The American

City and the Evangelical Church

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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The Minority Churches Face the New City

1970–1990

As whites and their churches moved to the suburbs, their place was taken by minorities and minority churches. Those who had been geographical and sociocultural "outsiders" for so long found they were now becoming urban "insiders."

For many a major factor in the shift was the abolition in 1965 of a "national origins" quota system that had restricted immigration for four decades. Doors were opened now to a different part of the world.

In 1914, 88 percent (almost nine-tenths) of America's immigrants came from Europe. By 1973, that figure had dropped to 23 percent. And in their place came Latinos and Asians, with 30 percent coming from Asia, 18 percent from Mexico, and 23 percent from Central and South America.[1] The United States, once a microcosm of European nationalities, has become a microcosm of the world.

In the last two decades, that picture has been reinforced dramatically. The United States is undergoing a new demographic transition to a multicultural society. Between 1980 and 1990 the foreign-born population increased by 40 percent, with Mexico the largest contributor (2,369,514 people). The Asian population has jumped from only 877,934 in 1960 to over 5 million by 1985, an increase of 577 percent (compared to 34 percent for the general population).[2]

1. Lyle Schaller, *Understanding Tomorrow* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 68–69.

2. Kenneth U. Fong, *Insights for Growing Asian-American Ministries* (Rosemead, Calif.: Ever Growing Publications, 1990), 27.

The future will see an acceleration of the process. The Immigration and Naturalization Service projects that legal immigration will exceed 700,000 per year starting in 1992. That compares with 600,000 immigrants per year as recently as the late 1980s. Judith Waldrop predicts that by the twenty-first century everyone will belong to one kind of minority group or another.[3]

Central cities will still be the front line for receiving these new immigrants. Based on the 1980 census, four of New York's five boroughs are in the top ten most diverse counties in the nation. San Francisco is the most diverse. On a map, a band of highest-diversity counties extends from San Francisco southward and then across the lower part of the States through the Sun Belt. And the least diverse? "A broad swath stretching from northern New England through the Midwest and into Montana."[4]

New Insider Triumphs: The Black Church

In this multicultural urban society, the black churches, outsiders for such a long time in American history, have "maintained themselves fairly well since the 1950s. None of the mainline black denominations have experienced the kind of severe decline in membership that has affected some mainline white denominations . . . Some black denominations have grown in membership, with the Church of God in Christ showing the most rapid growth from about 800 churches to over 10,000 churches since 1950."[5] From 1980 to 1993, this body has averaged a gain of nearly 200,000 members and 600 congregations per year. It stands now at 5.5 million members, the fifth largest denomination in the country.[6]

Other growth records are less spectacular. The African Methodist Episcopal Church has experienced some measure of growth in some districts and among some congregations, particularly those touched by a neo-Pentecostal or charismatic flavor. Still others, like the Chris-

3. Judith Waldrop, "You'll Know It's the Twenty-First Century When. . .," *American Demographics* 12, no. 12 (December 1990): 23.

4. James Allen and Eugene Turner, "Where Diversity Reigns," *American Demographics* 12, no. 5 (August 1990): 36.

5. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 158.

6. Kenneth B. Bedell, ed., *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1993* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 8–9.

tian Methodist Episcopal Church and the AME Zion Church, have shown no decline but no rigorous growth either.

As in the white communities, it is among the black Holiness-Pentecostal bodies where one sees dynamic and drive. An integral part of the movement from its beginning, by 1965 over 1 million Afro-Americans were Pentecostal, 5 percent of the total black population then. "This was more than twice the national percentage of all Pentecostals, which was only 2 percent."[7] And sometime in the twenty-first century, predicts *Time* magazine in its issue of November 19, 1990, half of all black churchgoers will be Pentecostal.[8]

The contributions of the black churches, Pentecostal and otherwise, to the Afro-American community of the cities has been rich and diverse. The nature of worship as celebration "afforded tired and downtrodden people a recreative catharsis that helped them face an oppressive and frequently hostile larger world. The values inculcated in the lives of the sanctified church members—honesty, thrift, hard work, and discipline, combined with . . . moral asceticism—structured their daily lives around a coherent system of beliefs and, within the limits of racial discrimination, tended to promote upward mobility."[9] In a world destructive of black community, Afro-Americans found in the church the critical components of that missing community—intimacy, freedom of expression, face-to-face contact, and familiar social and physical surroundings.[10]

Holistic Models

Whether large or small, the black churches have continued to make their contributions. The storefront church, often maligned, opened its doors in hospitality to the Southern black during the time of the Great Migration when established churches would not. And it con-

7. Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 179.

8. Russell Chandler, *Racing Toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Religious Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 176.

9. Albert J. Raboteau, "The Black Church: Continuity Within Change," *Altered Landscapes: Christianity in America, 1935–1985*, ed. David Lotz, Donald Shriver Jr., and John Wilson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 81.

10. Melvin Williams, *Community in a Black Pentecostal Church: An Anthropological Study* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1974), 8. A case study underlining this same theme of recovered community will be found in Carolyn Beck, "Entrepeneurs in God's Economy: Christian Stronghold Baptist Church," *Urban Mission* 7, no. 5 (May 1990): 7–19.

tinues to minister as a "walk-in" community to the near neighbor without personal transportation. Small churches in Boston and San Francisco, Cleveland and Dallas, with no tools except evangelism and love, serve as "healing communities" to the ex-addict and single teenage mother, the abused children and battered wives.

And scattered in the inner city are always the large congregations, megachurches before the term was coined—the black charismatic wave of the 1990s including at least a half dozen congregations in the multiple-thousands class; Twelfth Baptist Church serving its 1021 members in the Greater Roxbury and Boston areas; New Shiloh Baptist Church in Baltimore, its weekly program of "food evangelism" taking care of five hundred families yearly, its ministries extending out to senior adults, detention centers, and penal institutions. And balancing all these commitments the conviction of New Shiloh's pastor, Harold Carter: "we must refuse to believe," he argues, "that a social gospel that argues for man to order his own society through legislation and community actions is somehow more relevant than the fundamental message of the gospel declaring, 'You must be born again.'"[11]

Deliverance Evangelistic Church remains the largest Bible-believing church in Philadelphia. Its doors opened in the fall of 1960 with ten persons sharing the Pentecostal vision of a blue-collar worker, Benjamin Smith, its founder and current pastor. By the 1980s its attendance at five worship services was averaging 6,000. In 1992 its 10,000-seat sanctuary was dedicated in the neighborhood where it began.

With a strong Bible-teaching pulpit ministry and a pastor who spends up to five hours a day in prayer, Deliverance defies many white stereotypes of the Pentecostal tradition. Its membership stretches from low- to upper-income residents. Its outreach ministries include "a drug task force, caring for the homeless, a prison ministry, street evangelism, college campus ministries, hospital and nursing home evangelism," and a twenty-four-hour counseling ministry on the telephone.[12] And as a token of its commitment to the neighborhood, before the present sanctuary was erected on the site of the old Connie Mack Stadium, the church had set aside property for the development of a twenty-one-store shopping center, Hope Plaza.

11. B. Carlisle Driggers, comp., *Models of Metropolitan Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 26–27.

12. Andrew J. White, "Reaching the Lost at Any Cost," in *Center City Churches*, 69.

East Oakland, California, a community once predominantly white, is now 90 percent black. Meeting the needs of this neighborhood is the ministry of Allen Temple Baptist Church. A 21-member congregation at its founding in 1919, its membership passed 2,800 by 1983, representing more than 1,100 families. Affiliated with the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Convention, U.S.A., it has combined a vigorous blend of evangelistic enthusiasm and social concern. Since 1970 and the coming of its present pastor, Dr. J. Alfred Smith, more than 100 persons each year have been baptized into membership.

Pastor Smith pleads for a church that will be "the visible manifestation of the invisible Christ." "At Temple Baptist," he says, "the church assembled is concerned about regeneration and racism, hell and housing, justification and justice, evangelism and ecology, prayer and poverty."[13]

In that search for a "harmonious balance between faith and works," the church provides tutorial services for schoolchildren and an annual college scholarship program. Church volunteers work in patient services at a local hospital. Space is provided in the building for dental and medical clinics. Out of a nonprofit housing corporation spun off by the church has come the Allen Temple Arms, a housing facility for the elderly. Financial assistance on a limited scale is ready to pay for rent, medicine, and personal bills, available to both member and nonmember. A credit union began operation in 1979, sponsored by the church.[14]

Linking all this together is an equally vigorous commitment to evangelism. At least two revival meetings a year focus on the unsaved. And in the tradition of the black church, special occasions focus on gospel ministry. Evangelistic street meetings and neighborhood Bible studies are a few of the thirteen areas designated as evangelistic ministry by the church. About 30 percent of all new members come through conversion and baptism.

Some are concerned that the black church is losing its central place in the lives and day-to-day struggles of the Afro-American community.[15] But there are others like William Pannell of Fuller Seminary

13. G. Willis Bennett, *Effective Urban Church Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 36.

14. Ibid., 86–106.

15. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 82; Ida R. Mukenge, *The Black Church in Urban America* (New York: University Press of America,

who still affirm that "the black church is both integrated into the Afro-American culture, and it is a source of strength for leadership and community development . . . It's the one constant."[16]

Lincoln and Mamiya support Pannell's judgment. "The majority of black urban churches are still strong, vibrant institutions and they have continued to attract and to hold the loyalty of a significant sector of the national black community. Gallup Poll data indicate that about 78 percent of the black population in 1987 were 'churched,' that is, claiming church membership and attending church within the last six months."[17]

New Insider Triumphs: the Latino Church

Once the Hispanic population was a pinch of spice for most Americans. Now Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population, the "invisible minority." The Anglo population fell from 83 percent in 1980 to about 80 percent in 1990. By contrast, "Hispanics increased from 14.6 million to 22.4 million, accounting for 9 percent of the population, up from 6.4 percent a decade before."[18] Ninety percent of these live in urban communities.

By the end of the century, some are predicting, Hispanics will be the largest minority, surpassing the African-American community. Depending on your count, their presence marks the United States as the third or fourth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. By 2025 A.D. they will number over 60 million.

The difficulty of using one term to describe this whole community is apparent by looking at its ethnic and political composition. Mexico accounts for 52 percent (13.5 million). Twenty-four percent (6.2 million), both on the island and the mainland, are of Puerto Rican descent. Twenty percent or approximately 5 million are, to use the language of the U.S. Census Bureau, "other Hispanics." Four percent or approximately one million are Cuban.

1983), 204; Hart M. Nelsen, "Unchurched Black Americans: Patterns of Religiosity and Affiliation," *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 4 (June 1988): 408–9.

16. Quoted in Chandler, *Racing Toward 2001*, 179.

17. Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 159–60.

18. David D'Amico, "Evangelization Across Cultures in the United States: What to Do with the World Come to Us?" *Review and Expositor* 90, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 84; Manuel Ortiz, *The Hispanic Challenge: Opportunities Confronting the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 26–27.

With the blacks, the vast majority of Hispanics form a growing and permanent underclass. Less than two-thirds finish high school, compared with nearly 90 percent of non-Hispanics. In 1988, the household net worth of white couples reached $62,390. By contrast, the net worth of black households was $17,640 and Hispanics even lower at only $15,690.[19]

Chronic unemployment continues to plague this community in which, by 1980, 70 percent were unskilled. In New Jersey, the estimated white unemployment rate for 1992 was 7.3 percent, up from 6 percent in 1991. For blacks, it was 11.5 percent. And higher still, the figure for Hispanics reached 15 percent.[20]

A Catholic Community?

And yet, as in the black community, evangelical churches continue to appear in the Hispanic community. Traditional Anglo stereotypes think of the Hispanic community as Roman Catholic. In fact, at least 70 percent of Hispanic Americans profess Catholicism. Nearly a third of the country's 55 million Catholics are Hispanic. And "with immigration and a high birth rate, Hispanic Americans are expected to make up about half of the country's Catholic population in another decade."[21]

At the same time, significant shifts are taking place. A relatively small proportion of the community (perhaps 9 percent) claim to have no religion. Even more striking is the growing number of Hispanics who have turned to the Protestant faith, perhaps more than 4 million. No precise count exists, but several indicators point to a growing constituency, particularly in the 1980s.

In 1986 the Gallup Religion Poll found that 19 percent of Hispanic Americans identified themselves as Protestants. Using data gathered by the University of Chicago, Father Andrew Greeley estimated in 1988 that about 23 percent of all Hispanic Americans were Protestants and that approximately 60,000 from that community join Protestant denominations each year.[22] "Three times as many Hispanic

19. Robert Pear, "Rich Got Richer in '80s, Others Held Even," *New York Times,* 10 January 1991, A1.

20. Neill Borowski, "Joblessness Persisting, Especially for Minorities," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 9 August 1993, C1.

21. Roberto Suro, "Switch by Hispanic Catholics Changes Face of U.S. Religion," *New York Times,* 14 May 1989, 22.

22. Ibid.

Protestants are enrolled in Protestant seminaries and schools of theology as are enrolled in Catholic seminaries."[23]

In southern California, to cite one example, the number of Hispanic Protestant congregations jumped from 320 in 1970 to 1,022 in 1986 to 1,450 in 1990.[24] In Boston between 1970 and 1980 the Hispanic population doubled, and its Spanish-language churches grew from a handful to more than two dozen. By 1990 there were approximately 150 Spanish churches in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. And 43 were Protestant.[25]

The exact number of Hispanic Protestants in the U.S. is very hard to estimate. But "if there are at least 20 million Hispanics (and some researchers think the exact figure should be around 25 million), the number of these Protestants should be no less than 5.4 million or 23 percent in 1990, up from 16 percent in 1972."[26]

Figures on the full strength of the evangelical Latino subcommunity are just as hard to obtain. Some suggest there is a larger body of independent congregations in the community than among the blacks, and therefore harder to find and count. As with the black Christian constituency, there are also some congregations connected with predominantly white evangelical bodies. But these numbers are limited. And, argue some, this is linked in all likelihood to the preoccupation of such Anglo denominations with their own urban survival and to an ultimate disinterest in the evangelism of Hispanics.[27]

By 1988, the Church of the Nazarene had 124 organized Hispanic churches and 71 mission churches. The Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) listed 400 Hispanic churches on its rolls, the Evangelical Free Church of America only 18. The Assemblies of God saw a strong rise in the 1980s and counted 2,717 Hispanic ministers and 1,217 churches in its fellowship (a 35 percent increase for the decade).[28] The Southern Baptist Convention appears to have the strongest con-

23. David D'Amico, "Evangelization Across Cultures in the United States," 90.

24. Andrés Tapia, "¡Viva Los Evangelicos!" *Christianity Today* 35, no. 12 (25 October 1991): 18.

25. Alderi S. Matos, "Boston's Ethnic Churches," in *The Boston Church Directory, 1989–1990*, ed. Rudy Mitchell (Boston: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 1990), 256.

26. Manuel J. Gaxiola-Gaxiola, "Latin American Pentecostalism: A Mosaic within a Mosaic," *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 114.

27. Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic-American Pentecostal Social Ethic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 67–68.

28. "Outreach Among Hispanics Increasing in NAE Denominations," *Action* (July-August 1988): 10.

stituency with 2,612 Hispanic congregations by 1987; it speaks of itself as "the largest Spanish-speaking evangelistic religious group in the world."[29]

It is outside all these circles, however, where the great growth lies. Unnoticed by mainstream Christianity, many meeting in storefronts, old theaters, former synagogues, and assorted commercial buildings, "one finds enthusiastic communities of faith, bearing vibrant witness for Jesus Christ and nurturing those who come to faith."[30]

And dominating this picture, even more than in the African-American world, is the family of Pentecostal fellowships. One estimate suggests that nationally, 15 to 20 percent of all Hispanic evangelicals consider themselves Pentecostals.[31] Fed strongly by "the airborne migration" of Puerto Ricans in the late 1940s and 1950s, New York City has exploded from 25 Hispanic Pentecostal churches in 1937 to 560 by 1983. Latin America Mission found that 58 percent of all Latino Protestants in Florida's Miami/Dade County were Pentecostals.

A Holistic Ministry?

Unlike the black church of the 1960s and early 1970s, the Hispanic evangelical community has occupied no center stage in Anglo society that might underline its needs and galvanize an outward-oriented agenda of concerns. Looked on by the white community as even more marginal, made even more invisible by a language barrier the black does not share, it seems more narrow in its focus. It looks more comfortable with revival meetings and mass evangelism than with some larger call to transform the city for good.

And within the church itself there are other obstacles to holistic self-expression. Theological commitments for some restrict the vitality of the gospel to a life of discipleship lived only within the doors of the church. The call to warfare against "the world, the flesh, and the devil" minimizes the role of the church in society as an agent of justice, freedom, and peace. Negative eschatological views are reinforced by the church's experience in its home-base cultures of Central and South America where the evangelical church has been forced

29. *Language Mission Facts: 1988 Update* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1988), 16.

30. Orlando Costas, "Evangelizing an Awakening Giant: Hispanics in the U.S.," *Signs of the Kingdom in the Secular City*, Helen J. Ujvarosy, ed. (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1984), 63.

31. Tapia, "¡Viva Los Evangelicos!" 20.

into a withdrawn minority role. And the church sees "the world" as a dying place and social expression outside the church, therefore, as a fruitless waste of time. The church takes on the look of a "haven for the masses."

Reinforcing these concerns may be Hispanic evangelicals' past experiences with what they perceived as "secularizing" efforts by mainline U.S. churches to aid the influx of the growing community in their adjustments to a new culture. One sample is provided by the "Houses of Neighborliness" and community centers erected by sponsoring interdenominational agencies in the 1930s.

They had "become so important in some communities that the people began to regard them as 'theirs' and to 'secularize' them. Neighborhood priorities displaced the evangelistic emphases and strained the relationships with the churches that conceived the centers as places where evangelization, if not proselytism, might occur."[32] Underlining this evangelical concern, often strongly anti-Catholic in its temperament, was the involvement of Roman Catholics in forming policy for the centers.

In the end, "Anglo sponsors as well as many 'pietistic' Hispanic congregations, offended by the social activism of the centers, resisted the success of these ministries."[33] And that ambivalent resistance has continued.

The Sanctuary movement of the early 1980s repeats the pattern. From 1982 to 1985 approximately 200 churches nationwide defied U.S. law and provided refuge for illegal Salvadoran and Guatemalan aliens who were unwilling to apply for political asylum. It would appear from news reports that the large majority of official sanctuary churches were Anglo, not Hispanic. And though many Hispanic congregations offered help to the Central American refugees on a more informal level, how many with clearcut evangelical credentials is difficult to evaluate based on the literature.[34]

32. Moises Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 123. I am grateful to Michael Kelly for drawing my attention to this history.

33. Ibid.

34. Donovan J. Cook, "'Public Sanctuary' for Central American Refugees: Its Meaning and Implications," *American Baptist Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (December 1984): 315–20; Eldonna Fisher, "Help for the Homeless," *Presbyterian Survey* (May 1984): 24–27; Michael McConnell, "Sanctuary: No Stopping It Now," *The Other Side* 21, no. 2 (March 1985): 32–35; Daniel Ritchie, "Sanctuary," *Eternity* 36, no. 6 (June 1985): 24–28, 35.

And if Tom Sine is correct, there is still another barrier that many of the Hispanic evangelical churches must cross to a fuller urban ministry. Most of the Pentecostal and Baptist churches in its fold are essentially rural churches planted in urban areas.[35]

Yet the potential is here. And more than potential. The Hispanic evangelical cannot simply be dismissed as irrelevant and escapist in relation to the urban struggle. Financial pressures, language barriers, theological worldviews, and Anglo social perceptions may limit the scope of their holistic ministry to their own community. But it is real nonetheless.

In the small church homes are visited and the ill and disturbed find a caring community. Emergency financial aid is provided as possible newcomers to the country are met at the airport and oriented to the city. Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal alike locate housing and employment for members through their congregational grapevine. There is an open door of welcome and help for drug addicts, prostitutes, and other social outcasts.[36]

And in the larger churches there is elbow room for a larger ministry. The mission field of Love Gospel Assembly is the Fordham section of the Bronx, New York. The population there has dropped by 20 percent in the last twenty years. Forty percent of those who remain were on public assistance in the 1980s (14 percent for New York City as a whole). In Fordham, 44.3 percent of the population live below the poverty line; 42.9 percent are unemployed. All the figures seem to say, "Nothing can grow here."

Love Gospel Assembly, now a thirteen-year-old multiethnic congregation of about 300 members with a strong Hispanic base, has adopted that community. And in the words of one of its members, "The church has a good reputation in the community, because the vision has enabled us to institute people-oriented ministries instead of a 'fortress mentality.'"[37]

Door-to-door evangelism and street preaching take place on a weekly basis. A Love Kitchen lunch program feeds 600 people a day. Care services are staffed by trained counselors and a full-time lawyer,

35. Tom Sine, *Wild Hope* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 192.

36. Melvin Delgado and Denise Humn-Delgado, "Natural Support Systems: Source of Strength in Hispanic Communities," *Social Work* (January 1982): 83–89.

37. Luis Carlo, "Love Gospel Assembly: A Current Urban Ministry," unpublished paper, Alliance Theological Seminary, Nyack, N.Y., 8.

providing crisis counseling, referral services, and contacts with professional agencies and parachurch organizations. A coffeehouse ministry the last Saturday of each month is designed to evangelize the community on a more social level.

And their vision for the city? "Listen, the Lord is calling to the city . . . Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city" (Mic. 6:9).

In the South Bronx one finds another Pentecostal assembly, Iglesia Cristiana Juan 3:16, the largest Hispanic church in the U.S. by 1977. By the same year, this "Citadel of the City" had planted seventeen new churches throughout the Northeast, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. Fifty-four ministers had been nurtured there and sent out all over the Spanish-speaking world. Its Sunday school averaged over 1,500; over 1,000 attended every Sunday night service.

"It had several evangelistic teams and prison ministry teams, several standing Benevolent Programs, and provided the inspiration and leadership for a social service agency in the church's premises serving the church and community at large."[38] Its commitment to the poor stands firm. As the church grew in numbers and economic strength, many have wanted to move out of the ghetto. Its pastor for thirty-four years, the Rev. Ricardo Tañon, has resisted that temptation. Lighthouses are needed at the point of danger. And all the lights must be burning brightly.

New Insider/Outsiders: The Asian Churches

Where do we place the Asian-American churches? On the periphery or at the urban center? We focus for our answer on China and Korea. But their journey is a much more complex and diverse history than the African-American or the Hispanic.

Late Arrivals

For one thing, Asians come in large numbers more recently in American history. As we have noted in an earlier chapter, the Chinese Exclusionary Act of 1882 made the Chinese, for example, "the only foreign race formally excluded from immigration to the U.S."[39]

In those early years of anti-Chinese sentiment, the community sought refuge in the emerging Chinatowns of cities like San Fran-

38. Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit,* 98.

39. Samuel Ling, "The Metamorphosis of Chinese Church Growth in North America, 1943–1983," *Chinese Around the World* (October 1983): 1.

cisco, Los Angeles, and New York. Self-insulation and segregation provided the poverty-stricken Chinese with a common cultural "identity and security where they could adjust to a new social, economic, political, and physical setting."[40] More severely isolated by language than even the Hispanic population, they planted their churches here also.

That exclusionary act was not repealed until 1943.[41] And until it was, the number of Chinese churches remained small. By 1931, there was a total of 64 churches in the United States and Canada. By 1952, there were 65 in the United States (43 connected to denominations, 14 independent, and 5 interdenominational). After a full century in the United States, "there were only 7,500 believers, roughly four percent of the total Chinese population, unevenly distributed among 62 Protestant churches."[42]

In the decades that followed, new waves of immigrants came and church growth began its expansion. By 1979, spread across a Chinese-American population of 705,600, there were 366 churches in the United States. In 27 years the Chinese Christian community had grown from an estimated 7,500 to approximately 50,000.[43] By 1985 that figure had reached 526 organized congregations, with an additional 159 designated as "Bible study groups or fellowships."[44] Congregations, by and large, have remained small, averaging 135 (according to a 1982 study).[45]

The rate of church growth, however, seems discouraging when compared with larger population estimates. One observer commented in 1977 that "during the past decade . . . the yearly increase of Christians is less than 2,000; only four percent of the population

40. Moses Chow, *Reconciling Our Kinsmen in the Gold Mountain* (Washington, D.C.: Ambassadors for Christ, Inc., 1972), 9.

41. For a full study of the effect of immigration policies on Asian-American church growth, consult Wi-jo Kang, "The Background of the U.S. Immigration Policy Toward Asians: Implications for the Urban Church Today," in *Signs of the Kingdom in the Secular City,* ed. Helen J. Ujvarosy (Chicago: Covenant, 1984), 75–80.

42. John Peter Chow, "Evangelism Among American Chinese," *Interlit* 14, no. 4 (December 1971): 11.

43. Felix Liu, "A Comparative Study of Selected Growing Chinese Churches in Los Angeles County" (Unpublished D.Miss. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 1981), 54.

44. Edward K. Knittler, "Development of a Manual for a Culturally Related Evangelism Program for Chinese Churches in North America," unpublished D.Min. dissertation, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1988, 12–13.

45. Gail Law, *Chinese Churches Handbook* (Hong Kong: Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism, 1982), 243.

growth. Actually, the increase is mainly due to migration of Christian families rather than by conversions."[46]

The growth of the Korean-American population and its churches follows a similar pattern in some ways—a small trickle at first, then a tidal wave of growth in the last half of the century. But several things mark it as unique.

Whereas the Chinese community's presence in the United States has spanned over a century and a half, the Korean history is briefer. Not until the first decade of the twentieth century did the first immigrants arrive on the U.S. mainland.

Further, "unlike the Chinese and Japanese immigrants, a majority of the early Korean immigrants had had some exposure to Christian missionaries, and many of them were already baptized Christians prior to their emigration from Korea . . . The number of Buddhists among the early Korean immigrants was negligible, and most were converted to Christianity later."[47]

This Christian legacy of Korean immigrants persists today in the massive population change since the 1960s. Never more than a community of 10,000 until the end of World War II, rapid demographic changes followed the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965. By 1980, sixteen years after the abandonment of the old quota system, the Korean population numbered 357,393. By the time of the 1990 census, it was closer to 814,000, a growth of 125.3 percent in ten years.

More remarkable yet has been the growth of the church during this time. "The number of Korean immigrant churches has grown even faster than the population from about 75 churches in 1970 to about 2,000 today—an unprecedented increase of about 27 times. This would mean that there is one Korean ethnic church for every 350 Koreans in the United States."[48]

A new proverb current among Korean-Americans summarizes well the picture: "When two Japanese meet, they set up a business firm; when two Chinese meet, they open a Chinese restaurant; and when two Koreans meet, they establish a church."[49] The comparison

46. Chow, "Evangelism Among American Chinese," 2.

47. Won-moo Hurh and Kwang-chung Kim, "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 1 (1990): 21.

48. Ibid., 19.

49. Il-soo Kim, "Organizational Patterns of Korean American Methodist Churches: Denominationalism and Personal Community," unpublished paper read at the Bicentennial Consultation on Methodism and Ministry, Drew University, Madison, N.J., 13 April 1983, 2.

with the church in Korea is even more startling. Estimates place the church in the homeland between 30 and 35 percent of the population. By contrast, that proportion in the U.S. Korean community by 1984 had reached 70 percent, and 77 percent by 1988. Approximately half, 51.3 percent, are said to have been Christians prior to their emigration from Korea.[50]

Middle-Class/Suburban Orientation

Also unlike the African-American and Hispanic church communities, the Asian-American evangelical community of recent years has a larger constituency among the middle class. A greater degree of wealth represented by a larger number of university-trained professionals is present in the Chinese and Korean congregations today.

In fact, Asian-American households are more affluent than any other racial or ethnic group, including whites. "The median household income of Asians was $31,578 in 1988, compared with $28,661 for non-Hispanic whites, $20,000 for Hispanics, and $16,004 for blacks. Fully 32 percent of Asian-American households have incomes of $50,000 or more, compared with only 29 percent of non-Hispanic white households."[51]

Like the whites, this has turned the Asian-American communities and their churches to the suburbs recently in increasing numbers. By 1990, about half lived in central cities and half in suburbs. This contrasts with whites, who are twice as likely to live in suburbs as in central cities.[52]

As a result, "the Chinese community in major North American cities is rapidly polarized into two ecologies: affluence among Chinese dispersed or clustered in suburban neighborhoods and poverty among Chinese concentrated in the traditional inner-city Chinatowns."[53]

What effect has this had on the churches? In the suburban areas, there are more and more new churches or branch churches planted

50. Yong-soo Hyun, "The Relationship Between Cultural Assimilation Models, Religiosity, and Spiritual Well-Being Among Korean-American College Students and Young Adults in Korean Churches in Southern California," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Biola University, LaMirada, Calif., 1990, 1.

51. William O'Hare, "A New Look at Asian Americans," *American Demographics* 12, no. 10 (October 1990): 30.

52. Ibid.

53. Wing-ning Pang, "The Chinese Protestant Church in North America," *Chinese World Pulse* 6, no. 1 (March 1982): 4.

in emerging "Chinatowns" like Monterey Park or Alhambra in Los Angeles County. They represent a high degree of wealth and the new Chinese professional community. And their presence indicates that the suburban church has had some degree of success in evangelizing the Chinese in this socioeconomic group.

On the other hand, many of the churches remaining in the local Chinatown or its vicinity appear to be struggling in other ways. Like the suburban churches, they have yet to make a strong impact on subgroups in the community—the poor hidden behind the facade of the "gilded ghetto," the working class and elderly people, the Indo-Chinese refugees who find their homes in the Chinatowns of Houston and Philadelphia. And, like the white churches of recent history, they can be in danger of moving into the commuter church model, fed by suburbanites who come to church only on Sundays.

The recent history of the Korean-American community follows a somewhat similar pattern. "It was mainly the middle-class who had access to and resources for immigration, and who were in a position to take advantage of the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965, which favored family reunion and migration of professional and technical workers."[54]

And it is that urban middle class that continues to be highly represented among Korea's immigrant population. Between 1974 and 1977, 40 percent of the arrivals had previously engaged in professional and technical occupations in the homeland.[55] By 1975, 65 percent of the 560 Korean householders living in the New York metropolitan area had finished university studies in the homeland.[56] Their adjustment to urban life must have been a relatively easy one. Out of 622 Korean immigrants interviewed for a 1990 study, 97.4 percent came from the major cities of Korea, predominantly Seoul (74 percent).[57]

By and large, like the Chinese, recent church planting remains suburban in orientation. Small businesses proliferate in black neighborhoods. But Koreans, and their churches, remain in the suburbs,

54. Won-moo Huhr and Kwang-chung Kim, "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States," 29.

55. Eui-young Yu, *Migug eui Hanin Sahoe* (Seoul: Bak Young Sa, 1983), 475.

56. Won-moo Huhr and Kwang-chung Kim, *Korean Immigrants in America* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1984), 58.

57. Won-moo Huhr and Kwang-chung Kim, "Religious Participation of Korean Immigrants in the United States," 29.

avoiding living in the communities from where they draw their income. In 1991, for example, there were probably fewer than fifteen Korean congregations in Philadelphia proper but twenty-eight in the neighboring suburb of Montgomery County.[58] And in the larger metropolitan area covering several surrounding suburban counties that total figure reaches over one hundred.

Language and Assimilation

As we have pointed out in an earlier chapter, the Asian community has not escaped the racist stigma of being a peripheral "outsider" in the American city's history. Can its church escape that label now? Especially in view of its growing move, not to the city, but to the suburbs? Will it join the white church there and become a different model, a kind of "new insider/outsider"?

Both churches retain a strong sense of ethnic self-identity that makes any movement in this area difficult to plot. Both continue to struggle with the overwhelming barriers of communication in a language other than English. With the African-American and the Hispanic, both feel a growing sense of alienation from the majority white culture in which they have sought a home. Even their place in the suburbs with the whites does not always eliminate the sense of isolation or break the siren call to withdrawal.

The Chinese evangelical church, by virtue of its longer history in the U.S., shows signs of deep struggle in this whole area. And in this community the conflict often revolves around the issue of American-born Chinese (ABCs) and Overseas-born Chinese (OBCs).

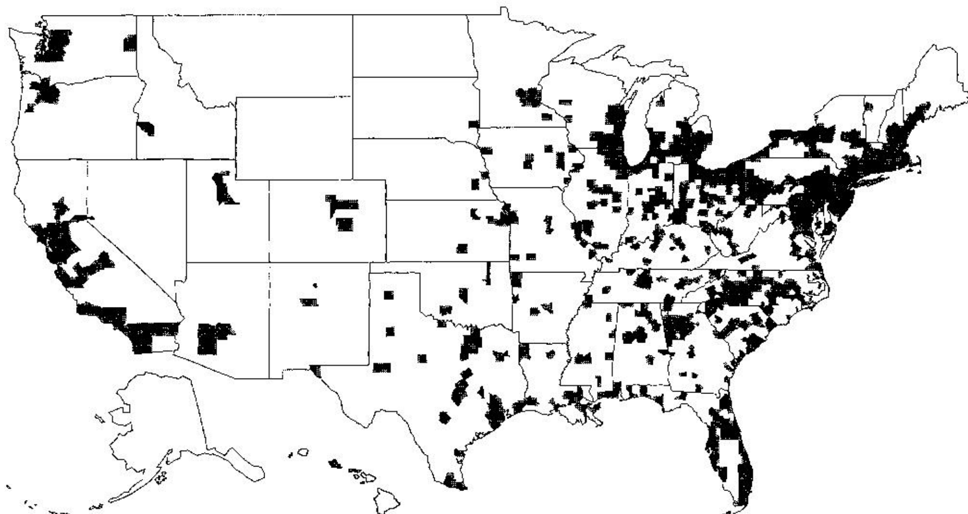
Between these two groups the difference is much larger than place of birth. There are cultural and social differences that have left the church with a basic, unresolved tension over assimilation.[59] And these differences also have effected those churches located both in the city and in the suburbs.

Unlike the white urban churches of the post-1950s, creating transitional churches that would move from an OBC orientation to an ABC one, from a Chinese-dialect church to an English-speaking one, will not work easily at all. The ABC community obviously continues

58. James H. Chun, "Korean Communities in Montgomery County, Pa.," unpublished paper, Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, 1991, 1, 14.

59. Cecilia Yau, ed., *A Winning Combination: ABC-OBC. Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches* (Petaluma, Calif.: Chinese Christian Mission, 1986), 1–15, 37–58.

Figure 12
Urban America 1990



U.S. counties with over 100 people per square mile.

Source: U.S. Census, 1990

to grow (40 percent of the entire U.S. Chinese population by 1980). But so does the OBC!

In this situation, assimilation is not a once-for-all battle the community can win and then move beyond. After all, is it ever once-for-all anyway? It is an ongoing struggle with which the church wrestles.

Can it be transcended by planting more Chinese evangelical churches in the suburbs where the ABC locate in larger numbers? Assuredly that will be needed and, in fact, appears to be the major trend already. Such churches also may have a stronger chance of integrating ABCs more deeply into the fellowship and leadership of the Chinese church where they have long felt a "housing shortage."[60] The potential for reaching ABCs for Christ in such fellowships seems high.

At the same time, there will be newcomers in the suburbs too who will need ministering in their own linguistic and cultural idiom—fam-

60. Hoover Wong, "The ABC Housing Problem," *Chinese Around the World* (October 1990): 1–6.

ily and friends uncomfortable still with either American monoculturalism or ABC biculturalism; young people just arrived who are neither first generation nor second generation. Language and ethnic issues will not disappear in the suburban setting.

By comparison, will the churches of Chinatown fade away? As long as OBC population continues to grow, as long as first-generation immigrants continue to seek a place where they may "feel at home" with family or friends in their own languages and cultures, as long as the Chinatowns of America's cities continue to welcome these newcomers and to be reception centers for the poor and the blue-collar workers, they will not. With the Chinese church there appears to be a blurring of the city/suburban distinction. Assimilation does much of the blurring.

The Korean Christian community now begins to face these same issues of assimilation, and probably on a more intense scale than even the Chinese. Their history in the U.S. is much briefer than the Chinese, and pressed therefore into a narrower assimilation timespan. Ninety percent of the Koreans residing in the U.S. by 1986 had come since 1965. To cite one local sample, the 1980 census notes that 94 percent of the Korean-born population in the New York metropolitan area arrived since 1965.[61]

Compounding the combined difficulties of this narrow time band and rapid growth of the Christian community are the large amount of first-generation Korean pastors serving these immigrant churches. Trained in Korea with the bulk of their church experience there, they come with an orientation and theological focus still directed by the needs of the homeland. The assimilation issues of the immigrant church are not always faced adequately by these pastors. Their orientation, by and large, remains monocultural, not bicultural.

The effect of all this on the Korean churches is a general preoccupation with their internal needs and their own survival. The focal point of social interaction and the center of community life, they often display what one author calls a "conservativeness and introvertedness" that tends "to reinforce Korean values and traditions."[62]

61. Nancy Fonder, *New Immigrants in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 221.

62. Dae-gee Kim, "Major Factors Conditioning the Acculturation of Korean-Americans with Respect to the Presbyterian Church in America and Its Missionary Obedience," unpublished D.Miss. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, Calif., 1985, 102.

Until future generations change this picture of Chinese and Korean evangelicals and look for new models of ministry structured around the needs of an assimilating people of God, we are faced with churches characterized by great ambiguity in their philosophy of ministry. They will find serious difficulty in breaking through their "outsider" mentality to become full "insiders" in either city or suburb.