

Immigrant Religion

in the City of Angels



Center for Religion and Civic Culture
University of Southern California

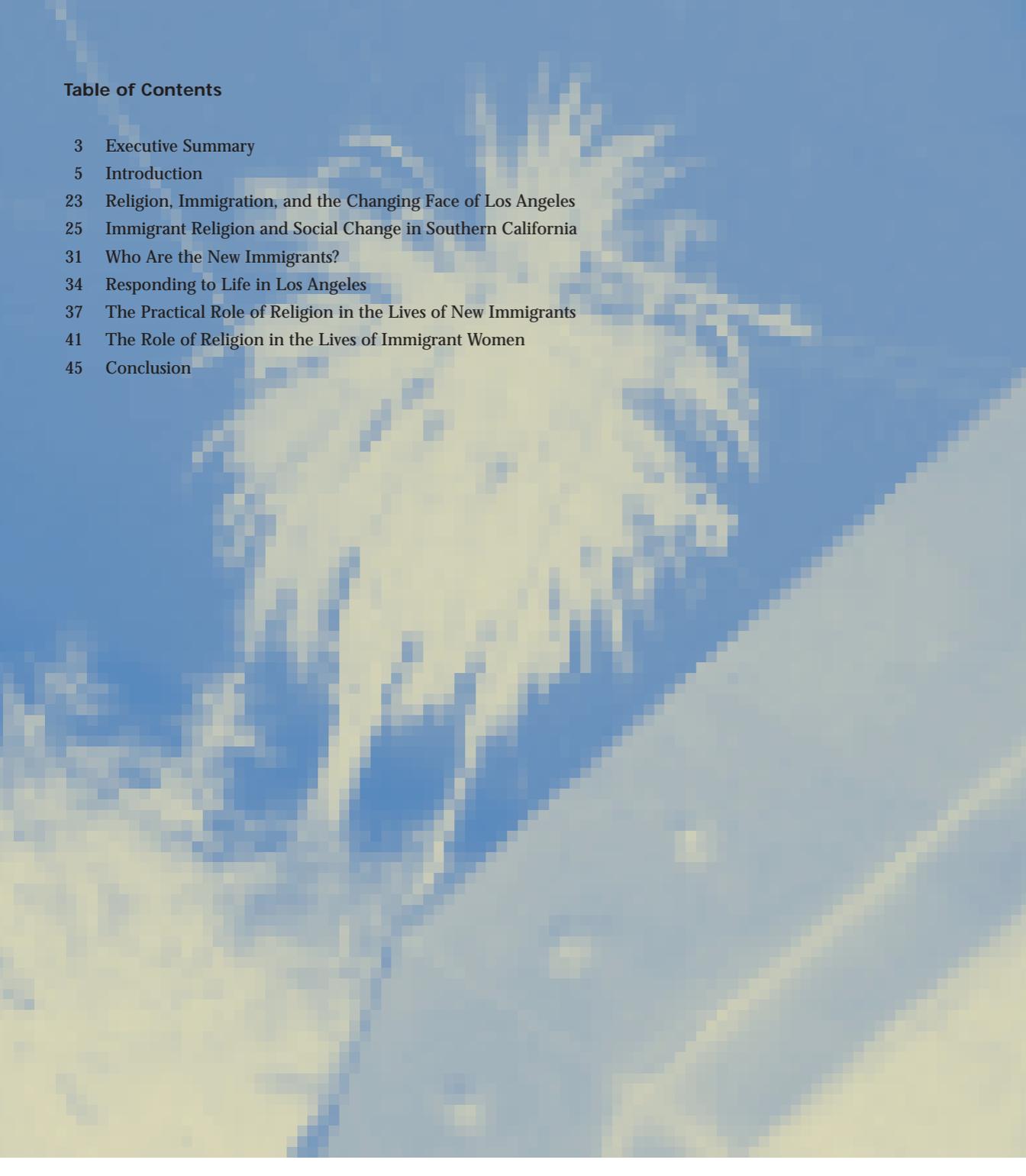


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Executive Summary

LOS ANGELES is a major gateway city for new immigrants and is already home to a population where one person in three is foreign born. Given the context of this amazing demographic shift, in the fall of 1998 the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture launched a two-year research project to study the role of religion for new immigrants to Los Angeles. Funding for this project came from The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, which has a long-standing commitment to researching social issues in Los Angeles. A year later, The Pew Charitable Trusts decided to build on this project and add Los Angeles to the list of Gateway Cities (major ports of entry, including Chicago, Houston, Miami, New York, San Francisco, and Washington) where they are funding three-year research efforts on religion and immigration. The goal of both the Haynes and Pew projects is to document the role of religion for new immigrants living in Los Angeles, as well as to advance our theoretical understanding of religion's role in the 21st century. This report reflects our findings at the end of two years of research. At the conclusion of the Pew-funded phase of the project, in 2002, a university press book, as well as a collection of essays by scholars associated with the project, will be written.

The traditional view of the role of religion in the lives of immigrants stressed assimilation. Thus, the great melting pot subsumed cultures of origin and created an American identity that was tied to one of three religions: Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. Today, a new paradigm of *segmented assimilation* is a more apt description of the ways in which immigrants

adjust to life in the United States. Religious institutions, rather than merely incorporating people into the American mainstream, serve the dual functions of preserving national identities and aiding incorporation.

While immigration is affecting the entire nation, there is no question that immigrants are transforming the face of the existing religious marketplace in Los Angeles. Religious institutions are refocusing their efforts to accommodate the growing numbers of immigrants by altering their worship styles, creating multiple congregations inside the walls of a single church building, and seeking ways to show solidarity with immigrants. Moreover, denominations are creating innovative models to meet the social service needs of new arrivals to Los Angeles. Religion for new immigrants certainly includes the search for truth, but is also a human community that nurtures, expresses compassion, and challenges individuals to live up to their potential. Many immigrants who arrive without extended family and a social safety net are drawn to congregations. These congregations offer a safe haven, connection with the home country, a place to exercise leadership abilities, and formal and informal social services. For women, the new country often offers a greater sense of freedom and autonomy.

The most compelling finding during these first two years of research is that immigrants are a potential source of moral renewal at a challenging moment in United States history. The decline of civility, shared effort and civic cooperation in Western democracies is a legitimate concern in our civic context. Anchored in community, immigrants know something about extended family ties, the value of community, and the importance of preserving a cultural heritage while contributing to the new society. Immigrant congregations are contributing to the religious and civic fabric of Los Angeles. These institutions play an important role in the process of incorporating new immigrants into American society and play a mediating role to help maintain the values connected with their places of origin.

Introduction

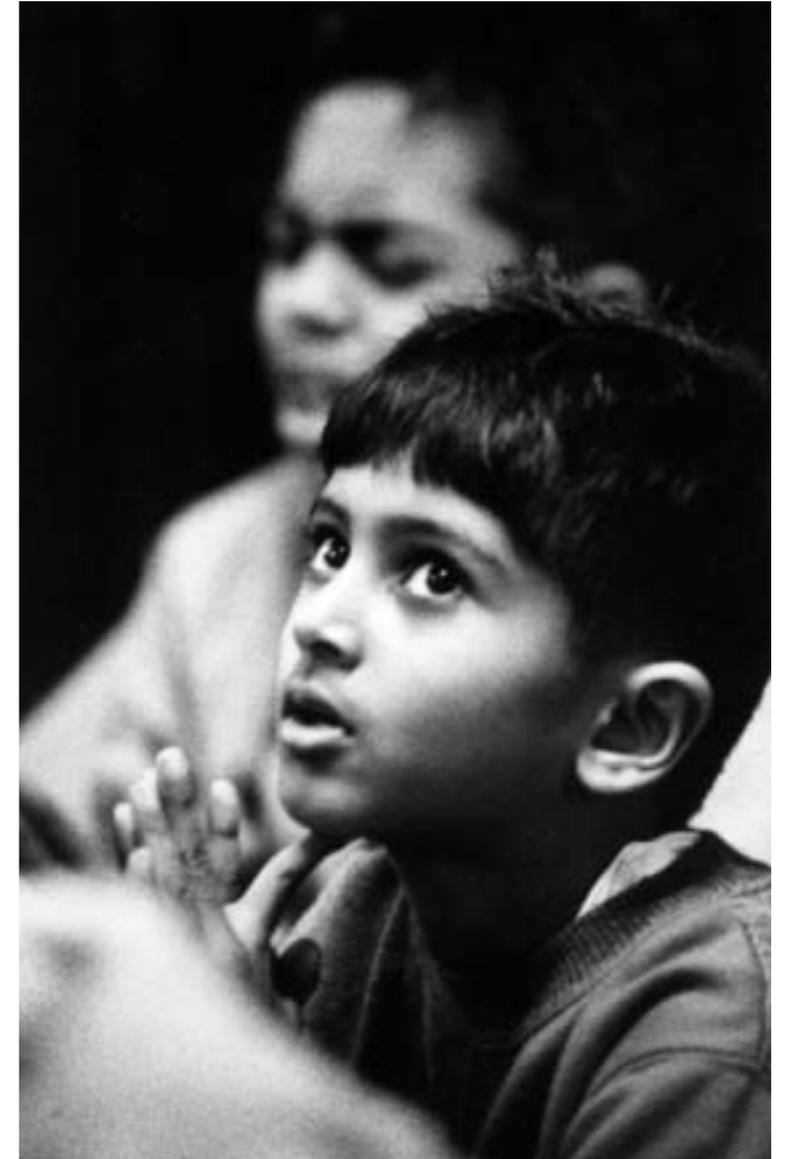
THE EMOTION IN THE AIR was palpable. In a few minutes a six-foot replicate image of the Divine Savior of the World, “El Salvador,” was to complete its ten-day journey from the cathedral in San Salvador to Los Angeles. Hundreds of people were gathered in the parking lot at Dolores Mission, a church in Boyle Heights that has given refuge to thousands of immigrants. The news media was out in full force, with microwave towers raised to the sky. And then the red pickup truck rounded the corner off First Street and headed south on Gless Street towards the church. People crowded into the street, wiping away tears and beaming smiles as this transnational symbol of hope and peace came towards them. After a few short speeches, a Mariachi band stepped to the front of the procession and the crowd sang and prayed its way through the housing projects surrounding the church.

A week later, thousands of Salvadorans gathered in front of Precious Blood Catholic Church in Pico-Union and witnessed the transfiguration of “El Salvador” as he descended down into a huge world globe they had constructed, and minutes later reappeared in a white robe. Perhaps the most touching stories came from the pilgrimage northward, where mothers, who had bid farewell to sons and daughters a decade earlier in El Salvador, kissed and touched the image which connected them with their loved ones, some of whom, we must suppose, now joined the processions of the figure around the streets of Los Angeles.

Several months earlier and twenty miles south of the scene in Boyle Heights, a less dra-

matic but equally important event occurred in a Cambodian Buddhist monastery in Long Beach. Nearly a thousand people crowded into Temple Khemara Buddikaram, bearing food and gifts, to pay homage to their departed relatives. As Rev. Chhean burned slips of paper with the deceased ones' names, his fellow priests chanted, and family units sat together on the floor unpacking their canisters of food, remembering together the events that had brought them to this strange land. There was a young woman in the group who, as a child, had walked through the "Killing Fields" over dead bodies as she and her family made their escape from Cambodia. And there was a woman, now middle-aged, whose two children had died on the same day from dysentery in the early 1970s. Is it any wonder that there are 150 documented cases of psychosomatic blindness among women in Long Beach who witnessed the torture of their husbands, the rape of their daughters, and the obliteration of their villages? Rev. Chhean, who has training in psychology, refers his members to a local clinic for medication and treatment when they are amenable to western styles of intervention, and otherwise he performs magical incantations to help them cope with the trauma of their past.

A few weeks later in the San Gabriel foothills, an age-old ritual is repeated in the city of Pasadena where approximately ten thousand Armenians have settled. Resident here are the sons, daughters and grandchildren of survivors of the genocide in Turkey which claimed the lives of 1.5 million Armenians. It is Saturday, and Tavit (David) is being baptized at Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church. The young child cries as he is held naked in the baptismal font and Father Vazken pours water on him, following the most ancient rite of Christendom — a rite that has been practiced for 1700 years since the time Armenia became the first nation to convert to Christianity. After the baptism, Father Vazken tells a visiting journalist that Armenians can never accept the Turkish denial of the genocide, but, on the other hand, he has chosen every April 24th — the day commemorating victims of the genocide — to have a blood drive at the church. In this way, the blood of Armenians is available to all — perhaps, as he said, even to a Turk who is in need.





The Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the religious and cultural ties of a diaspora community. Father Vazken Movsesian (right) enacts the oldest rite in Christendom as he baptizes a child at Saint Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church in Pasadena. Fr. Movsesian (above) leads students in an April 24th ceremony to remember the 1.5 million Armenians who lost their lives during the 1915 genocide in Turkey.





Hsi Lai Temple is an architectural monument as well as a functional monastery. It is a place where people, particularly Chinese from Taiwan, come to connect with their cultural and spiritual roots. Daylong retreats (shown here) are opportunities for lay people to experience Hsi Lai as a cultural and spiritual reservoir.





The Swaminarayan Hindu Temple provides a peer group that articulates through rite, ritual, and communal activities the values associated with the homeland. Devotional activities, Gujarati language classes, and cultural festivals are regular events at the temple. The ascetic tradition is a very important component of the religious practice for the *sants*, monks who are trained in Gujarat and provide leadership for local temples. One of the Whittier temple's *sants* is shown here (right).





St. Thomas the Apostle in Pico-Union, an area that is populated predominantly by Central American immigrants, has traditional Catholic mass and has embraced a charismatic movement of lay leaders. Every Friday night, a group called *El Sembrador* (The Sower) leads a service with enthusiastic praise choruses and hand clapping, followed by a period of healing and laying on of hands.





Muslims in Los Angeles undoubtedly take the prize for being the most multiethnic religious group in the city. Some have called Friday “Salat” prayer services at Masjid Omar ibn Al-Khattab (above) “the United Nations on its knees.” Girls from the New Horizon School in Los Angeles (right) take part in a prayer service.





St. Philomena Catholic Church in Carson is an example of the amazing diversity in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Filipinos represent the second largest Asian group in Los Angeles County. Since 1980, the Asian population has increased from six percent to twelve percent of the total population.





Guru Nanak founded Sikhism in the early part of the fifteenth century and it is now the world's fifth largest religion. Vermont Gurdwara in Hollywood is one of a handful of Sikh temples in the Los Angeles area. Tej Suri, a Sikh from Punjab and deputy assessor of Los Angeles County, was recently quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*: "In God we trust.' You see it on every bill in America. Also, 'All men are created equal.' It is the same for us. We believe like Americans."





Religion, Immigration, and the Changing Face of Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES, a major gateway city for immigrants coming to the United States, is undergoing a dramatic shift in population. Nearly one person in three in the county is foreign born. Latinos currently constitute 44 percent of the population and Asians, at 12 percent, have surpassed African Americans (10 percent) who are gradually declining as a proportion of L.A. County's residents. But these are not the only immigrant groups in Los Angeles. There are more immigrants from the Middle East in Los Angeles than any other region of the country. Armenians, for example, are the second largest group of limited-English speaking students in the Los Angeles Unified School District. (Over one hundred different languages are represented by children in the Los Angeles Unified School District, with Spanish speaking students being most numerous followed, in rank order, by students speaking Armenian, Korean, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Filipino, Mandarin, Farsi, Russian, and Arabic.) There are also immigrants from Africa, as well as a continuing trickle from Europe.

In 1990, Los Angeles was home to 3.9 million immigrants — 400,000 more than

New York. Today, approximately one-third of all the zip codes in Los Angeles County do not have a single ethnic group that constitutes a majority. Los Angeles leads the way in redefining the ethnic composition of the State of California, which is now just 49.9 percent Anglo.

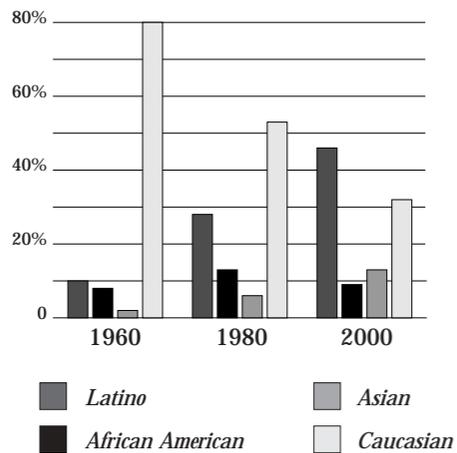
The traditional view of religion's role for immigrants stressed the function of assimilation. This view fit the reality prior to the 1960s when most newcomers were from Europe and who, in a generation or two, were thoroughly incorporated into American life — barely distinguishable from the rest of the population. However, with the amendment of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, the pattern of immigration changed radically, enabling large numbers of individuals from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to emigrate much more easily. In 1998, for example, the top ten sending countries to the United States (in order) were Mexico (131,575), China (36,884), India (36,482), Philippines (34,466), Dominican Republic (20,387), Vietnam (17,649), Cuba (17,375), Jamaica (15,146), El Salvador (14,590), and Korea (14,268). Each year, roughly a million new immigrants come to the United States, 700,000 of them legally and approximately 300,000 illegally.

While many of America's new immigrants are assimilating in much the same way as did European immigrants of earlier years, there are nevertheless some impor-

tant differences. For one thing, many of the new immigrants are Asian, Latin American, or African, and, hence, even after English has become their primary language, they still are distinguishable from the typical Anglo-American. Furthermore, many new immigrants do not share the Judeo-Christian background of earlier generations of immigrants. To the contrary, they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Mayans. Hence, the old argument that, regardless of one's ancestry, one could be a "true American" so long as one was a Protestant, Catholic or Jew, is simply no longer accurate.

In the new paradigm, religion may aid in incorporation to the United States, but it also functions to preserve identification

*Los Angeles County's
Changing Demographics*



with the home country. It helps immigrants maintain their national identity as Guatemalans, Armenians, or Koreans. True, some members of the second generation join "American churches" and shed their connection with the homeland. But it is equally likely that many of these immigrant congregations will continue into the second and third generation — if not longer — precisely because they are places where ethnic groups can enjoy the company of individuals with similar roots. If there is a melting pot facilitated by religion, it is around identification as Latino Catholics, Asian Protestants, or Muslims from the Middle East and Asia. For example, Latinos from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Guatemala and El Salvador search out points of commonality as they worship together in their Catholic or, increasingly, Pentecostal churches. Alternatively, Muslims from Iran, Egypt, and Lebanon, as well as the Indian sub-continent, find common connections as they pray together in their local mosque, even if they were possibly antagonistic toward each other in their home country. And some second generation Korean churches are turning into "Asian enclaves" which attract Filipinos and Chinese in addition to immigrants from Korea.

For all of these reasons, many researchers agree that a more appropriate model for today's immigration may be that of *segmented assimilation* in which preservation of immigrants' own values and promo-

tion of national solidarity with the homeland are compatible with assimilation to American culture. Thus, under this model, religion has two social roles, not one, and they are not contradictory in an era of global connectedness. So long as the United States was the great melting pot where people lost their language within a generation and sought to blend with the dominant culture as quickly as possible, religion functioned as an unofficial instrument of the state, helping people to assimilate —even if many first generation immigrants continued to gather nostalgically in church basements to speak their native language, eat their ethnic food, and celebrate some of the customs from the homeland.

The assimilation or incorporation function is still a major social role of religion in the United States. But since the mid-1960s the churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues have expanded their roles as they mediate between the country of origin and the country of residence for many immigrants and their offspring, serving as some of the most important points of reference as individuals create *bicultural identities*. Indeed, the immigrant congregation is unrivaled as the place where homeland values are maintained, celebrated, and passed on to the next generation. And in performing this function, religion is permanently changing the face of religion in Southern California.

Immigrant Religion and Social Change in Southern California

IN CONTEMPORARY PARLANCE, the arrival of immigrants in large numbers has changed the religious marketplace of Los Angeles and existing religious institutions have responded in visible ways. Church marquees and other announcements of the times and subjects of religious services are not in one language but often two, three, or four. In the Catholic archdiocese, more than 60 percent of the 4 million members are Latino and there are Spanish language masses in 196 of 287 churches. There are Catholic churches where more Filipinos than Anglos worship. And, similarly, there are Catholic churches with niche congregations of Vietnamese and other Asian populations. Clearly the Catholic hierarchy is scrambling to meet the demands of these new immigrants to Los Angeles, and learning Spanish is a requirement for all seminarians. Given the shortage of clergy in the U.S., the Catholic Church relies increasingly on priests trained in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. These priests, being themselves immigrants, are in this respect close to their parishioners in Los Angeles, but, because of their conservative theological training they are sometimes at odds with many of the things the church is doing to accommodate its changing membership base.

Catholics are not the only group responding to changing demographics. All over Los Angeles County there are Protestant churches with multiple congregations. In Glendale there is a Presbyterian church with Arabic, Filipino, Spanish, Armenian, and English speaking congregations all meeting on the same campus. A Nazarene church in downtown Los Angeles (indeed, the “mother church” of that historically Anglo denomination) has set up separate governance structures for its Filipino, Spanish, Korean, and English congregations, with each having proportional representation in church decisions. In Pasadena, an evangelical “mega-church” has given over to a Spanish-speaking congregation the sanctuary that the Anglo congregation outgrew. Moreover, it has hired a staff to minister to the growing Latino population in the immediate neighborhood of the church. On Broadway in downtown Los Angeles, several ornate former “movie palaces” have been turned into churches, and one of the largest congregations there is the Universal Church, an import from Brazil.

Predominantly Anglo churches are also seeking to symbolize their solidarity with the changing demographics of Los Angeles. For example, at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, songs in Spanish are often incorporated into the liturgy, even though very few Latinos attend this upper-middle class church. Thanks to the efforts of the custodial staff, All Saints

has formed a partnership with Agua Verde, a village in Mexico where the joint effort has helped to construct a library and launch other social projects. In some Protestant churches, such as Immanuel Presbyterian in the Wilshire District, there has been a dramatic blending of Protestant and Catholic elements in their worship. A person who attended the Good Friday “Stations of the Cross” procession through the streets adjoining this cathedral-style church might think it is a Catholic service as the crowd stops to pray and listen to short homilies before homemade altars and shrines that have been placed on the sidewalk. Mainline Protestant churches that are not embracing the culture of their neighborhood residents are dying, and consequently there is great interest by Methodists, Baptists, and other denominations to figure out strategies for ministering to the new residents in their neighborhood.

The religious “marketplace” changes in response to “consumer” demand, and consequently some of the fastest growing churches in Los Angeles are Pentecostal and charismatic, because these are among the most vital congregations in the members’ homelands. For example, according to some reports Guatemala is 30 percent Pentecostal and growing — much to the dismay of Catholic clergy who sometimes accuse their Protestant colleagues of “sheep stealing.” On the other hand, some Catholic churches have embraced a charismatic

movement of lay members. Every Friday night at St. Thomas the Apostle in Pico-Union, an area that is populated predominantly by Central American immigrants, a group called *El Sembrador* (The Sower) leads the congregation in enthusiastic praise choruses and hand clapping, followed by a period of healing and laying on of hands. Furthermore, Catholics are accommodating their members’ desire for concrete symbols in their lives. A replica of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was brought to Los Angeles and became the focus of a commemoration mass in the Los Angeles Coliseum that drew tens of thousands of enthusiasts. It was clear that this image of the Virgin had been elevated to the status of a transnational symbol of immigrant hope as people carried flags from the many nations represented in the Catholic archdiocese’s multiethnic membership.

As immigrants are attracted to Los Angeles from many parts of the world, they are building impressive houses of worship as expressions of their commitment and in doing so are changing the landscape of religious and community architecture. The Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights is the largest Buddhist temple in the Western Hemisphere. It is an architectural monument, as well as a functional monastery, and place where people, particularly Chinese from Taiwan, come to connect with their cultural and spiritual roots. The Malibu Hindu Temple is also an architectural gem,

and the Swaminarayan Hindu sect, with headquarters in Whittier, has been attempting to buy a substantial parcel in Southern California in order to build a temple that reflects their affluent congregation from India. One must also include in the list of architectural masterpieces the King Fahd Mosque in Culver City, which is just one of 68 mosques in Southern California. Indeed — consistent with speculation that Muslims will outnumber Jews in the United States within the next decade — Los Angeles has the third largest number of mosques in the United States, after Chicago and New York.

Although the evidence is not usually architectural, it is Koreans who are by some measures the most obviously religiously committed group of immigrants in the Southern California basin. Church attendance is pegged at 80% or more, and two of the largest congregations (Young Nak Presbyterian Church, just east of downtown Los Angeles, and the Oriental Mission Church in Koreatown) welcome more than 5,000 worshippers each Sunday. When one of our graduate researchers wanted to look at predominantly Korean Christian student groups at UCLA, she found herself dealing with over a dozen recognized organizations. Some estimates suggest that there are as many as 600 immigrant and second-generation Korean churches in the Los Angeles area. Many of these are small congregations that offer leadership opportunities to immigrants who too often feel shut out from

mainstream society or from long established and culturally conservative Korean churches. The influx of Korean Christians has been important to the financial health of Protestant seminaries and colleges in Southern California, with Fuller Seminary, Claremont School of Theology, and Biola University all having high percentages of Korean and Korean American students. As is true with many immigrant groups, Korean churches are deeply committed to missionary work in various parts of the world, and from their base in Los Angeles they are sending missionaries to Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, as well as to countries in the former Soviet Union.

Armenians, who are also well represented in Los Angeles County, have large immigrant populations in Glendale, Hollywood, and Pasadena. This ancient Apostolic church has two different branches, but there are also dozens of evangelical Armenian churches that are competing for the flock, and from all appearances, rather successfully. Like many immigrant groups, these churches have private day schools as well as Saturday schools where children and youth come to learn the language and something about the customs and history of the homeland. Armenian churches also play a major role in diaspora politics, with their members supporting political candidates who are advocates for the homeland; additionally, hundreds of thousands of dollars are funneled by the church and its ancillary

organizations back to the homeland for various relief and development projects.

While there is no doubt that immigrants are reshaping the religious marketplace, what else can we say about their impact and their contributions to this “City of the Angels”? The answers are complex and sometimes subject to debate. That the evolving mix of nationalities forever alters the rhythm of “race and ethnic relations” in Los Angeles hardly needs to be pointed out. Even the dynamics of electoral politics have shifted dramatically in response to recent spikes in applications for citizenship and rates of political participation in immigrant communities. Immigrants are also altering the economy — and even the social fabric — of the city.

While the majority of Angelenos may not consider the contributions of immigrants to the local economy to be significant, there is important evidence to the contrary. Some economists say that the relatively robust economy of Southern California is linked to the rapid growth of firms with fewer than 50 employees, reliant to a very large degree on immigrant labor, whether they are in the garment industry where sweatshop conditions often prevail, or in the “high-tech” sector that relies increasingly on foreign-trained professionals. Occupancy rates of high rise office buildings and the continuing attraction of tourist venues, restaurants, and hotels are linked directly to a reliable and growing

service sector, again largely immigrant based. Middle-class lifestyles, occupational opportunities, and two-earner incomes are predicated upon the availability of affordable child care and household labor, again provided almost entirely by immigrant workers. The rapid aging of the U.S. population creates a growing demand for health care and elder care occupations, and increasingly this demand is met by immigrant workers performing valuable functions on both the higher (e.g., physicians and nurses) and lower (attendant care) rungs of the employment ladder.

Among academics such as Robert Putnam (author of a popular book called *Bowling Alone*), there is a deep concern that our “social capital,” by which he means collective effort and shared commitments, is decreasing in American society. He captures this sentiment in the metaphor of solitary bowling: more people than ever bowl, but they are bowling alone, not in leagues. He also notes in the same vein the decline in people volunteering to oversee Boy Scout troops or joining such traditional collective organizations as the PTA and the League of Women Voters. But how do immigrants fit into this schema and what do they offer to Los Angeles?

Quite simply, immigrants can be an important source of moral renewal. In every one of the twelve immigrant groups that we studied for this project, there was an emphasis on values associated with family,

children, and community. If one of the problems of modern society is the breakdown of primary institutions such as the family, fueled by a rugged individualism that puts self and consumerism above all other values, then we have something to learn from our immigrant populations. Indeed, the primary concern that immigrants express about raising their children in this society is that it is difficult to maintain a focus on sharing communal values in a society so dominated by consumerism and self-interest. Their efforts in this regard are visible in the parks in our urban neighborhoods, filled with families picnicking and playing soccer. These public gatherings are settings where children are typically taught to respect their elders as they interact with the members of an extended family.

Religion and culture are inseparable for all of these immigrant groups. Homeland values are integrally tied to their religious practice, and these values are renewed as well as enacted in feast days, festivals and other celebrations — many of which are connected to the religious calendar of the country. A Mayan from Guatemala said that in his community he was taught that even one glass of water needs to be shared by *all* members of the community, which sharply contrasts with the pervasive individualism that competes with the spirit of community in the United States.

There is another reality at work, which Putnam and other cultural pessimists should note. Within Los Angeles there are hundreds of “hometown associations,” a name given to groups of people from cities and villages in Mexico and Central America who now live in Los Angeles and who have come together to maintain ties and fund projects back in their village or city. These associations are often closely related to churches and their resources sometimes go into the restoration of a church or church activities at home; at other times the objective may be building a road, digging a well, or buying books for the school library. These hometown associations raise money by putting on dances, beauty pageants, and dinners. In some cases they partner with the government back home to establish matching funds for major public works projects. These are sophisticated organizations, oftentimes legally incorporated, or, if not, they are affiliated with not-for-profit federations. From the Mexican state of Zacatecas alone there are at least sixty hometown associations in Los Angeles organized under the “Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos del Sur de California,” and the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles has registered 170 hometown associations within the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Last year the Federacion de Clubes Zacatecanos sent close to one million dollars to finance public works projects in about 100 communities within the state of Zacatecas.

Another sign of moral engagement is that immigrants living in Los Angeles send billions of dollars each year back to their families. Based on anecdotal evidence, many immigrants wire \$200 to \$300 home each month, and this is from people who may be earning a minimum wage or who are working as day laborers or in sweatshops for even less than minimum wage. Annual remittances from expatriate Salvadorans to their home country amount to \$1.6 billion — almost double the income from coffee, the nation’s largest import. This type of heroic moral commitment has to be considered whenever the media highlights an immigrant gang or criminal activity by an immigrant. Indeed, many immigrants come to this country, not for their own personal economic advancement, but so they can support a family back home, pay for medical treatment for a relative, or send someone to school. A woman from El Salvador told us that she came to Los Angeles when she was only twenty because her son, born prematurely, needed an operation to correct a heart condition. The only way she could finance this expensive surgery was to work in the United States, leaving her baby behind her.

Who Are the New Immigrants?

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT recognizes three broad groups: (1) refugees and asylees, a category that in 1997 accounted for 14 percent of all foreign-born individuals admitted to the United States and included, for example, refugees from the former Soviet Union and Bosnia; (2) individuals and their families who are admitted for economic or employment reasons, including people of “extraordinary” ability in the arts or sciences, as well as multinational executives and people with professional or advanced degrees; and (3) immigrants who are children, parents, or spouses of individuals already living in the United States. In addition, there are several hundred thousand unauthorized or undocumented migrants who come to the United States without a valid visa. About sixty percent of these individuals cross the Mexico-U.S. border without being apprehended, and the remaining 40 percent enter the United States legally, often as tourists, and then decide to stay without seeking proper registration.

Given the diversity and complexity of the issues faced by each of these groups, who, then, helps the immigrants to become incorporated into American life? Who helps them find housing and employment, assists them with understanding a new legal system, connects them to medical care in an

emergency, negotiates the inevitable problems that arise between first generation immigrants and their children, helps them find their way in a complex mix of contrasting and competing ethnic identities, and offers a helping hand if they run out of cash or have a brush with the law? Many public and private, religious and secular institutions share these responsibilities, but historically, religious groups have always played a central role in settling new immigrants in this country, and now is no exception. Immigrants bring elements of their religious institutions with them, of course, but resident congregations, including churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques — and coalitions of these — have viewed it as their duty to welcome the newcomers, providing sources of assistance that are often amplified by the timely informal assistance offered by individual members of those congregations. Many local congregations have developed extensive programs to minister to the needs of immigrants in their immediate neighborhoods, sometimes with infusions of money from public agencies and government programs.

In many cases new kinds of interplay between religion and the public sector are evident. To take just one historical example, the United States government worked closely with the U.S. Catholic Conference, Lutheran Social Services, and various other religious groups, such as the Mennonites, in settling refugees from Vietnam and

Cambodia during the 1970s and '80s. In response to the needs of newcomers, various faith-based advocacy groups, such as the Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights and the Jesuit Refugee Services, have stepped forward to mediate contacts between immigrants and employers and between immigrants and various agencies of government, including the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

From the perspective of congregations, advocacy groups, and non-profit organizations — and indeed from the perspectives of the immigrants themselves — the needs of immigrants vary widely according to level of education and socio-economic status. For example, Mexicans constitute almost half of all new immigrants in Los Angeles, and they average only seven years of education. Included in this group are *campesinos* who may be illiterate and whose primary vocational skill is picking fruit or doing manual labor. Salvadorans and Guatemalans together constitute another ten percent, and they average eight years of education. In contrast, Asians on the average, with the exception of some groups such as Cambodians, are highly educated. Chinese immigrants to Los Angeles average 16 years of education, Filipinos 15 years, and Koreans 13 years. Obviously there are well educated and poorly educated individuals in any group, but the generalization stands that among immigrants, those from Mexico and Central America tend to be

employed in low level jobs in Los Angeles, while those from Asia are much more likely to be represented in professional and managerial positions.

A second cluster of concerns has to do with the fact that some immigrants, including many refugees, come here to escape highly traumatizing backgrounds, and these individuals are not necessarily the ones the INS classifies as refugees. That distinction is often complicated by political variables that bear little relationship to the circumstances people have actually faced. Many immigrants from Guatemala and El Salvador, for example, though not legally refugees, have witnessed the killing, rape, and torture of family members and friends by government forces that were supported by the U.S. military. Refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia have similarly experienced violent bloodshed, including the annihilation of entire villages. Clearly, there are also the pastoral demands put on clergy who confront the dilemma of men and women who remarried, thinking that their spouse had been killed, only to meet them once again in the United States. Pastoral care needs differ from one immigrant group to another. An Armenian cleric, to take one case in point, said that for many immigrants from the Republic of Armenia, cheating the government was a way of life — it was how one survived. Hence, he went on, there is a need to “resocialize” these individuals in order to displace the expectations ingrained by sev-

enty years of communist rule.

Legal documentation is a marker for another dimension of need. Undocumented immigrants often come to a church or temple because they see it as a place of refuge and as a place of hope. Included in this category are men and women who have left children behind with grandparents and other family members, seeking higher wages in order to enhance the prospects of the children they are not able to bring with them. There are women who become “dual mothers,” working as domestics taking care of the children of well-to-do people (often at wages well below the legal minimum and without any benefits) at the same time that they are preoccupied with the welfare of their own children at home. One Latino pastor we interviewed said that his task is to give hope to people caught in such situations, urging them to have dreams and telling them that they can have a better life. As for the methodology in his ministry, he says, “We treat people right. We treat them with dignity.” The numbers that are attracted to these congregations would seem to bear out his choice of methods.

Displacement and change — whether brought about by personal choice or an enforced move — always result in a degree of culture shock that is then exacerbated by linguistic and cultural challenges for new immigrants. If they are separated from their family, they feel keenly the lack of a supportive network — a safety net if they get

sick or cannot find a job immediately. In addition, many immigrants who were scientists, doctors, and professionals in their home countries are working in what for them are menial jobs in Los Angeles because of licensing regulations or language deficiencies. With a variety of causes, immigrants face loneliness and lack of self-esteem, issues that religious communities help to mitigate. Regardless of religious tradition, the clergy we interviewed said that the task of the religious community is not to apprehend these individuals; rather, it is to hear their stories, care for them in times of need, and offer them hope that something better is in store for them.

Responding to Life in Los Angeles

PART OF THE CULTURAL SHOCK of living in Los Angeles is that there is considerable freedom and many options from which to choose. There is no longer the certainty of one assumed religious identity. People face dozens of options. Moreover — even for a person surrounded by a kinship group — the cultural restraints on making choices are not as limiting as they were in the home country. Although immigrants interviewed for this project often remarked on the dangers of such pluralism, they also tended to like the freedom they experience here. They felt that they could “be themselves” in this new homeland. With some frequency, immigrants from Hindu and Muslim countries said that they felt that they could live “more honestly” in America, by which they meant that they were free from bribes, corruption, and other practices that sometimes are a way of life in their home country. Having said this, however, they also indicated that there were temptations in Los Angeles that they did not face at home — especially temptations associated with alcohol and promiscuous sex. Women sometimes commented with approval that here they could practice their religion in public ways that were proscribed in the homeland, where they had to confine their worship to the home. Finally, there was very little mention by our interviewees

of religious discrimination once they moved to Los Angeles. In fact, some individuals, especially college students, said that being an “ethnic” practicing a “strange” religion brought them a certain envious regard among their peers.

It was not at all uncommon among those we interviewed to say that their faith had grown stronger since moving to the United States. They offered several explanations for this increased commitment and energy. Some said that at home their religion was taken for granted. Several times a year they might go to the temple to offer oblations, but religion was so pervasive and so unquestioned that it never felt like a conscious choice. Even prayer, some said (including Muslims who pray five times a day), was something done routinely, without thinking. On the other side of the balance, a Hindu we interviewed said, “...in India it was much easier to preserve and practice Hinduism because it is all over the place,” whereas here, she said, it takes a conscious effort to drive “all the way to Malibu to keep track of auspicious days and festivals.”

On this same theme, in the American context, and particularly in Los Angeles, immigrants often see a stark contrast between the values they have been raised with and the values of American mainstream culture. Hence, they find themselves faced with a clear if sometimes painful choice. Those we interviewed often *elected* to embrace their religion more firmly — now

making a clear, conscious *choice* — rather than float along with what they perceived to be the permissive values of American culture. A Muslim from Lebanon, asked whether his faith had changed upon coming to the United States, replied, “Actually, it has improved, to be frank with you. I think we devote more time to the religion [here] even though it should have been more over there, back home.” And several second generation Sikh boys whom we interviewed said that, at first, they wanted to abandon the turban worn by their fathers, but now see it as an important element of their Sikh identity. In spite of adolescent peer pressure to conform, they have chosen to be different.

Many immigrants believe that they can juggle the best of both worlds — the advantages of life in the United States and the values of their home country — so long as their children can associate with a strong religious community. As one member of the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple said, “We are giving [our children] opportunities of being in the United States and everything that comes along with it, but at the same time we are teaching them that [there are] things that are not good for you.” The importance of having an alternative community was stressed by another individual from the same temple who said, “...even if the Swaminarayan religion cannot stop everything, it minimizes the chances of going astray or succumbing to temptation

or peer pressure. So, religion does help...Oh, yes, religion does make a difference.” In essence, religion provides a peer group that articulates through rite, ritual, and communal activities the values associated with the homeland.

Finally, for many immigrants religion continues to exercise a strong attraction simply because it provides a setting and a reason to be in contact with their fellow immigrants. Religion, in other words, is a source of community, a place to speak one’s native tongue, eat one’s native food, and, not unimportantly, find a husband or wife who shares one’s cultural background. A group of Hindu women told us that they didn’t mind doing the cooking for the temple’s activities on the weekends because it provided a welcome time for them to see their friends and talk in Gujarati. And young people in the same temple, one of our research assistants noted, seemed to quite enjoy being at the temple, wearing *gaghras* and saris and the latest chic Indian fashions, especially for important religious occasions.

But a complete picture requires us to note that there are also negative factors related to religious practice and life in Los Angeles. Immigrants often mentioned that they are so busy trying to make a living that it leaves little time for religion. Muslims in particular said that it sometimes feels awkward in their workplace to observe the daily routine of prayer, even if there is no objec-

tion from their employer. Immigrants from Asia said that, without temples being omnipresent in society, religious practice demands a rhythm different from the occasional formal observance that they followed in their home country, and this cultural difference is not easily addressed. A Vietnamese priest noted a different problem: namely, that it is difficult to recruit clergy in this country, since so many other alternatives are open to young men.

On the other hand, for every objection to Los Angeles, a counter-benefit was cited. Women from Latin American countries indicated, for example, that they appreciated the view toward domestic violence that they experienced in this country. Pastors and priests teach against it, they said, whereas in their home country “machismo” practices were tolerated, if not actively accepted. Women from the Philippines said that they like the fact that religion is not labeled “women’s work” in this country, and that their husbands are also expected to be active in the church. And there were expressions of appreciation with the fact that interfaith dialogue is respected in this country, at the same time that there is acceptance of firmly held beliefs. In the home country, strict beliefs were often viewed as antithetical to tolerance and appreciation of others’ right to hold deep convictions.

Another benefit of practicing their faith in Los Angeles is the availability of

advanced technology. At the risk of overstatement, there seems to be a positive correlation between the marginality of a religion and the size of its web site. Some of the most sophisticated web pages have been put up by religious groups that do not command a large number of adherents. The Internet, in other words, represents an entirely new medium for achieving visibility and expanding the boundaries of communication. In this regard, it is a democratizing medium that enables many different religious voices to be articulated.

The Practical Role of Religion in the Lives of New Immigrants

WHILE MUCH OF THE DISCUSSION of immigrant religion appropriately concentrates on matters of belief and worship, there is also a long list of very mundane, though nevertheless crucial, ways in which religion affects the daily lives of immigrants. Perhaps foremost in this connection is the role it plays as a “conduit” for people who are considering emigrating. Because of the thousands who have preceded them, those considering the move to Los Angeles know that there will be a ready-made community waiting for them when they arrive here. Leaving home is always a process fraught with considerable anxiety, an emotion that photographer Sebastião Salgado has brilliantly captured in his documentary collection called *Migrations*. But to know that there is a community at the far end of the road that shares your values and understands the challenges you are confronting eases some of the tension associated with being uprooted and faced with the challenge of starting a new life. Other institutions often develop alongside, and in close association with, churches, temples, synagogues, or mosques, and before long an area becomes known as “Little Saigon” or Koreatown — often with religious congregations as the anchor institutions. Religion addresses the problem of loneli-

ness, in other words, by offering community and a belief system and set of practices that give structure and meaning to life, especially in a new environment where expectations about what to believe or think are unclear. Indeed, worship and ritual have the potential to bind people together in ways that other institutions are not equipped to do.

In short, religious institutions are a safety-net for immigrants: spiritually, psychologically, and culturally. Some of the large “mega-churches” approach this task by dividing their congregations into cell groups that meet in people’s homes. Young Nak Presbyterian Church, for example, has 127 such small groups of 12-20 people each. In addition to studying the Bible, there are times of sharing in these informal settings, followed by prayer for each other’s needs. If someone is out of work, this is made known within the cell group which functions, in many ways, like an extended family. And even if someone in the group cannot supply a connection for a job, at least the person in need feels the warmth and compassion of a caring group of friends. Small storefront churches, too, often operate like extended family networks. Congregations are voluntary associations and even if they have paid staff they always provide multiple outlets for others to share their talents and abilities — whether it be singing in a choir, directing a children’s program, or cooking and serving food. Congregations of all sizes provide opportunities for expressing leadership,

something that may not be possible for immigrants within their workplace or the larger society.

Religion also serves as a mediating institution, functioning as a bridge between immigrants and a culture which they fear and have not learned to navigate. Sometimes this is as simple as offering translation services for the newly arrived. At other times the mediation is more practical: connecting newcomers to various social services, advising them on a good doctor, or telling them where they can buy food cheaply. Congregations with professionals among them often set up legal clinics for immigrant members or offer health screening and referral. Young Nak employs a parish nurse; other groups have prison ministries directed to fellow immigrants who have trouble with the law and need support as well as an advocate on their behalf. Churches have taken an active role in the defense of the rights of immigrants when police, schools, the INS, or other public agencies engage in practices that cause concern.

Advocacy, in fact, is a major role-played by religious institutions. At a political level, these institutions work to counter the nativist impulse that always arises when population shifts dramatically and individuals feel threatened that newcomers will take their jobs, work at a lower wage rate, or displace them from housing. Immigrant congregations across Los Angeles were strongly opposed to Proposition 187, which was

intended to strip undocumented immigrants of many social services. The congregation-based Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) went on the offensive with public demonstrations and, through its Active Citizenship Campaign, registered thousands of immigrants to vote. The IAF actively petitioned the INS to speed up the processing of applications for citizenship, so that these individuals could be turned into voters and thereby defend their rights on their own.

Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles has been a strong advocate for immigrants. In an important statement in 1993 he captured the thinking of many religious leaders when he said:

Today we are witnessing a distressing and growing trend among political leaders, segments of the media, and the public at-large, which capitalizes on prevailing fears and insecurity about the growing number of immigrants in our communities. In today's social climate, we have special reasons to study and ponder the Bible's positive view of strangers, sojourners and aliens [quoting from the New Testament book of Hebrews]. Our biblical tradition encourages us to encounter the "strangers in our midst" — not with fear and negativity — but with compassion and hopeful expectation. Our social teaching challenges us to embody this sentiment in our personal actions, in our response as a community, and in public policy.

Specifically attacking the sentiment that was to later be focused in Proposition

187, Mahony said: "We know that nothing is gained by denying citizenship and access to education to the children of undocumented workers. On the contrary, the human potential of these dynamic new Americans will be lost. Our society will not be improved by creating an even larger under-class deprived of education." Citing papal encyclicals and appealing to scripture as well as personal empathy, Cardinal Mahony has used his bully pulpit effectively. The *Los Angeles Times* frequently publishes his opinion articles, and the press turns to him when they want a pro-immigrant statement.

At a local congregational level, too, religious rhetoric is matched by actions, even in large Pentecostal churches such as Templo Calvario, with its "Adopt a Family" program in which church members target specific families in their community that need a helping hand. While (or because) many individuals who adopt a family were themselves immigrants only a few years previously, they believe that they have an obligation to help others. One individual from this church put it this way, "We are not volunteers. We are servants doing God's work." As another member of this church explained, this dedication is fueled by the fact that the members are repaying the kindness that was offered to them by strangers when they were new to the city.

It is important to note that churches and other religious organizations do not, typically, provide services only to those with-

in their congregation or even to those who affirm their same faith. Rather, food, clothing, citizenship and other programs are offered, without stipulation, to everyone in the community. Informal assistance, on the other hand, often occurs because a new immigrant is a member of a cell group or participates in other church-related programs and consequently their needs are known because of the close friendships that have developed. But because of the sheer volume of requests for help, some churches have made a policy of referring individuals to Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, or other professional charities that are capable of dealing with the complex needs of individuals and their families.

Other faith-based groups resist the idea of "charity" and instead work hard at helping individuals to be self-sufficient. For example, an Episcopal priest with an immigrant congregation (Pueblo Nuevo Episcopal Church) decided to start a janitorial service. Father Philip Lance said that this small "capitalistic enterprise," along with a thrift store he started, is employing 50 people. And an enterprising Jesuit priest, Fr. George Schultz, organized day laborers, creating an employment center associated with St. Joseph Center so that men and women will not be exploited simply because they are poor and not legal residents of the City of Los Angeles. With the welfare reform legislation of 1996, the Charitable Choice provision is encouraging congregations to

partner with government in creating job readiness programs, which should further buttress the role that religion is playing in the areas of employment and self-sufficiency.

Because they are so consumed with problems of their own members, one might assume that immigrant congregations would be unable to think far beyond their own community, but that is not the case. During the period of our study, the Hsi Lai Temple, whose members are predominantly Buddhists from Taiwan, not surprisingly gave generously to victims of an earthquake that wreaked havoc in their homeland, but also came forward to help those affected by a devastating hurricane in Honduras and an earthquake in Colombia. Korean Buddhist temples and Korean churches have sent tens of thousands of dollars worth of aid to help counter the food shortages in North Korea. And Armenian congregations have a long history of sponsoring orphans, sending money to build schools in the Republic of Armenia, and helping the elderly to cope after the collapse of the Soviet Union (and with it, the pension system), not to speak of the millions of dollars that they sent to Armenia after an earthquake in 1988 that killed 25,000 people and left a half million homeless. Islamic groups in Los Angeles have expressed their humanitarian views by encouraging discussion of State Department policy, such as the ongoing embargo of Iraq, which has claimed the lives of thousands of children because of the lack of

medicine and basic nutrition. At the same time, Muslims were very pointed in their support of U.S. actions and NATO troops in Kosovo. The Muslim Public Affairs Council has been very proactive in countering stereotypes about Muslims — especially those that portray them as terrorists. Likewise, an Armenian priest in Pasadena told us that he recently had intervened with youth from his church when they were upset by a photo in the school yearbook that stereotypically linked Armenian youth with gang activity.

The Role of Religion in the Lives of Immigrant Women

IMMIGRANT WOMEN face the same anxieties, cultural challenges, and linguistic barriers as immigrant men, but many of those in our study described a unique set of problems and challenges of their own. We are only beginning to discover their specific needs and the ways that the faith community has responded to them. Many of the women — refugee and undocumented women in particular — have been victims of rape, have witnessed atrocities against their family members, and have lost husbands to war or abandonment. Others have come to the United States to find husbands who promised to return home but stayed in the new country. Some women have made the hard choice to leave their children behind, sometimes for many years, to come to live and work in the United States. These women arrive in Los Angeles feeling isolated and often helpless, unable to speak the language, and unsure of how they will survive with limited resources and little or no support. Others expect to find someone they know — a friend or a *comadre* — but when they come to the city, they never connect with them. Over and over they tell the story of how scared they were and how they were reluctant to leave the house for fear of getting lost.

Yet, as these women struggle to survive and adapt in a new land, they begin to find a sense of freedom and autonomy that they did not have back home. Indeed, this is confirmed by a study conducted by one of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture's research associates, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. In her 1994 study of Mexican immigrant families, she found that while women still have less power than men do in families, they generally enjoy more autonomy, resources and leverage than they previously did in Mexico. (*Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*, 1994.) This sense of freedom, we have found, is often developed in the context of religious congregations. Consider the following examples:

- *The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)* sponsored the Active Citizenship Campaign as a way to empower immigrants — and immigrant congregations — to engage the legislative process. A young Latina woman, a member of St. John's Catholic Church, told us that the community organizing process and the support from her congregation provided her with the space and place to develop her own potential. Suddenly, she said, she found a voice as an advocate for her people. Indeed, all over Southern California, this story is repeated in churches where women have learned how to organize and how to be advocates.

- *The Muslim Women's League* has been teaching women to read the Koran. In this way, they are being empowered to understand for themselves their rights and privileges.
- *Religious congregations*, including the Swaminarayan Temple mentioned earlier, are venues where feelings of loneliness are assuaged through social interaction and community. Some women have stated that they enjoy preparing for religious and cultural festivals because it provides an opportunity for them to interact with other women in their own language.
- *The Temple Khemara Buddikaram*, as described in the introduction to this report, provides a place where people gather to gain healing from traumatic experiences in Cambodia. Here, women can talk to the priest, one of the few people they will trust with their pain. Rev. Kong Chhean understands the trauma that many of them have experienced, and understands both western psychology and Buddhist healing practices. As a result, this temple has become a sanctuary for these women.
- *The women of Boyle Heights* have found that Dolores Mission Catholic Church is a place where they can talk about their problems, face their fears, and take up the challenge to work for peace. Every Friday, these Latina women walk through the streets, praying on the corners for

peace in the barrio and an end to gang violence. Moreover, they have also learned to challenge the authorities when their sons are unduly treated by police or become victims of racial profiling.

- *Pentecostal churches* maintain an aggressive stance against alcoholism, "womanizing," and spousal abuse and are often effective in changing patterns of domestic violence and *machismo* practices in the family. As men become more involved in the church, they are motivated to change their behavior. The result, their wives often say, is that the home environment is transformed by the teaching of the church.
- *The women at Sacred Heart Mission* come together to support immigrant women who have had to leave their children behind in order to come to the U.S. to work and live. The church community provides economic and emotional support to these mothers.

All over Los Angeles immigrant women are also finding creative ways to overcome financial and economic hurdles. Often, congregations serve as places where women can connect, learn about jobs, and create informal networks that enable them to augment their income. For many of the women this process is natural since informal networks were the means of survival in their home countries. But here in the new country, they often find that it is in the churches that they can connect with other women and get the mutual help that they need. The women at Dolores Mission have formed a cooperative that provides learning opportunities for them while at the same time caring for their children in a licensed child care preschool facility. The Episcopal Diocese is working with a coalition of private and public organizations to provide legalized sidewalk vending for illegal street vendors and the majority of these are women. The focus of these efforts has been on setting up hot food carts where they can sell the *tamales* and *pupusas* that they make. Another coalition of churches and organizations is working hard to advocate for the rights of immigrant sweatshop workers in downtown Los Angeles with the hope of improving their economic standing.

Another issue that immigrant women face is the daunting problem of health care. Often, they arrive here with little or no understanding of health problems and how to deal with the American health system.

Many refuse to be seen by male doctors and will resist getting treatment for that reason. The faith community has responded in a variety of ways to bring medical care to these women. For example, the University Muslim Medical Association (UMMA) Free Clinic provides health care for women in accordance with Muslim guidelines. Several miles to the north, Sister Diane Donoghue and Nancy Ibrahim of Esperanza Community Housing Corporation established a program called "Promotoras de Salud Comunitaria" which is designed to expand access to health care and to promote wellness in the community. Trained *promotoras* are community members who are able to go door to door providing health education and offering referrals for health problems they encounter. Recognizing the need for this type of outreach to immigrant women, several congregations and faith-based hospitals have parish nurses who visit the community members to identify problems and offer solutions and referrals. For a woman who is afraid to go to the doctor or hospital because she does not speak English, these parish nurses become her health consultants.

Finally, globalization has accelerated flows of capital, people, cultures, and knowledge. Often, according to media reports, globalization also results in tragedies like human rights violations in sweatshops and sexual exploitation (e.g., prostitution and pornography). While this study has not focused on these issues, further research must be done to examine the ways, if any, that the faith community is coming to the support of immigrants who have suffered from the negative effects of globalization.

Conclusion

THE RECIPROCAL EFFECTS of immigrants on religion and religion on the lives of immigrants are plain to see. There is no question that immigrants are changing the face of existing religious groups in Los Angeles. Religious institutions are increasingly refocusing their missions to accommodate the growing numbers of immigrants in their neighborhoods. Religious mandates to care for strangers and the least privileged in the community are obviously behind this receptivity, but it is also born from a recognition that the demographics of the region are changing and, hence, institutional survival is connected to inclusivity and decline is likely to be the price of turning away from the newcomers. Conversely, many of the religious “imports” to Southern California, which in their own homeland may preach exclusivity, are learning to function in a pluralistic social environment that values diversity. As minority religions here in Los Angeles, they see the value of tolerance as well as interfaith dialogue. Given the diversity of Southern California, immigrant religious groups are seldom asked to water down their beliefs and practices, but they are expected to respect the rights of others. In exchange, they are appreciated for the color and the contribution that they make to this extraordinarily metropolitan city.

Part of the postmodern mood of Los Angeles is that people need not homogenize their beliefs and practices. Quite the contrary, uniqueness and distinctiveness are valued in a city that values experimentation. Anglos are a visible presence in many immigrant congregations, sometimes because of intermarriage, and other times because this new religious expression mediates the sacred in ways that more established religions fail to do. And there are immigrants who are switching their allegiance from the faith of their homeland. There is a small movement in Los Angeles of Latinos converting to Islam; there are Buddhist Koreans joining immigrant Presbyterian churches, and the ranks of immigrant Mormons are growing. And so the marketplace of religion evolves, with people switching allegiances in response to whoever is serving their needs the best.

What is uniformly apparent about immigrant religion, however, is that its power lies in its anchorage in communities of people. Within these religious communities immigrants meet their spiritual needs, find respite from their loneliness, discover marriage partners, and find support to get them past the many difficulties they face. Some of this support is formalized in programs designed to serve immigrants, and at other times it is informal, nurtured in small groups associated with congregations or in personal interactions with clergy. Indeed, clergy fill a great many roles in these immi-

grant congregations: pastor, social worker, immigration counselor, friend, advocate, and even psychiatrist. Religion certainly includes the search for truth, but it is also a human community that nurtures, expresses compassion, and challenges individuals to live up to their potential.

While religious institutions historically have facilitated assimilation and incorporation into American values, this part of their mission is increasingly sharing energy with the task of cultural preservation. It is in the church, temple, synagogue, or mosque that immigrants are celebrating the rites of passage, feast days, and other rituals that preserve their ties to their homeland and constantly renew the values associated with the birthplace of their ancestors. These composite identities that bridge cultures are possible because the world has changed since the Immigration and Nationality Act was amended in 1965. In the last few decades we have increasingly become a global village in which national boundaries often feel arbitrary. This is not to ignore the political reality of country borders, which oftentimes have been created at the cost of many lives. But it is to say that the need to make mutually exclusive choices among national identities is not so important any longer, especially when the Internet can supply news about one's birthplace that may be more current than what the relatives back home are getting, and when inexpensive air travel makes it possible for many,

most notably of course the more affluent, to shuttle between here and there or send their children home for vacations or extended visits.

The "melting pot" idea in the sense of convergence toward a very small list of "American" religions is certainly a dated one, but we are increasingly seeing immigrant congregations that display some similarities with that process. Many of them are organized around language or broad regional identifications. Hence, there are Latino or Asian congregations that attract people from many different national backgrounds, and yet they share an identity that is rooted in a particular language and faith tradition, finding commonalities that are different from those shared by members of congregations that are predominately comprised of Anglo Americans.

At the same time, there are congregations that are extraordinary in their inclusiveness, expanding far beyond regional or linguistic connections. In this regard, Muslims in Los Angeles undoubtedly take the prize for being the most multiethnic religious group in the city. Friday prayer in Masjid Omar ibn Al-Khattab across the street from USC is attended by African Americans, Persians, Egyptians, Saudi Arabians, Thais, Lebanese, and Iranians, to mention just some of the nationalities present. Some have called it "the United Nations on its knees," with people from many backgrounds standing should-to-

shoulder as they participate in "Salat" prayer service. Indeed, even distinctions between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims, the source of tense relations elsewhere, often seem to evaporate in the Los Angeles context.

The major headline of this report, however, is that immigrants are a potential source of moral renewal in the United States. Concern is often expressed about the decline of civility, shared effort and civic cooperation in Western democracies, and some of this concern is no doubt legitimate. But when we think about sources of rejuvenation, it is questionable whether middle class Anglos are going to turn away from their individualistic ways. It is much more likely that the source of moral renewal will come at the hands of the immigrants, who together constitute the emerging majority, and who know something about extended family ties, the value of community, and the importance of preserving a cultural heritage while contributing to the new society which they have chosen to help build. Religious institutions will play an important role in this process as they simultaneously incorporate new immigrants into American society and help to maintain the values connected with their places of origin.

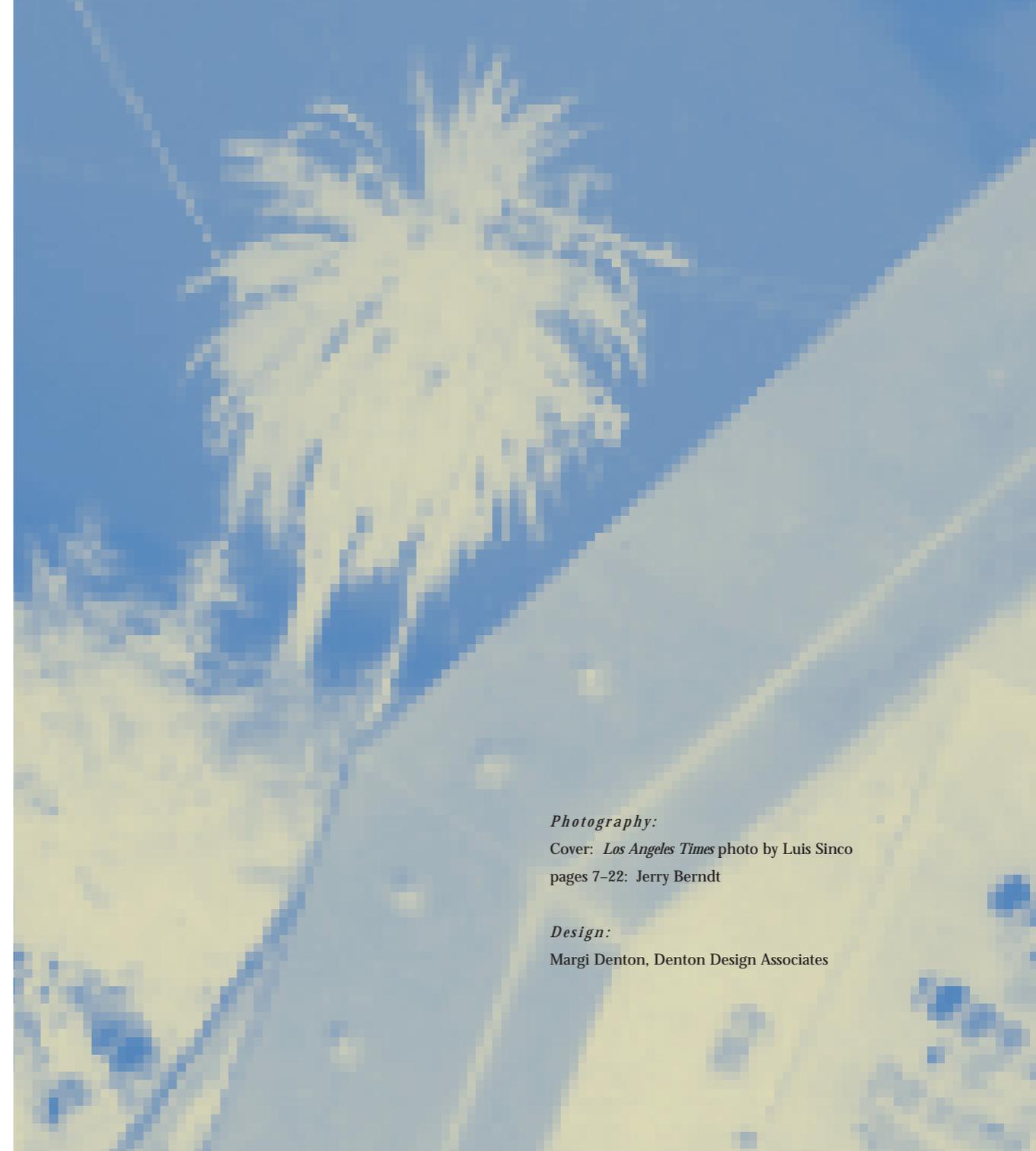
New Research Directions

RELIGION IS NOT THE ONLY INSTITUTION in Los Angeles that assists new immigrants, but it is clearly among the most important ones. The support provided by The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation has enabled us to compile a valuable baseline of information to guide future study. While this has not been an exhaustive report on all that we have learned, we trust that it does suggest the richness of the subject as well as the many intriguing questions that remain to be addressed. Recognizing the need for more research on this topic, The Pew Charitable Trusts has provided funding to focus on four broad areas of investigation over the next two years:

- How are immigrant congregations formed and transformed? For example, how many religious organizations in immigrant communities are "transplants" from the home country? What has been the role of Western evangelism, specifically missions, in their formation? How and why do they change over time in this country?
- How do religious institutions serve the personal and social needs of immigrants? What supportive roles do they play with respect to housing, jobs, food, clothing, legal and medical assistance, and psycho-

logical support for individuals and families? How are they involved in the continuing contacts that immigrants have with the homeland?

- How do immigrant faith communities participate in politics and civic life in Los Angeles, in the American political system, and in politics in the country of origin? How do they communicate American values of citizenship, and conversely, how do they contribute to maintaining the cultural identity of their members? How are they affected by political events and divisions within their home countries?
- How are religious institutions responding to the needs of immigrant women? What types of services are being provided that help support these women? How are congregations working with parishioners as the balance of power shifts within families? How do the roles of women in these congregations compare to “traditional” roles in their home countries? What types of leadership development activities are targeted for women?



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