidarity, and leaders of those institutions give a public voice to disadvantaged immigrants such as Haitians.

Thus, just looking at how the individual faith of people like Donald provides a kind of cultural mediation only tells part of the story of Haitians’ adaptation in Miami. During the 1980s, Notre Dame earned a reputation for social activism both within and outside the Haitian community, because its pastor at the time, Father Thomas G. Wenski, vocally defended the Haitian boat people who were arriving by the thousands. Not only did he build up the religious community at Notre Dame, he founded a social service center, the Pierre Toussaint Center, which quickly became the largest service provider to Haitians in Miami. In the beginning the Toussaint Center relied on volunteers from the Haitian community and start-up resources from the archdiocese of Miami. Over the past twenty years, however, it has attracted millions of dollars in outside funding, most of it from the government, enabling it to expand its services—among them, programs in Creole and English literacy, acculturation, and job training, as well as legal services—and the number of people it reaches. The regular interactions between
leaders of both Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center with government officials, as well as the abundant government funding that the Toussaint Center has earned for its social programs, demonstrates how government agencies and religious agencies have cooperated to work toward a common goal, thereby strengthening each other’s efforts.

Although they occupy the same ten-acre property, donated by the archdiocese of Miami, Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center are administratively separate entities. However, the spiritual mission of Notre Dame complements the social mission of the Toussaint Center. Leaders of the Toussaint Center saw the center as much more than a conduit of state funding for Haitians; no amount of funding could solve all of their problems. These leaders see themselves as members of the community they serve, not just as providers of badly needed services, but as examples of hope and encouragement in a long-term struggle. Their clients see the leaders of the Toussaint Center as people who understood them and sympathized with them, whereas they often perceive government agencies as generally unfriendly and intimidating.

For these reasons, Donald turned to the Toussaint Center when they needed a specific form of help—like applying for asylum or taking Creole literacy or English classes. Although government agencies or secular community agencies can and sometimes do provide similar services, Haitians feel not only helped materially but also understood culturally at Notre Dame and the Toussaint Center. This two-tiered institution meets both their spiritual and material needs and does so in a way that affirms their dignity and strengthens their sense of control over their own lives.

Haitians Catholics in Montreal and Paris use similar religious narratives as a kind of cultural mediation to interpret their migration experience. As in Miami, leaders of the Haitian Catholic missions of Montreal and Paris started community service organizations. These institutions and their leaders mediate for Haitians in important ways, such as by meeting with government officials to help them understand the types of social problems in their communities. However, given the different
church-state relations in France and Canada, they have not been nearly as successful as the Toussaint Center in securing government funds for their social programs, or even in getting the government to acknowledge their potential contribution to Haitians’ adaptation.

“JESUS IS YOUR FRIEND”

The story of Robert, a Haitian immigrant in Montreal, on the surface seems similar to Donald’s, but it relates to a very different historical process, in which the state has gradually cut ties to religious institutions, thus weakening their capacity to support immigrant adaptation.

As part of my research in Montreal, I joined the choir at the Haitian Catholic mission in Montreal, which goes by the same name as its counterpart in Miami, Notre Dame d’Haiti. Being a regular member gave me opportunities to visit other members’ homes, in addition to observing informal conversations and interactions in the choir, which met on Friday and Saturday evenings for prayer and rehearsal. After one Saturday night rehearsal, Robert, a choir member, celebrated his fiftieth birthday by inviting all forty of his fellow members of the choir to his home in Saint Michel, a working-class neighborhood in Montreal, where about 10,000 of the city’s 80,000 Haitians live.

In the 1960s, the Quebec government recruited high-skilled Haitian migrants to come to Montreal to work as professionals in education and health services, among other things. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the same forces that lead increasing numbers of Haitians to head to Miami also led thousands of middle- and working-class Haitians like Robert to move to Canada. In recent decades, some Haitians have moved to Montreal by taking advantage of work visas and family reunification polices, whereas others have entered Canada as tourists and overstayed their visas, leaving them in a precarious legal situation. Although in the 1960s, only a few thousand well-educated professionals and students lived in Montreal, by the time of the 2001 Canadian census, around half of the Haitians in Montreal had less than a high
school education. Through steady migration over the past thirty years, Haitians have grown to be the largest black community in Quebec and one of the largest of all recent immigrant groups to Montreal. Unlike Miami, however, there is no “Little Haiti” where Haitians constitute the majority of residents in a neighborhood. Although highly educated Haitians had little difficulty adapting in Montreal, in areas like Saint Michel, where Robert lives, even the majority of two-parent Haitian families live under the poverty line.

Robert, together with his wife and their nineteen-year-old twin sons, who were born in Haiti, live in a small, three-room rented apartment in the basement of a townhouse duplex. For Robert’s birthday party, about forty people crowded into two tiny rooms, where everyone bumped elbows trying to move around. Despite the tight space, the choir members spent the evening fighting over the microphone to sing Haitian church songs—either alone or in groups—while the musicians took turns playing the electric piano. A few of Robert’s sons’ friends joined the party, and their hip-hop style of dressing—baggy jeans, Raiders jackets, and Yankees caps—introduced into the party a bit of what many Haitians in Montreal call “North American black culture,” which contrasts with the style of dressing most common among less acculturated Haitians, namely, ironed slacks and shirts with collars. Apparently recognizing that his sons’ friends might feel like outsiders at such a religious gathering, at one point in the evening, Robert grabbed the microphone, pointed right at the youths, and sang a song saying, “Jesus is your friend, won’t you come meet him?”

Robert was well aware of the different social context that surrounds his children compared to how he was raised in Haiti, and he pointed to an important difference as well between Miami and Montreal. Before choir rehearsal at Notre Dame the following Saturday night, Robert explained why he had sung these words to the teenage boys. “A lot of youth today are leaving the church. We have to try to bring them back. Thanks be to God that my two sons still come to church with me. My family and I do everything together. We go to church together; we
pray together at home. We can overcome difficulties if we have God in our lives. With God, there is always something you can do to help your situation.” Robert’s words echo much of what Donald had said: when facing difficulties, many Haitians turn to prayer and wait for a better opportunity. Both Donald and Robert fear that their children will fall prey to temptations to crime without the patience that comes from prayer.

Robert also believes in miracles; he believes that divine intervention saved his life in Montreal when he had what he called an “accident.” He had been brutally attacked while at work as a night janitor in Montreal. Tears welled up in his eyes as Robert recalled how a few men had broken into the store where he worked and “beat me like savages and left me for dead.” Fortunately, someone found him and he was rushed to the hospital. He believes his wife’s fervent prayers of intercession helped save his life.

As I listened to him, I wondered if the tears rolling down his cheeks represented hope, sadness, or a bit of both. His words expressed great pain, but Robert also focused on how his “accident” had led him to greater faith rather than to despair. “God tells us that not a hair of our heads will fall without him knowing about it. We can overcome our difficulties with prayer. With God, things will always work out. *Kenbe fem, pa lage, pa dekouraje* [Hold on tight, don’t let go, don’t get discouraged].” Haitians often string together these last three phrases to describe how they find the hope to continue in their ongoing struggles.

Robert has never been quite the same since his “accident.” He is more physically limited, but feels spiritually empowered. “God saved my life. I always went to church, but since my accident I have dedicated my life more fully to God in thanksgiving for what he did for me.” Although Robert believes a miracle saved his life, he also knows that, to get ahead, he has to take many small steps. Aware that many young Haitians fail to make the transition from high school to college, and wanting his children to beat this trend, he encourages his sons to attend
church with him and pray at home with him, reminding them that Jesus is their friend and will help them through the hard times.

Was the violent attack on Robert part of a broader trend of prejudice against blacks in Montreal? He thought not. Since his attackers did not yell any racist insults, he did not attribute this violent act to racist feelings against Haitians or blacks more generally; he simply believed he had been in the way of an attempted robbery. Other Haitians in Montreal often echoed Robert’s sentiments that their economic troubles, or even the social distance they felt from non-Haitian Quebecois, were not due explicitly to racism. However, perhaps because Haitians in Montreal live more spread out than in Miami, loneliness was a more common theme in my interviews in Montreal.

Despite the fact that the U.S. and Canadian governments differ in their immigration and welfare policies, regardless of location, Haitians like Robert and Donald are concerned about the same things—jobs, housing, and getting their children to finish high school and go on to college. Even though there are less stringent black-white racial boundaries in Canada than in the United States, Haitians’ low human capital, compounded by the lack of legal channels for low-skilled Haitians to migrate to Canada, and relatively high unemployment rates in Montreal, means that many Haitians in Montreal face similar socio-economic struggles as those in Miami. For example, even though government transfers supplement the income of poor Haitians in Montreal, as in Miami’s Little Haiti, more than half of the Haitians in Robert’s neighborhood of Saint Michel and other neighborhoods with many Haitians nonetheless have incomes that fall below the poverty line. In other words, government transfers may buffer the sting of poverty, but government welfare alone does not achieve what Haitians moved to Montreal seeking—a life free of poverty. Even the ability to get a good free education does not guarantee that all young Haitians in Montreal will do so; in fact, many young Haitians in Montreal have fallen into delinquency and dropped out of high school, much to the chagrin of their parents and community leaders.11
The challenges Robert’s family faces show that government social services alone do not guarantee Haitians’ successful adaptation. In the 1970s, recognizing that many Haitians needed extra support for their adaptation, the leaders of the Haitian Catholic community of Montreal founded a service center—the Bureau de la communauté chrétienne des Haïtiens à Montréal (Bureau of the Christian Community of Haitians in Montreal). Like the Toussaint Center, the Bureau’s founders organized volunteer work, mobilized funds from other Catholic agencies to support social programs for Haitians, and lobbied the government to regularize the status of undocumented Haitians. People like Robert benefited greatly from this advocacy, because he first came to Quebec on a tourist visa in the late 1970s, but later his wife acquired legal papers through a relative, which then allowed Robert to legalize his own status and bring their children over to join them.

Academics and government officials in Montreal all recognized the Bureau’s important contribution to Haitians’ adaptation. However, the Bureau has had a very different trajectory than the Toussaint Center in Miami. Whereas the Toussaint Center expanded from a church-based voluntary organization to a full-blown service center bolstered by millions of dollars in public and private funding, the Bureau’s initial scope of activity has decreased, and it struggles to find funding to continue its programs.

The Bureau’s initial success in supporting Haitians’ adaptation has waned in part due to the Quebec government’s preference for funding secular organizations. Like the French Revolution more than 170 years earlier, the 1960s “Quiet Revolution” in Quebec displaced the Catholic Church from its formerly dominant position in culture, education, and social services. In the United States, President George W. Bush’s creation of an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in 2000 largely strengthened the long-standing tradition of government support of private social service organizations, not the least of which is Catholic Charities. In contrast, in Quebec, the 2003 government proclamation that it prefers to cooperate with secular community
organizations rather than faith-based ones drove another nail into the coffin of what had already been a decades-long process of government disengagement with any organization that can be related to the historical influence of the Catholic Church. This progressive disengagement creates an environment in which religious institutions and government institutions, even when concerned about similar social problems, appear to be in conflict with each other in how they address those problems.

But differences in government funding of organizations such as the Toussaint Center and the Bureau only tell part of the story about the differences between Miami and Montreal. Canadian multiculturalism policies and Quebec’s similar interculturalism policies recognize ethnic pluralism, like the ideal of the American melting-pot. Given the historic English-French ethnic tensions in Quebec, the provincial government works hard to protect a unique Quebecois identity. One of the measures the government has taken to protect this identity is to favor cooperation with mixed-ethnic organizations, not organizations like the Bureau that clearly identify themselves with one group of immigrants.

Quebec’s rapid secularization over the past forty years and the imperative of protecting the province’s own cultural identity have created a great gap between the state’s approach to immigrant adaptation and the strategies of many new immigrants like Haitians. In the United States, ethnicity and religion are understood to be frequently closely intertwined, and the leadership of Haitians’ ethnic and religious organizations in Miami overlaps quite substantially. However, Quebec’s policy of funding only multiethnic secular organizations makes little sense to people like Robert whose social networks are tied closely to their church and ethnic community.

“THE LORD HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOOD TO ME”

Moving our analysis to France provides further evidence of how individuals’ narratives intersect with the historical dynamics that surround them. Although Haitians in France construct narratives similar to
those of Haitians in Canada and the United States, the religious institutions they belong to operate in a vastly different political context, which severely limits the ability of their religious leaders to advocate on their behalf and connect them to badly needed social services.

Relative to Canada and the United States, only a modest number of Haitians (around 25,000) live in France, notwithstanding the two countries’ historical ties. As in the case of Montreal, the first modern Haitian migrants to arrive in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s were students and professionals, but Haitians who have migrated to France since the 1980s in particular come from the lower socioeconomic classes of Haiti. Little research has been conducted on Haitians in France, probably because they constitute a relatively small immigrant group compared to the much larger groups of North Africans who live in France.

Just as in Miami and Montreal, I gained insights into how Haitians adapt in France by conducting ethnographic work at the Communauté catholique haïtienne de Paris (Haitian Catholic Community of Paris). As in Montreal, I sang in this church community’s choir, attended Sunday and weekday religious services, and often interviewed people from the church in their homes. One Saturday in the spring of 2003, I took the train to visit Marlene Pierre, a forty-five-year-old Haitian widow, at her home in a high-rise apartment in Saint-Denis, a suburb just outside Paris.

Walking between high-rise buildings to find Marlene’s apartment, I passed numerous stores catering to immigrants’ needs, such as African hair salons, convenience stores selling international calling cards and foreign-language newspapers, and ethnic food markets and restaurants. The types of goods sold in Saint-Denis clearly reflect the ethnic makeup of this neighborhood. Even in the middle of the afternoon, few people were on the sidewalk, and as I look white, I stood out just as much as in Miami’s Little Haiti.

My visit to Marlene’s apartment drilled home the reality of how a widowed immigrant mother of two girls tries to survive in one such banlieue. During the many times I interacted with Marlene at the Com-
munauté catholique haitienne de Paris, she struck me as particularly joyful and friendly, but her behavior changed to extreme caution once we entered her neighborhood. To illustrate this rather remarkable change in behavior, as we talked leisurely and cheerfully inside her apartment, someone knocked on the door and Marlene’s face became very serious. She only opened the door a crack and then curtly replied to the person in the unlit hallway, “No, no one from Mali lives here!” Noting my surprise, Marlene explained that she does not know her neighbors, many of whom are from places in Africa such as Mali, and is careful not to interact much with them.

Because many more immigrants from sub-Saharan African immigrants than Haitian immigrants live in France, Marlene mentioned that people often think she is African. Although one might expect Haitians to form some connections to their black African neighbors out of racial solidarity, Marlene and others said they don’t feel they have much in common with their African neighbors. Even though their skin color may be the same, many people pointed to numerous ethnic and religious differences, not only between Haitians and Africans, but even among Africans of the same nationality. As Marlene put it, “People from Mali do not even share the same ethnicity, religion, or language. If they don’t have many things in common even though they are from the same country, what do I have in common with them?”

When I was leaving her home, Marlene did not want me to walk back alone to the train station after dark, because she thought it was too dangerous, so we walked out of her apartment toward her car. As soon as we went outside, Marlene covered her head with the hood of her coat, and she did not greet anyone we passed, not even her neighbors whom we saw in the dark, dingy courtyard of her building. Because Marlene lives in an immigrant neighborhood with high unemployment and many people barely scraping by in the informal economy, her neighborhood can be dangerous, both in terms of crime and in terms of people seeking to take advantage of unmarried women like her who
have legal papers. To avoid trouble, she simply chooses not even to make eye contact with anyone—much less talk to them.

The 2005 riots in the immigrant suburbs around various cities in France confirmed for me that Marlene’s fears are not unfounded. The social isolation and economic deprivation in France’s immigrant-dominated banlieues became undeniable after the more than fourteen nights of consecutive rioting and violence in late 2005. Mostly first- and second-generation immigrant youth turned their anger against symbols of the French state—like school buildings and buses—as well as cars. The French government declared a state of emergency in order to restore order. Once the violence was quelled, the government began to reconsider its policies toward immigrant adaptation, which have long focused on encouraging immigrants to quickly adopt a French identity and lose ties to their own religious and ethnic communities.

Despite different ideologies surrounding immigrant adaptation, immigrants in France suffer many of the same problems as in the United States. It is harder to know reliably about the long-term trajectories of immigrants in France, however, because French republican ideology has influenced the kind of research done on immigrants in France and few official data directly compare the socioeconomic status of descendants of immigrants with that of native French. Nonetheless, like Marlene, most Haitians in Paris live in poor neighborhoods such as those where the riots took place, and their levels of poverty resemble those of Haitians in Miami and Montreal. In addition, Haitians exhibit extremely high unemployment rates in France—28.4 percent, according to the 1999 census.

Although the French government formally halted all labor immigration in 1973, the numbers of new immigrants to France have not declined substantially, much less to the level of zero immigration proposed by some. Without many visas available for low-skilled immigrants to France, thousands of people, Haitians among them, enter France as tourists and then overstay their visas, whereas others enter
clandestinely. Regardless of the mode of initial entry, thousands of Haitians in France request asylum annually. Although many Haitians legalized their status in France during regularization programs for undocumented immigrants in the 1980s, no more such programs are currently on the horizon, thus making nongovernmental support for immigrant adaptation—such as that provided by ethnic and religious associations or even by Catholic Charities—even more crucial. It is hard to see how the French republican model of immigrant adaptation—which sees citizenship as the key to successful adaptation—can work when so many immigrants may never be citizens and when even those who do become citizens have such high rates of unemployment. Some amount of conflict about immigrant adaptation must—and has—arisen in such a scenario.

Although she lives in a crime-ridden banlieue, Marlene is fortunate in other ways. She has a steady job as the leader of several domestic servants who all work for a wealthy family. She will soon receive French citizenship, and inasmuch as her daughters were born in France, they will become French citizens when they turn eighteen. Even so, Marlene relies on strong ties to her family, her religious community, and her ethnic community for numerous forms of support. Like Donald and Robert, Marlene answered my questions about her legal status and work with rather matter-of-fact answers as we chatted in her apartment. However, her countenance always lit up when she returned to her favorite topics—her family and God—topics apparently much closer to her heart than French citizenship. Marlene’s older sister helped her get a tourist visa to visit her in France, and Marlene then stayed. With many civil society organizations, the most prominent being the Catholic Church, pressing for a legal way for people from conflict-ridden countries to regularize their status,16 Marlene acquired legal residence during an amnesty program in the early 1980s.

For Marlene, as for Donald, Robert, and so many others, belonging to a church community fortifies their individual faith and provides a supportive environment for their families. Marlene married a Haitian
man she met at the Communauté catholique haïtienne de Paris, and they had had two daughters, but her husband had died at the age of forty, and since then Marlene had struggled to raise the two girls—Katrine, aged fifteen, and Julia, aged ten—while working long hours. Although an outsider might see Marlene as a powerless single mother holding a low-wage job and living in a poor and dangerous neighborhood, Marlene finds empowerment in her faith, insisting with a loud voice and a big smile that “the Lord has always been good to me.” Like Donald and Robert, she tries to pass on her faith to her children, despite the much more secular climate in France than in Haiti.

As a young woman, Marlene participated actively in her parish in Haiti, both singing in the choir and belonging to a Catholic prayer and service group called the Holy Family. Despite the fact that Christianity first came to France in the fourth century, when she arrived in the country that first sent Christian missionaries to Haiti, she did not find a vibrant religious spirit in her local neighborhood parish. But when her sister took her to the Communauté catholique haïtienne de Paris, she finally felt spiritually at home. On Sundays, she attends afternoon Mass at the Haitian Catholic Community, which is about a forty-minute drive from her neighborhood. In addition to the many activities she participates in at the Communauté catholique haïtienne de Paris, at the request of the priest in a neighborhood parish, she now leads a Saturday morning prayer group there. As in Haiti, Marlene spends all of her free time in France attending church services and participating in different church groups. So far, her daughters seem to be following in her footsteps, because they both belong to a youth group and sing in the youth choir at the Haitian Catholic Community.

Although there are not enough Haitians in Paris who belong to the Charismatic Renewal to start a regular group like the Haitian Charismatic groups in Miami and Montreal, Marlene’s intense prayer experiences are reminiscent of Charismatic prayer experiences and provide her with a narrative that keeps up her hope. During pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem, she received visions of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary
telling her that her family would be alright. As she was having trouble conceiving a child at the time, she also thinks that the Virgin Mary interceded for her to become pregnant with her second child. Although the strength of Marlene’s beliefs surprised me at first, she spoke so strongly about her experiences that I knew she was convinced that she had received special messages from God and Mary to strengthen her in her struggles. Regardless of whether or not one believes supernatural visions or miracles can occur, such experiences profoundly shape the individual behavior and social interactions of many Haitians like Marlene.

However, Marlene and the other members the Communauté catholique haitienne de Paris who share her faith nonetheless recognize that their prayer lives and beliefs in divine intervention do not automatically resolve social problems. The priest and lay leaders of the Communauté catholique haitienne de Paris expressed concern about the same types of problems as leaders in Miami and Montreal—obtaining legal papers for the undocumented, finding employment, overcoming language barriers, and preventing juvenile delinquency. One of the lay leaders who helped found the Communauté catholique haitienne de Paris—René Benjamin—also runs a nonprofit agency, called Haïti Développement (Haiti Development), that functions as a mediating institution, like similar institutions in Miami and Montreal, attempting to support Haitians’ settlement and adaptation in France by drawing outside resources into the community.

For the past twenty-five years, Benjamin has run Haïti Développement out of his own apartment, largely as one-man show. Despite his fund-raising efforts, he has acquired very little outside funding for staff or programs other than helping Haitians navigate the complex paperwork required to file for asylum status, such as proving that they experienced physical harm or the threat of serious harm that forced them to leave their country. Haïti Développement’s only regular source of outside funding comes from the Office français de la protection des réfugiés et des apatrides (French Office for the Protection of Refugees
and Stateless People), a government agency. As an illustration of how civil society groups can work with the state while also challenging the state’s boundaries and rules, Benjamin receives money from the French government to help Haitians apply for asylum after entering clandestinely or overstaying their tourist visas. In other words, the French government funds a civil society organization, and one led by a lay leader of a Catholic religious mission at that, to help undocumented immigrants normalize their status vis-à-vis the government.

Other than on the issue of legal status, Haïti Développement and other Haitian associations in France have not been able to obtain much funding for social programs they wish to start to assist Haitians’ adaptation. In fact, one Haitian leader asserted that Haitian associations in France are practically invisible to the government. The modicum of government support Benjamin has won for Haïti Développement is largely overshadowed by the French government’s general lack of interest in cooperating with Haitian organizations. Although people like Marlene may regularly turn to leaders of their own religious and ethnic community for support they need, those leaders have relatively little voice with the government.

Perhaps recognizing how important mediating institutions can be in immigrant communities, on numerous occasions, including after the 2005 riots, the French government has announced that it would provide greater funding to immigrant community organizations, and that government leaders would meet with religious leaders, including a council of Muslim religious leaders, the Conseil français du culte musulman (French Council of Muslim Religion). However, my research among Haitians indicates that communication between the state and community organizations or religious leaders remains very weak compared to the United States, and, what is perhaps not unrelated to this, concerns about the successful adaptation of immigrant youth continue to grow in France.

These three examples show how immigrants such as Haitians rely on their religious faith in numerous ways to support their adaptation.
However, the ability to successfully transform their faith into actions depends on local and national contexts, in particular the success of mediating institutions in working with state representatives and institutions. Although Haitians in all three cities express similar types of beliefs and engage in similar religious practices, the cross-national differences clearly emerge when we examine the response of the host society to institutions founded by leaders of religious communities that attempt to mediate between individuals and the state.

THE BOOK’S CONTENTS

Chapter 2 explores the sociological theories about immigrant adaptation, religion and civil society that guided my inquiry. Classical research and theories about immigrant adaptation in the United States emphasized that religious communities frequently form the center of immigrant communities, providing both cultural resources and institutional support for immigrants’ adaptation. However, in recent decades, the central contributions of religious beliefs and institutions to immigrant adaptation have been overlooked as decades of sociological research focused more on explaining differing socioeconomic outcomes across various immigrant groups. This book contributes to the renewed interest in religion and immigration by comparing one immigrant group and one religious tradition in three vastly different political contexts. Not only do I move between the individual, community, and inter-institutional levels of analysis, I also explore how historical processes influence the ways in which similar types of institutions engage the public sphere in three different nations.

The extent to which religious institutions engage the public sphere in any given society depends in part on government policies that regulate the public functions of religious institutions and on how governments regulate the public expression of religious beliefs. Compared to France and Canada, government agencies in the United States frequently cooperate with civil society institutions, including faith-based
institutions, to provide social services. Differences in church-state relations and the public expression of religion are crucial to understanding why the scope of the Catholic Church’s social programs for Haitians is greater in Miami than in Montreal and Paris.

The notions of cultural and institutional mediation guide our understanding of Haitians’ religious faith, their moral communities, and interactions between religious and government institutions. From the point of view of many Haitian immigrants, their successful adaptation is as much about creating a moral community centered on their religious faith as it is about creating social capital or achieving economic progress.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 consider Haitian Catholics’ religious beliefs and their religious communities alongside other elements of their adaptation in Miami, Montreal, and Paris, respectively. Census and immigration data, the history of the Haitian community, other Haitian associations, and how government representatives in each country address questions of immigrant adaptation. I also use extensive interviews and ethnographic observations to focus attention on how Haitian immigrants understand their adaptation. Next, I relate these narratives to the broader social and historical context in each city and nation.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 each present numerous examples of how Haitians use their religious faith to make sense of their migration and adaptation experiences. The ethnography in each of these chapters builds a vibrant picture of Haitian Catholic religious piety. For example, readers will see, from the perspective of my interviewees, the meaning behind reenacting the death of Jesus on Good Friday is related to the struggles and rebirths experienced as an immigrants. Interview excerpts illustrate recurring themes such as loving one’s enemies, pleading from one’s knees for God’s help, talking to Jesus all day long, and believing that one’s dignity lies in being a child of God. All of this ethnographic evidence supports the argument that religious ideas and narratives are unique sources of cultural mediation that occurs at the Haitian Catholic missions of Miami, Montreal, and Paris.
Using secondary sources and interviews with religious and community leaders, as well as government officials, in each of the three cities, in chapters 3, 4, and 5, I explain the factors that helped or hindered the institutional mediation of the social service agencies founded by leaders of the three Haitian Catholic communities. Chapter 2 presents arguments about how religion contributes to immigrant adaptation in the United States, thus establishing the context in which to understand Miami’s Toussaint Center, which I analyze in chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 contain lengthy discussions of religion and civil society in Canada and France, respectively, that help explain the different trajectories of the Bureau in Montreal and Haïti Développement in Paris. Although Haitians in Miami, Montreal, and Paris express similar religious beliefs, and despite their leaders’ efforts in each city to found social service institutions to support their adaptation, the interactions between those institutions and the government vary from cooperation in Miami to conflict in Montreal and invisibility in Paris.

What are the consequences of these different types of interactions between religious institutions, their affiliated service agencies, and the government? In the absence of cross-nationally harmonized longitudinal surveys with large enough samples of Haitians and questions on religion, I can only speculate about how religious practice or religious institutions influence Haitians’ long-term economic adaptation. Nonetheless, the various pieces of evidence presented throughout this book are consistent with the argument that Haitians experience a greater sense of well-being in Miami than in Paris or Montreal, and that one of the reasons for this difference is Catholic Church’s greater cultural and institutional mediation there. As shown by the Haitian Independence Day celebration at Notre Dame in 2004 discussed above, Haitians in Miami have created a large moral community, with shared understandings and numerous ways of caring and sharing. This shared moral meaning is complemented by the social work done at the Toussaint Center and the political advocacy of members of the church hierarchy. Although similar institutions exist in the Haitian communities of Mon-
treal and Paris, they lack the scope and the impact of Notre Dame in Miami and the Toussaint Center.

In chapter 6, I discuss how the concepts of cultural and institutional mediation contribute to larger debates about civil society and a well-functioning democracy. First, the cultural mediation in the three Haitian Catholic communities reminds us that, although one can certainly imagine that communities of moral meaning might emerge around different types shared meanings, religious meanings present a potent source to organize and sustain moral communities. Second, much evidence from the United States overwhelmingly shows that people who are active in religious communities experience numerous psychological, social, and even health benefits. Therefore, we have reason to be concerned if membership in religious communities declines, as I suspect it will for second-generation Haitians in Montreal and Paris because of the more secular environments there. This argument about how Haitians’ cultural adaptation impacts their political incorporation and socioeconomic mobility underlies the entire book.

To reinforce my expectations about the future of the Haitian communities of Miami, Montreal, and Paris, chapter 6 examines how the same the three people I introduced in this chapter—Donald in Miami, Robert in Montreal, and Marlene in Paris—perceive their children’s future. These parents each described his or her own journey as a great struggle to survive. Yet all three Haitian parents expressed equally high aspirations for their children to graduate from high school, finish college, and find middle-class occupations. They also know that if they want their children to thrive, they must work with their religious leaders to form a protective environment around their children. What will happen to their children if these parents’ religious commitments and supporting institutions do not carry over into the second generation of Haitian immigrants? These Haitian parents fear that without strong religious commitments and thriving religious communities, their children will succumb to the pressures that have led other Haitians in their neighborhoods into criminal behavior and dropping out of school.
These immigrant parents are not neutral about their children’s religious faith, nor do they want their faith to conflict with or be invisible to the government. Yet, in practice, their view of what their children’s success consists of often clashes with that of the state.

Appendix A supplies greater detail about the ethnographic and case study methods I used to study these three Haitian communities. In this appendix, I discuss the strengths and limitations of focusing a single religious institution in three sites rather than comparing the different kinds of religions Haitians may practice. In particular for readers with little prior knowledge about Haitian society and religion, Appendix A further addresses the complex religious landscape in Haiti, where three main religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Vodou—are practiced with great intensity. Despite the fact that numerous sources indicate that many more Haitians practice Christianity than Vodou, more scholarship exists on Vodou than on Haitian Christianity. The detailed ethnography of Haitian Catholics presented in this book helps fill the void of scholarship on Haitian Christians, in particular on fran katolik—Haitian Catholics who do not practice Vodou. The devotions and beliefs described here—such as the beliefs in the incarnation of God as man in Jesus Christ, that Jesus’ suffering is redemptive, and that God can forgive sins—distinguish Haitian Christianity from Vodou.

Appendix B presents background information on the political and economic conditions in Haiti that have led 20 percent of the nation’s population to emigrate in the past forty years, many of them to North America and Europe. In Appendix B, I also describe liberation theology and the various faith-based social movements it gave rise to in Haiti, movements that later crossed borders and were transformed into new initiatives in the Haitian communities of Miami, Montreal, and Paris.

“GOD IS GOOD”

Theology matters for social action. Although there is much renewed scholarly interest in religion, we are a long way from unlocking the
black box of religion to see what, specifically, about religion matters for social phenomena we want to explain or predict. We also should ask what people believe about the nature of God—their theology—and how they live out their obligations to God—their specific acts of piety. Beliefs about the nature of God and how God acts in the world simultaneously constrain strategies of action and suggest particular paths to follow. This book shows how, for Haitian Catholics, pondering God's promises of justice in the Bible, promises already made evident for believers by the life and death of Jesus Christ, is a great inspiration to work for justice in this world. In other words, theology provides an inspiration, a channel, for the struggle for social progress.

When I first visited Haiti, I was struck by how frequently people said, “Bondye bon,” which means “God is good.” Understanding the meaning behind this saying provides insight into Haitians' faith. During the time I spent traveling in and studying Haiti and in three Haitian communities of the diaspora, I struggled to see the good that lies beneath the layers of poverty. As I listened to how Haitians used this proverb “Bondye bon,” I began to see how their understanding of who God is—their theology—influences their actions in this world. When Haitians say “God is good,” they are not affirming a belief in a God who created the earth and then withdrew, but a belief in a God who continuously acts in this world right in the midst of their poverty and suffering. The God of Haitians is a good God, a God who intervenes in this world. The abundant hope and boundless energy to fight for change among Haitians finds a potent source of renewal in a theology of a good God.

Without denying the bad in Haiti, we have to look—sometimes very hard—for the good as well. If we think of Haitian immigrants simply as carrying with them the marks of poverty, repression and disorder, we might easily conclude that they bring no resources with them to help their adaptation abroad. At the very least, however, they bring with them the hope and determination produced by their belief that God is good. This belief in God's goodness, which many Haitians hold to be an unchangeable certainty, represents a constant in the midst of
an unpredictable and harsh social and political reality. Without a firm belief that social structures can be changed, notwithstanding ample evidence apparently to the contrary, we would be unlikely to see such enthusiastic engagement in efforts to achieve social justice among Haitians. Thus, as the title *Faith Makes Us Live* implies, throughout this book, a theological imagination accompanies the sociological imagination.