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From American Church to Immigrant Church: The Changing Face of Seventh-day Adventism in Metropolitan New York

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In 1945 Seventh-day Adventism in Metropolitan New York was divided administratively into two conferences, one of which had an almost completely Caucasian membership, the other Afro-American. Both groups grew substantially during the following twenty-five years, but this growth was accompanied by the beginning of a flow of immigrants who had become Adventists as a result of missionary activity in their homelands in the developing world. Since 1970, the influx of immigrants — and of conversions among their non-Adventist peers — has burgeoned, while American-born members, both black and white, have declined sharply in total number and precipitously as a proportion of the total. The data presented here show that in this region "new immigrants" now account for almost 90 percent of the Adventist membership. While the situation in New York is more extreme, it mirrors a transformation taking place among Adventists throughout North America. Without the flow of immigrants, North American Seventh-day Adventism would now be in a situation of numerical decline akin to that of many of the mainline Protestant denominations. This paper sets out to account for the demographic transformation of Adventism in Metropolitan New York — for the decline of the American segments (Caucasian and Afro-American) and the huge growth among the new immigrants. It argues, drawing on modernization theory, that a strict church with a rigid doctrinal system and behavioral code will decline among constituencies with growing sophistication if it does not accommodate to modern values, but may succeed in the short-term by attracting less modern people.

It has often been pointed out that the United States of America is a nation of immigrants, and that the immigrants brought their religions with them, which in turn reflect the ethnic origins of their members (Niebuhr 1954 [1929]; Herberg 1960 [1955]). American-born religious groups represent an exception to this, for their existence and growth depended initially on their ability to win converts in the US. Only a few of these have grown substantially. One such is Seventh-day Adventism, which emerged from the Millerite Movement after the "great disappointment" of 22 October 1844, when Christ failed to return as

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William Miller had predicted in his preaching throughout New England and upstate New York.

Adventists were initially almost all rural whites, who were initially so urgently apocalyptic that they thought they had no time to take their message abroad or to create a formal organization. However, they finally created a centralized church structure in 1863, and in the 1870s began to send out a stream of foreign missionaries which gave them a presence on all continents and in most major countries by the turn of the century. Adventists engaged in a building spree, first at home and then also abroad, between 1860 and 1901, establishing 16 colleges and high schools, a medical school, 75 "sanitariums" or hospitals, 13 publishing houses, and 31 other institutions. These later provided members with a means of upward mobility. Adventism put down roots in society, especially in American society, and began to move steadily from sect towards denomination (Lawson 1996a). Although Adventists had spread across the US, they did not put special effort into evangelizing Afro-Americans until the 1890s, when they launched a special mission project in the southern states. When it was found that the initial practice of admitting the new converts to existing white congregations stirred up hostility and attacks within southern communities, the Adventist prophet, Ellen White, endorsed racial segregation within Adventism as a "temporary" measure (Graybill 1971; White n.d.). The "colored work" grew steadily, but Afro-American pastors found no opportunities for promotion to administrative positions within what remained an all-white church bureaucracy. By the time of World War II their demands for such opportunities had become so strident that church leaders chose in 1944 to defuse the discontent not by opening positions in the existing structure to them but by creating separate conferences for black churches which overlapped geographically with the original conferences, which now became white. This change, which placed Afro-American administrators over Afro-American churches and evangelism, resulted in a growth spurt in that community (Reynolds 1984).

Meanwhile, many of Adventism's foreign missions had also experienced steady growth, to the extent that the foreign membership total equaled that in North America by the 1920s. The world membership, which stood at 66,547 in 1900, has shown a growth-rate averaging 67.9 percent per decade throughout this century: it passed 500,000 in 1940, one million in 1955, two million in 1970, three million in 1978. A sharp increase in the growth-rate starting in the early 1980s, which saw it rise to 91.4 percent during that decade, brought the membership to 6.6 million in 1990, and past nine million during 1996. The bulk of this growth has taken place in the developing world — in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and parts of Asia — where the Adventist membership increased by 995.9 percent between 1960 and 1995; the growth-rate in the developed world lagged far behind: 122.9 percent during that same period. As a result of this trend, the proportion of the world membership

located in North America had plunged from 26.7 percent in 1960 to only 9.5 percent by 1995 (General Conference 1961, 1996).

The Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 resulted in major changes in immigration patterns to the US. It fostered a flow of immigrants that was much more ethnically diverse, and less European, than previously: whereas three-quarters of the immigrants between 1900 and 1968 (when the reforms of 1965 took effect) were from Europe, almost two-thirds of those arriving since that date have been drawn from Latin America or Asia (Christiano 1991:172). As this wave of "new" immigrants gathered strength, it was inevitable that Adventists were among them, for Adventists were well represented among the population of many of the countries from which they were drawn. Indeed, the experience of Adventists with upward mobility as a result of education received at church-run educational institutions in their homelands only whetted their appetites for more opportunities (Lawson 1998). This, together with the special ties Adventists there felt to the US because of their experience with American missionaries, meant that Adventists were especially likely to migrate. Nowhere was this more true than among those mired in the weak economies of the islands of the Caribbean and the countries of Guyana, Mexico, and Central America (interviews). Meanwhile, the growth-rate among American Adventists — both Caucasian and Afro-American — had slowed. This has resulted in a phenomenon where the growth of the church in the Adventist motherland, the original source of missionaries, is being increasingly dominated by converts from what were formerly regarded as the mission fields. That is, the new immigrant component within North American Adventism has strengthened considerably in recent years. This pattern is especially marked in the major cities attracting immigrants.

This paper first examines the changing demographic face of Adventism in Metropolitan New York in recent decades.[1] It then sets out to account for the patterns found: for the decline of Adventism among Caucasians and Afro-Americans, and its huge growth among some segments of the "new immigrants."

METHODS

The research reported here is part of a large study of Adventism, which has included well over 3,000 in-depth interviews with church administrators, teachers, hospital administrators and medical personnel, pastors, students, and leading laypersons in 55 countries in all twelve divisions of the world church. Since I am an Adventist and have lived in Metropolitan New York for 26 years, I was well aware of the demographic changes taking place and ultimately decided that they

[1] Metropolitan New York is defined as New York City and the four suburban counties located in New York State — Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, and Rockland counties.

were so dramatic and relevant to my general research theme that they warranted focused study. I approached the headquarters of the two overlapping Adventist conferences whose territory included Metropolitan New York — the Greater New York Conference and the Northeastern Conference — in the Fall of 1996, seeking data on the racial breakdown of their membership. This effort proved fruitless, for one conference had no such data (its leaders were willing to make estimates for me — but these proved to differ considerably from one another) and while the other had compiled a table, inquiries concerning that process indicated that it could not be relied on.

I next weighed the possibility of doing a survey of a random sample of members, but rejected this on the ground that the return rates from the various immigrant groups were likely to vary considerably, rendering the results unreliable. Since it is the English-speaking congregations that are racially and ethnically diverse, I ultimately chose to call the pastor of each of these churches to ask him to go through the membership roll and place every baptized member in a racial/ethnic category and then give me the total for each; I also asked them to subtract those members who were missing from the official membership total. As I had expected, most pastors then referred me to the Church Clerks, the women who keep the membership rolls for their congregations. These are usually long-term participants who know the membership well. Since I had followed the chain of command down from the conferences, which had provided me with the official membership of each church and the phone numbers of the pastors, and from the pastors to their church clerks, I had considerable credibility. The clerks proved eager to help, and I eventually achieved a 100 percent response rate.

I had carried out in-depth interviews with the leadership of both conferences and a broad sample of their pastors in 1985, and had remained aware of the changes since then through more interviews in the years since then. While waiting for the data to be tabulated by the church clerks or pastors, I completed a new wave of interviews with conference leaders and 20 pastors representing all major racial/ethnic groups who had served these conferences for many years. Here I explored their experience with the racial changes over time. I also ascertained that the membership of the non-English-speaking congregations was, with very few exceptions, homogeneous — those attending Spanish-speaking churches were Hispanic, those attending Francophone churches were Haitian,[2] those attending Korean churches were Korean. There was thus no need to phone the clerks of these churches to ask about the ethnic breakdown of their congregations — which was just as well, since many would not have spoken sufficient English. Finally, I asked the pastors of these churches to give me the percentage of missing members on the rolls, generalized these to the group, and subtracted the figures so obtained when I totaled the number in each category.

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[2] Immigrants from Guadeloupe and Martinique are forced to attend English-speaking congregations because they do not understand the Haitian Patois.

Since the territories of both conferences extend beyond Metropolitan New York, I excluded the churches in those segments of the conferences from my study.

In order to keep the confidentiality of interviewees, as was promised them, the convention adopted in this study is to refrain from citing the names of interviewees when they are quoted except when they are major figures in the church.

DATA OVERVIEW

The face of Seventh-day Adventism in the New York Metropolitan area has changed dramatically over the past 30 years as it has become extremely diverse ethnically and racially. The extent of change can be seen most easily if the membership figures for 1945 are used as a baseline, for in that year the church was reorganized along racial lines, so that the racial distribution of the membership is clear.

Until the end of 1944 Adventism in the US was organized geographically, with the nation being subdivided into local conferences. All Adventists in the New York Metropolitan area fell under one administrative unit, the Greater New York Conference (GNYC), which at that time had 4,499 members. However, at that point, for the reasons explained above, a new racially based structure was introduced, overlaying the earlier system. This removed the Afro-American congregations from the existing conferences, and created new conferences just for them, which then elected Afro-American leaders. At this point, then, the GNYC was divided into two, and the new Northeastern Conference (NEC) took over the Afro-American congregations while the GNYC retained the Caucasian congregations. Since congregations were highly segregated along racial lines at that time, it may safely be assumed that the membership statistics for the new conferences reflect the racial distribution of Adventists in Metropolitan New York at that time. At the beginning of 1945, when the split became effective, a total of 1,817 members had been transferred from the GNYC to the new NEC.[3] Almost all of these would have been Afro-Americans, for few black immigrants had entered from anywhere else up to this time. The GNYC was left with 2,682 members. The vast majority of these were Caucasians — the first Hispanic congregation was just organizing. The "black" conference had taken just over two-fifths of the Adventists in the region (see Table 1).

[3] The NEC had a total of 2,228 members, for its territory extended to Boston and Buffalo; however, this paper limits itself to the New York Metropolitan area.

TABLE 1

Seventh-day Adventist Membership in the Two Metropolitan New York Conferences, January 1945.

	Membership	%	
Greater New York Conference	2,682	59.6%	(Caucasians, with a few Hispanics)
Northeastern Conference	1,817	40.4%	(Afro-Americans)
Total	4,499		

Source: General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics.

By the end of June 1996, the official membership of the GNYC in the Metropolitan area had increased to 15,164, and that of the NEC to 29,369. The combined membership stood at 44,533, almost ten times that of 51 years earlier. However, the membership of both conferences, and especially that of the NEC, is exaggerated because missing members remain on the rolls. This is a much more common occurrence today than it was 50 years ago, when pastors were pressured to "clean the rolls" regularly. After excluding missing members, which was provided for in the research methodology, my estimate of the real membership of the conferences within Metropolitan New York in 1996 was 20,908 in the NEC and 13,572 in GNYC, for a total of 34,480.[4] Table 2 shows how the total membership now subdivides racially and ethnically: the two categories used in 1945 have been replaced by great diversity.

TABLE 2

Seventh-day Adventist Membership Breakdown, Metropolitan New York, 1996

Race/Ethnicity	Total	%
West Indians (English speaking)	16,122	46.8%
Hispanics	6,523	18.9
Haitians	5,884	17.1
Afro-Americans	2,761	8.0
Caucasians	947	2.7
Africans	668	1.9
Black Central Americans	572	1.7

[4] Koreans and Haitians are often so slow to transfer their membership from the congregations they left in their homelands to the congregations that they attend in Metropolitan New York that the number of persons attending who have not yet transferred membership tends to exceed the number of missing members. The Hispanics, in contrast, tend to be compulsive about keeping their rolls current, being punctual in completing transfers and quick to drop the names of members who no longer attend or who do not faithfully observe Adventist norms. The missing member phenomenon is found especially in the English-speaking congregations.

TABLE 2 *(Continued)*

Race/Ethnicity	Total	%
Koreans	430	1.2
Brazilians	233	0.7
Filipinos	170	0.5
Southern Asians	82	0.2
Chinese	75	0.2
Other	13	0.0
Total	34,480	

The most striking factor revealed in this table is the withering away of the white membership — to only 35 percent of its number in 1945, and from 60 percent to a mere 2.7 percent of the total membership. Indeed, because of the recent flow of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the proportion of this category who are newcomers is not insignificant. While Afro-American statistics show a 50 percent growth since 1945, their proportion of the total membership also fell sharply — from 40 percent in 1945 to only 8 percent in 1996. On the other hand, immigrant groups, and especially three groups which are drawn totally or mostly from the Caribbean — English-speaking West Indians, Hispanics, and Haitians — have shown enormous growth.

Adventism in Metropolitan New York has become an immigrant church. Almost 90 percent of its membership is now "new immigrant," and the two "American" groups that were dominant in 1945 have diminished dramatically. Indeed, all of the formerly English-speaking "white" congregations are now very mixed racially, to the point where they have no majority group, and only three of the 56 English-speaking congregations in the NEC, where Afro-Americans previously predominated, now have Afro-American majorities — and all three of these congregations are small, with memberships of less than 100.

New York City has always acted as a magnet to new immigrants — for example, to large numbers of Irish, Italians, and Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In recent decades the flow of immigrants has increased once again, but this time they are coming mostly from developing countries. Data drawn from the 1990 US census show that 23.1 percent of the population of the New York Metropolitan area was foreign-born (see Table 3). However, this proportion is tiny compared with the Adventist membership, where almost 90 percent are immigrants or youthful members of immigrant families.[5] In addition to Hispanics and Haitians, the following groups now have their own con-

[5] Adventist children are usually baptized around the age of 10 or 12, and are only then counted as members. I instructed the church clerks to count the baptized youth in immigrant families as immigrants, partly because they were often unsure whether or not they had been born in the US.

gregations, speaking their own languages, in Metropolitan New York: Koreans, Ghanaians, Chinese, Brazilians, Romanians, Ukrainians, and Hungarians. The latter three are now the only congregations with Caucasian majorities. A Nigerian group has formed and is on its way to achieving congregational status. Other groups, such as Filipinos, Indians and Pakistanis, and second-generation Haitians and Hispanics, form minority segments in very diverse English-speaking congregations.

TABLE 3

Proportion Foreign-born, Metropolitan New York Population, 1990

	Population	Foreign-born	%
New York City	7,322,564	2,083,111	28.4%
Suburbs	3,749,553	470,917	12.6
Total, Metropolitan Area	11,072,117	2,554,028	23.1

New York may be unusual in its high proportion of immigrant Adventists, but its experience points to a trend. In the North American Division (NAD) of the Adventist Church, which includes both the US and Canada, Los Angeles, Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Miami have immigrant majorities; in some cases this has been so for more than two decades. In recent years, 75 percent of the new members added to the Adventist Church in the Division have been immigrants from countries in the developing world.[6] According to the General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics, the number of Hispanic members in the NAD increased by 127.1 percent between 1980 and 1990, Asians by 162.4 percent, those of African Descent (a category that does not distinguish between Afro-Americans, West Indians, and Haitians) by 71.1 percent, and Caucasians by only 4.9 percent (see Table 4). While Caucasians still form a majority of the Division membership, their proportion has declined precipitously — from 72.2 percent in 1980 and 60.2 percent in 1990 to an estimated 52 percent in 1996. It has been predicted that Caucasians will become a minority — 47 percent — by 2000 (Sahlin 1997; Vasquez n.d.:3). A highly diverse North American Adventism will then have no majority group.

This trend is not limited to the US. Within the NAD, it is further advanced in Canada, where the West Indian presence is now so great, especially in the cities of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, that the constituency has elected a

[6] This datum was derived from data supplied the author by Monte Sahlin, director of the North American Office of Church Information and Research. However, this proportion was reduced in 1995 and 1996, when larger numbers of Caucasians were baptized as a result of Net95 and Net96, huge evangelistic campaigns transmitted throughout the Division by satellite (Sahlin 1997).

TABLE 4

Racial/Ethnic Background of North American Adventists, 1980, 1990

	Membership and Percentage of Total								
	Caucasian		African descent		Hispanic		Asian		Total
1980	436,485	72.2%	127,541	21.1%	28,404	4.7%	12,000	2.0%	604,430
1990	457,971	60.2%	218,189	28.7%	64,502	8.5%	19,486	2.6%	760,148
Growth-rate 1980–1990		4.9%		71.1%		127.1%		62.4%	25.8%

Source: General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics

West Indian as president of the Canadian Union, the Adventist Church in Canada. A similar trend began even earlier in London and other urban centers in England, so that the president of the British Union is now also a West Indian. Of the 3,578 Adventists in Metropolitan Paris, fewer than 400 are French Caucasians; more than 3,000 of them are from the Caribbean and French Guyana, others are from former French colonies in Africa and Asia (interviews). That is, the bulk of the immigrants in all three countries come from the Caribbean, just as they do in New York. A "World Survey" of the various divisions of the international Adventist Church carried out at the behest of the General Conference in 1993 shows that around the world Adventism is growing most quickly among immigrants and internal rural-urban migrants.

Many religious denominations in New York are becoming more diverse as they absorb immigrants — depending on their presence in the immigrants' countries of origin and their evangelistic zeal here. Presbyterians and Methodists are known for their Korean congregations, Catholics for Hispanic, Haitian, and Filipino congregations, Episcopalians for their West Indian congregations. However, the proportion of new immigrants among the membership of the Adventist Church in this region is much higher than in these denominations: When I contacted the local headquarters of each of these denominations, and also the American Baptists, whose immigrant segment is more mixed, I was provided with estimates ranging from 50 percent for Catholics to 15 percent for both Episcopalians and Presbyterians, which fell far short of Adventism's 90 percent. Pentecostals, taken collectively, are proving even more successful among immigrants than Adventists, but their proportion of immigrants is lower than that of Adventists because they have maintained a greater presence among Afro-American and Caucasian Americans. Moreover, they are already fragmented,

and they tend to continue to subdivide along racial/ethnic lines.[7] Thus, another factor that makes Adventism so diverse is its centralized structure. Given Adventist growth, and the decline of its Caucasian and Afro-American membership, it has become an immigrant church to a much greater extent than any other denomination.

The focus of the paper now shifts as it attempts to account for the dramatic demographic changes within Adventism in Metropolitan New York.

THE DECLINE OF CAUCASIANS AND AFRO-AMERICANS

Modernization theory predicts that religious groups will experience growth to the extent that they accommodate to modern values such as individualism, independence, anti-dogmatism, cosmopolitanism (rather than separatism and insularity), and the acceptance of doubt. As people are exposed to formal education and other modernizing processes, the theory predicts that they will be attracted less to strict churches with rigid doctrinal systems and behavioral codes (Tamney and Johnson 1998; Tamney 1992; Sztompka 1993). Shibley, in his study of Southern-style evangelicalism outside the American South, agrees with the contention of Tamney and Johnson that strictness, as put forward by Kelley (1972) and Iannaccone (1994), is not the operative variable in some evangelical growth (Shibley 1996:4). His findings suggest that conservative religious groups can succeed in the short-term by attracting less modern people such as immigrants (in his case, migrants within America, from the South to the West), but that long-term success depends on cultural accommodation. Modernization theory similarly casts light on the demographic changes within Adventism.

Network theory is also relevant to the explanation of Adventist demographic patterns. This theory holds that religious movements spread more effectively when they utilize pre-existing social networks (Stark 1996: 20–22, 55–57).

The decline of the two main "American" groups within Adventism in Metropolitan New York has been much more dramatic than the above comparison between the statistics of 1945 and 1996 suggests, for both groups grew substantially over the first 25 years after 1945 before declining numerically — and even more in proportion to the total. In 1970 there were 3,500 Caucasians in the GNYC (interviews), but there are now fewer than 1,000. The number of Afro-Americans in the Metropolitan region of the NEC equaled the number of English-speaking West Indians as recently as the mid-1970s (interviews); today they number barely one-fifth of the latter.

During these decades American Adventists became much better educated — and therefore inclined towards modern values — as they took advantage of the opportunities offered to them through the greatly improved network of

[7] This analysis was confirmed with Professor Dale Irvin of New York Theological Seminary, who follows the Pentecostal segment closely.

Adventist colleges, which had gained accreditation during the interwar years, or less costly public colleges. However, at the same time the Adventist Church in this region failed to embrace such values and continued to present itself to potential converts as a millennial subculture separated from its setting (Schwarz 1979: 522–25, 579–97). Consequently, Adventism declined among the more cosmopolitan segments of the population, but was able, in the short-term, to add less modern members.

Membership growth or decline depends on three factors: natural increase, gains through evangelism and migration, and how these compare with losses from migration, apostasy, and deaths. We begin with the last.

Losses: There have been considerable losses among Caucasian and Afro-American members in New York, especially among the youth. This largely reflects the huge exit rate among American Adventist youth, who regularly rebel against Adventist behavioral rules, complain that Adventism is not relevant to them, and frequently "graduate from Adventism" when graduating from its schools. I pulled the relevant data together in another paper, where I argued that the exit rate among American youth who grow up as Adventists is approaching 75 percent (Lawson 1996b). But New York has two special problems which further increase the losses. First, the network of Adventist colleges funnels many of the youth out of the Metropolitan area, with the result that they often make their careers elsewhere, and do not return. Second, none of the major Adventist institutions — colleges and hospitals — are located in New York. Such institutions are typically the intellectual centers of Adventism (Lawson and Carden 1983), and their absence in a sophisticated center like New York leaves a gaping hole: Adventist youth who take advantage of the educational opportunities available in the region, or who move or return there after completing their education elsewhere, have difficulty finding a congregation where they are fed intellectually and culturally, where they can voice the issues on their minds without being regarded as "badventists," where they can feel at home and put down roots.

Another source of losses has been "white flight" and Afro-American flight as the ethnic makeup of their congregations changed, making them feel less comfortable there. This has taken the forms of exit from Adventism, switching the congregation attended (some Afro-Americans, for example, commute to churches in suburban New Jersey, where their proportion within congregations remains higher), or moving to another region of the country. This phenomenon is compounded by the tendency among the elderly of both groups to move south — as retired Caucasians follow the trend to move to a warmer climate and older blacks who came from the South choose to return "home" now that racial tensions there have eased (interviews). The reverse flow — of American Adventists to the New York region — is much smaller than the outflow. This is partly because of an ingrained fear of cities created among such members by church teachings — Ellen White, the Adventist prophet, portrayed cities as irreligious

and unhealthy, warned that they would become centers of persecution during the events that would culminate in the apocalypse, and advocated country-living where Adventists could be close to God in nature and grow their own food; it is also related to the absence of a magnet drawing them to New York, which church-run institutions and the attendant infrastructure and career opportunities could have provided. The number of deaths in both groups is also disproportionately high because their members are aging (see below).

Natural Increase: If a religious movement does not maintain a level of fertility sufficient to at least offset member mortality, the net losses can negate even a substantial rate of conversion. Fertility is closely related to age distribution — especially that of women.

Caucasian members in the NAD are now disproportionately elderly, with couples with no children at home — the "empty nesters" — the largest category. This means that they are no longer reproducing themselves. This is even more true of New York Caucasians. The GNYC congregations that were formerly Caucasian, but which are now all racially mixed, have very few Caucasian children who would be eligible to attend their parochial schools: the vast majority of the students at these schools are now drawn from non-European immigrant groups. The pattern among Adventist Afro-Americans in New York is similar — they too are graying and no longer reproducing themselves (interviews).

The fertility of Afro-American and Caucasian Adventists in New York has dropped, partly because many of them have experienced upward mobility (higher social classes have fewer children) and especially because they have aged as a group as many of their younger generation have exited from the church or from the region, leaving a decreasing proportion in the childbearing years. Concurrently, the death-rate among this aging population has burgeoned.

Gains: Additions to membership through migration or evangelism can make up for a situation where gains through natural increase are exceeded by losses from exits and deaths; they can also improve the fertility rate by adding younger families. However, there have been practically no conversions of Caucasians and Afro-Americans in New York in recent years, while migration patterns among these groups of Adventists have produced a net loss. Consequently, these factors are not bolstering Adventist membership statistics. Since migration patterns among these groups have already been discussed, this segment focuses on evangelism.

Adventists have traditionally used their institutions — schools and hospitals — as their chief means of evangelism. However, in the US, their schools are now aimed at their own youth (retention rather than evangelism), and their hospitals are now so similar to others and the typical stay in hospital is now so short that they have largely lost their evangelistic function. As their institutions have declined as means of evangelism, Adventists have placed increasing emphasis on public evangelistic campaigns and seminars and on radio and TV

programs. The media programs tend to make contacts, but the reaping is done mostly in campaigns, seminars, and home Bible studies.

It was noted above that Adventists have never planted any major institutions in Metropolitan New York: They have had only some elementary and secondary schools there. This neglect was primarily the result of a preference for rural locations for their institutions, but also of a special fear of New York City as symbol of urban evil which was destined to be destroyed. The Adventist prophet, Ellen White, whose word is officially considered to be inspired, wrote:

> The Lord calls for His people to locate away from the cities, for in such an hour as ye think not, fire and brimstone will be rained from heaven upon these cities. Proportionate to their sins will be their visitation (White 1906).

> On one occasion, when in New York City, I was in the night season [that is, in prophetic dreams] called upon to behold buildings rising story after story toward heaven. These buildings were warranted to be fireproof, and they were erected to glorify their owners and builders. . . . The scene that next passed before me was an alarm of fire. Men looked at the lofty and supposedly fireproof buildings and said 'They are perfectly safe.' But these buildings were consumed as if made of pitch. The fire engines could do nothing to stay the destruction (White 1909).

Without institutions, the City did not have the growth engines that attracted concentrations of Adventists elsewhere.

Consequently, Adventists were forced to rely on public evangelism and the media to an even greater extent. These received special emphasis in New York during the 1950s. In 1950 a New York pastor launched "Faith for Today," a TV program, which was quickly adopted by church headquarters as the official Adventist program. By 1958 the telecast was appearing on 130 stations, usually as a public service and therefore at no extra cost to the denomination. The program was based in New York until 1972, but was then relocated to California. Meanwhile, a crusade in Carnegie Hall by an Adventist evangelist drew audiences as large as 4,000 and spurred the purchase of an evangelistic center in Manhattan's theater district in 1956 (Schwarz 1979:579–91). However, results from these methods have been paltry among Caucasians and Afro-Americans in Metropolitan New York. Free time on TV declined and good regular slots in the New York market became expensive and difficult to procure; even the Carnegie Hall campaign netted few baptisms, and, after years of poor results and declining use for evangelism, the evangelistic center was eventually dubbed a failure and sold in the 1970s (interviews). During the latter decade an endeavor to follow Ellen White's instruction that the cities are to be "worked from outposts" was implemented, with the opening of health-food restaurants operated by staff who commuted in from rural areas. However, it was discovered that New Yorkers did not trust strangers easily, and the restaurants, deemed a costly failure, were allowed to fold.

Why has Adventist outreach to Americans in the New York region proved so ineffective in recent years? Their public evangelism stuck by the traditional Adventist message — an urgent apocalyptic, their distinctive beliefs, and strict behavioral rules. Adventist leaders held to this focus because "that is what we know, and it works" (interviews). It could indeed be an effective means of convincing biblical literalists that the Adventist interpretation of the Bible was the correct one. However, this meant that they were focusing on an increasingly restricted, anti-modern subculture at a time when Afro-American and Caucasian New Yorkers were showing increasing sophistication. The latter are increasingly less likely to be drawn by the methods Adventists use there — their advertisements of traditional Adventist topics, and the penchant of the NEC in particular to stage its campaigns in tents — than are immigrants. Adventists have been even less successful in the suburbs of New York — indeed, they have invested relatively little there, realizing that their traditional methods are out of sync with what could strike a responsive chord there. That is, neither the content nor the methods of Adventist evangelism appeals to members of these groups in Metropolitan New York.[8]

One of the reasons why Adventists have clung to an approach that has gained especially poor results among American New Yorkers has been that those appointed as leaders of the conferences there, especially of the GNYC, have often been drawn from outside the region, and have therefore not been familiar with or understood its culture. When the evangelistic methods used elsewhere have failed among that population, conference leaders there have tended to rationalize that it is "poor soil for the gospel." Moreover, the Caucasian pastors who have served there have tended to be of lower quality — less educated and therefore often less innovative — for New York is widely regarded among white Adventist clergy as a difficult location in which to make a reputation (interviews).

The conferences headquartered in Metropolitan New York have tended to divert evangelistic resources from Afro-Americans and especially from Caucasians to immigrant groups. This is mostly because the immigrant pastors are more eager in proposing crusades when the funds are to be divided — and this flows in turn from their higher expectations of success from such endeavors. It is also related to the expectation of the leaders that an investment in evangelism aimed at immigrants is more likely to be fruitful. As its world membership has grown increasingly quickly in recent years, Adventist leaders everywhere have been encouraged to place high priority on the number of converts. Consequently, the level of return expected plays an important part in the formula for allocating funds. It should not surprise conference leaders that their evangelism attracts those at whom it is targeted. However, evangelism in New York in recent years has tended to garner immigrants even when it was not aimed at them.

[8] Tent meetings can still draw an audience of Afro-Americans in the American South.

The most effective means of making contact with people and bringing them to evangelistic meetings is through personal networks — very few attend as a result of impersonal advertising. As Caucasian and Afro-American Adventists have experienced upward mobility, they have often lost touch with the poorer, less educated members of their ethnic groups, who are the ones most likely to respond to the Adventist message, and are embarrassed by the prospect of attempting to evangelize their better-heeled peers. Some respondents referred to "the cringe factor": their fear that peers would react negatively to a presentation that was aimed at a lower social class. That is, Caucasian and Afro-American Adventists are less enthusiastic and effective tools for evangelism than immigrant members.

Afro-American and Caucasian non-Adventists are highly unlikely to be attracted to evangelistic meetings where the speaker is from another racial or ethnic group. They have also proved to be less comfortable than immigrants when they unexpectedly find themselves in an ethnically or racially mixed audience. Should a few of them attend an Adventist evangelistic meeting in Metropolitan New York, they are likely to find themselves in such a situation even when they match the ethnicity of the speaker, because of the greater eagerness of immigrants to invite their acquaintances. I have heard several accounts of crusades run by Caucasian or Afro-American evangelists in neighborhoods populated primarily by Americans where the Americans present failed to return after the initial meeting because the great majority of the audiences were immigrants; consequently, those eventually baptized were all immigrants. In an attempt to pursue a different audience, the NEC spent a large part of its annual evangelism budget during one recent year on renting a college auditorium for an evangelistic series. It was successful in reaching one aspect of its goal, for, rather than baptizing mostly poor people, as is usually the norm with a tent crusade, it baptized a higher status group, with many lower professionals and some higher professionals. However, almost all were West Indians: The immigrant network functioned effectively once again.

Adventists are relatively few in number in New York and are largely unknown in its communities because their congregations are not community churches which espouse local issues. Most of the laity have become used to commuting to church because Adventist churches are more thinly spread than those of larger denominations. Moreover, as American Adventism has become increasingly diverse, so that its congregations vary not only in racial/ethnic composition but also in style of worship, degree of theological conservatism or openness, social class, and so forth, urban members now typically pass near several other Adventist churches closer to their home en route to the congregation of their choice. Adventist pastors in Metropolitan New York also rarely live near their churches: While most of those in the region are in New York City, almost all the pastors, regarding themselves as professionals and preferring a house to an apartment, have chosen to live in the suburbs. The conferences also typically

choose to move them from one congregation to another too frequently to allow them to establish a presence in the communities where the churches are located. Such transfers in turn encourage members to switch churches in order to follow favored pastors. Consequently, Adventists usually lack a local presence that draws traditional Americans to them — they are a commuter church engaged, perhaps, in guerrilla evangelism.

Black Adventist churches lost an opportunity to gain visibility when their isolation and otherworldly focus led them to avoid becoming involved in the civil rights struggle. Moreover, unlike many black churches of other denominations, they are not regarded as bulwarks of their communities, and Adventism is not seen as a "black denomination." Ammerman's findings that more than 60 percent of the members of Berean Church in West Adams, Los Angeles, drive over ten miles to church, that it shows little political commitment to the Afro-American community, and that the mix of Afro-American and West Indian members has made it less distinctively Afro-American, are all at least equally true of the black Adventist churches in Metropolitan New York (1997:94,103). When Adventist church buildings are located in predominantly Caucasian or Afro-American communities — as they often are — they have become even less of a presence there as both groups have become minorities in their congregations, and modes of worship — such as music and preaching styles — have shifted from the norm for those communities.

The evidence suggests that both Caucasians and Afro-Americans are typically reluctant to throw in their lot with such mixed congregations. For example, when the evangelistic center was sold in the late-1970s, the racially mixed congregation that had been meeting in its auditorium bought a former synagogue in a prosperous section of Manhattan's Upper West Side, hoping thereby to create a strong Caucasian bulwark. However, this segment of its members atrophied as the West Indian segment experienced strong growth from outside the neighborhood. The congregation eventually felt so out of place in its environment that it sold the building at an excellent profit and moved to a more diverse location. When Afro-Americans, for their part, are introduced to a West Indian-dominated congregation they are likely to feel that the latter is insufficiently sensitive to their history and struggle, noting, perhaps, that they do not eagerly celebrate Black History Month (interviews).

The failure of Adventism to accommodate to modern values in Metropolitan New York at a time of growing sophistication among both Caucasians and Afro-Americans has played an important part in the loss of its youth within both constituencies, which has in turn produced declining fertility and an aging membership with high death rates. Net losses among these groups from migration have further heightened the problem. Similarly, its intransigence in refusing to update the content of its evangelistic outreach, even while it has made some efforts to update its technology, together with the erosion of useful networks linking members to others who would be more open to its evangelistic message,

have meant that its evangelism has also increasingly failed to reach these constituencies successfully. These trends have produced a steady decline in the Adventist membership among these groups over the past 25 years.

Shibley found that the growing evangelical churches — Vineyard Fellowship and Calvary Chapel — stress meeting personal needs (1996: 119, 120, 131). A few Adventist voices have been trying to position Adventist congregations as community churches, meeting personal needs at the local level (Sahlin 1990). However, so far they have made little impact, being voices crying in the wilderness.

THE GROWTH OF IMMIGRANT GROUPS

Meanwhile, Adventism has been extremely successful among a less modern constituency, first generation "new immigrants" to Metropolitan New York, where it has made good use of networks in retaining Adventists arriving among the pool of immigrants and in reaching out to others there.

However, while Adventism has become an immigrant church in the region, it has not drawn from all immigrant groups in proportion to their numbers. Three groups in particular — English-speaking West Indians, Hispanics, and Haitians — now together make up almost 83 percent of the total Adventist membership. While in recent years New York has received strong flows of immigrants from the areas from which these groups are drawn — Jamaica, Guyana, and other English-speaking islands of the Caribbean; the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico[9] and parts of Central and South America; and Haiti — it has also drawn large numbers from other regions, such as China, the former USSR, and Southern Asia, very few of whom are represented among Adventists (see Table 5).

TABLE 5

The Flow of Immigrants to New York from Selected Countries/Regions, 1983–1993

West Indies, Guyana	174,111
Dominican Republic	165,124
China	91,566
South America	61,018
The former USSR	46,175
Haiti	42,155
Southern Asia	40,745
Central America	22,932
Korea	21,877

[9] Since Puerto Ricans are US citizens they are not technically immigrants. However, when Adventists from there move to New York they usually join Spanish-speaking congregations. In recent years the influx from Puerto Rico has been much smaller than that from the Dominican Republic.

TABLE 5 *(Continued)*

Philippines	21,723
Eastern Europe	20,421
Western Europe	17,666

Source: Abstracted from U.S. Census Statistics

Six factors bear on the growth patterns of the various immigrant groups:

1) The strength of Adventism in the regions from which immigrants are drawn: The extent to which Adventism is a presence in these countries — its size and public image there; that is, the degree to which the immigrants identify with Adventism or know about it.

Adventists have done well among immigrants from the Caribbean, where Adventism is strong. It has large numbers of members there, and is often well known among the population at large. This is not the case in China, the countries of the former Soviet Union, and Southern Asia, where Adventism is a much weaker presence. That is, few of the immigrants from these regions either identify with Adventism or are familiar with it.

Since Adventism is already strong in regions such as the Caribbean, it is not surprising that church members are among those who immigrate to New York. However, as noted above, it appears that the rate of Adventist immigration is higher than it would be if immigrants self-selected randomly: Adventists are more inclined to immigrate because Adventism focuses them on upward mobility, and migration from these poor countries to the US is seen as a means of improving their circumstances. They are also drawn to the US because they feel close ties to the land from whence their missionaries came.

2) The extent to which the Adventist Church in New York, and especially the members of each ethnic group, expend effort to contact, welcome, and help fellow members arriving as immigrants: Adventism will solidify the ties the immigrants previously felt to their church to the extent it does this well in their new land; if it fails in this respect, the ties may be broken.

The Adventist Church in New York does not have a comprehensive program to reach out to Adventist immigrants as they arrive — it assumes that they will find a church and contact it, often through Adventist relatives or friends already in New York. It is clear that such networks are important in helping immigrants establish ties to American Adventism. However, the absence of an organized program to contact Adventist newcomers raises the question of how many are shaken loose from Adventism by the transition — a process which Adventist evangelists exploit when it occurs among immigrants belonging to other churches. In fact, many Adventist immigrants are forced to take employment that includes working on the Sabbath in order to survive, and these consequently do not make contact with the church or may later lose contact with it.

However, once immigrants get in touch with an Adventist Church, they find the church services familiar, for the centralized structure has imposed a similar form of worship and all-age "Sabbath Schools" studying the same curriculum throughout the international church, and the social group then usually cements the contact. They have found, in Warner's phrase, that the congregation is "a Gemeinschaft in the midst of the alien Gesellschaft" (1994:70). This process may be assisted when the church offers some help with clothing, housing, and perhaps legal status, although this help is patchy and far from excellent (interviews).[10]

3) The effort expended by the Adventist Church and its members to evangelize new immigrants who are not Adventists. The immigrant members matching non-Adventist newcomers are often eager to reach out to the latter in friendship and with evangelistic goals. The conferences have awarded their pastors increasing resources for this purpose. Since new immigrants are frequently shaken loose from the networks that bind them to their religious communities just as they face the culture shock and alienation of a frightening new society, they are more open to proselytization (Stark and Iannaccone 1993:257). When they were well acquainted with Adventism because of its high visibility "back home," which is the case in much of the Caribbean, they are likely to view it more favorably than do Americans, for whom Adventism is usually a peculiar sect. Hispanic and Haitian immigrants are drawn to Adventism because it crusades in their neighborhoods, and its ethnic church services are conducted in their language. These immigrants are also disposed to appreciate the close community of Adventists from their homeland that they find in an Adventist congregation. West Indians, for their part, have flocked to hear both Afro-American and Caucasian evangelists and have eagerly responded to their invitations to be baptized — a situation which is not mirrored among their American counterparts. They have also proved to be comfortable when they have found themselves in mixed English-speaking churches with either Afro-Americans or Caucasians, where they have usually felt an initial welcome which they have not found to be typical in Episcopal churches (Brathwaite 1998).[11] These immigrants appreciate the confidence of the evangelists that what they preach is "the truth" in a context where so much seems new and uncertain to them, and also the proclamation of strict behavioral rules in a city where so many youth appear to them to be out of control.

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[10] Such services are far less organized, and therefore inferior to those offered, for example, by the Catholic Migration Office of the Brooklyn Diocese (Marino 1998; cf., Christiano 1991:170).

[11] Rev. Brathwaite, a West Indian Episcopal priest who has studied the reception of Anglican West Indians in the Episcopal churches in New York, estimated, when addressing my course on Urban Religious Movements, that over one million immigrants had been lost to the Episcopal Church because of the cool welcome tendered to them (1998).

Those interviewed agreed that while growth was initially primarily through the immigration of members, evangelism later became an important factor, with the result that the membership among the three numerically predominant immigrant groups is now drawn in approximately equal numbers from the immigration of Adventists and the evangelization of nonmember newcomers.

4) Fertility: Immigrants tend to be young and to have more children than is typical in America. For example, Hernandez found that 76 percent of the Hispanic members in the NAD were 41 years old or younger — and this figure omits the younger children, since they have not yet been baptized and added to the membership rolls (1995:31). Consequently, their high fertility and low death-rate contrast sharply with those of the aging Caucasians and Afro-Americans. These immigrant groups should be poised for further growth from natural increase — to the extent that they retain their youth.

5) Losses: However, the hemorrhage from among the Adventist immigrant youth is often considerable.[12] While the parents continue to look toward their homelands and their cultures, this is not true of their children, so that cultural tensions between generations are often high. For example, several pastors told of having to mediate with the police after the children of immigrants, who had learned from their peers that corporal punishment is illegal and considered child-abuse in New York, had called the emergency police number after being beaten by their parents. The latter had been taught "back home," where corporal punishment was frequently employed, that the Bible endorses such methods of discipline.

The problems with the youth are exacerbated in the case of Hispanics, Haitians, and Koreans because of language differences between the generations, for the youth are often much more comfortable with English. Yet there has been little attempt in these churches to create worship services that the youth can understand clearly because their parents have focused on their own needs and culture. They have rationalized their choice on the ground that services in their own languages are necessary if they are to attract non-Adventist immigrants to their churches. They have thus placed the evangelizing of new immigrants ahead of the needs of their own children. However, in the last year three Hispanic congregations, finally worrying about the losses from among their offspring, have experimented with monthly bilingual services for youth. These ventures have proved difficult to implement because of the difficulty of finding English-speaking Hispanic preachers (interviews).

It seems as if the retention of West Indian youth is somewhat higher than among Hispanics and Haitians because of the absence of a language problem between generations (interviews). This may be a key to the greater West Indian growth rate.

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[12] This pattern is not restricted to Adventists. For example, a study of Korean Americans in New York City found that while 75 percent of the first generation attend church, only 5 percent of the second generation remain in church after college (Chai 1998:300).

That is, as the second generation assimilates to American culture, and thus adopts modern values, there is a growing cleavage between generations and between the members of the second generation and their church. Nevertheless, even though losses among youth are often high, there are still many more of them present in immigrant churches than among Caucasians and Afro-Americans because of the fecundity of the much younger immigrant members.

6) Evangelization of second-generation immigrants. Adventists have had very little success in evangelizing second-generation immigrants because the latter become inaccessible to them for many of the same reasons that Caucasians and Afro-Americans are inaccessible: They have become Americanized with modern values, their Adventist peers reach out to them much less, they have usually established strong ties to existing networks, and the Adventist message appears much less relevant to them. There is an additional barrier in the case of second-generation Hispanics, Haitians, and Koreans, who rarely speak well the language used in the ethnic churches and yet have no special reason to be drawn to English-speaking churches where their ethnic group is only a small minority. The Adventist failure to reach second-generation immigrants indicates that maintaining the current growth rates of these ethnic groups will depend on whether the flow of immigrants continues.

CONCLUSION

In May 1998 the Presbyterian Church (USA), acutely aware of its declining membership in recent decades, announced that this "predominantly Anglo, suburban and middle class denomination" would seek to reverse its decline by fostering congregations among Asian, African, and Latin American immigrants. It set a goal of raising the proportion of its national membership belonging to ethnic minority groups by half, to 10 percent, by the year 2005 (Niebuhr 1998:13). This paper has shown that the Adventist Church has already traveled this road. Indeed, it was noted above that the proportion of new immigrants among the membership of the Adventist Church in Metropolitan New York is far higher than among the mainline denominations. Our analysis has determined that this is because, on the one hand, its extensive missions in the developing world have created a presence among potential immigrants and it is more aggressive in its evangelism among first-generation immigrants in New York, and, on the other hand, its Caucasian and Afro-American membership has proved less stable as it has lost members; the church has failed to gain replacements because it has not accommodated modern values and because its members have become detached from networks compatible to the Adventist message and they have lost enthusiasm for sharing their faith with their peers.

I have argued elsewhere, as was noted above, that during the last century or so American Adventism has moved a considerable distance from sect towards denomination, primarily as a result of members achieving upward mobility

through church-sponsored and -encouraged education (Lawson 1996a). The evidence presented here that demographic patterns among Caucasian and Afro-American members are similar to those of mainline denominations, culminating in a decline of membership in these categories, suggests that the process is far advanced among these long-dominant membership groups. It is the growth from immigration and from evangelism among immigrants that continues to make American Adventism's overall demographic profile different from mainline denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (USA). Even though the numbers of Caucasian and Afro-American Adventists are declining — a pattern which is very clear once missing and nominal members are excluded from calculations[13] — the total membership continues to increase because of the influx of immigrants.

If the influx of immigrants ceased, the Americanization of the youth would eventually blur these ethnic categories. Continuing losses from among second- and subsequent generation Adventists and the difficulty of evangelizing second-generation immigrants would also result eventually in the numerical decline of these groups, paralleling the existing patterns among American members.

Given the evidence of declining fertility and the exit of youth among all American-born Adventists, it seems evident that the continued growth of American Adventism will be dependent on a continued influx of immigrants.

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[13] Congregations are especially reluctant to remove the names of youth who grew up in their midst, for they hope that this remaining tie will some day encourage them to return; pastors too are loath to "clean the rolls" because their superiors tend to focus on numbers, and expect them to show an increase each year. Organized counts in recent years have found that the number of people, including children, in attendance at Adventist churches in the US on a given Sabbath is only about half of the baptized membership. It is generally agreed that this represents a sharp fall from what it would have been a generation ago.

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