CHANGES PREVALENT IN URBIA
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1. **POPULATION INCREASE:** Urbia grows in three ways: by natural childbirth; by migration into the city often from the rural areas within the region; and by geographical expansion where the city swallows up surrounding countryside and neighboring towns. In some inner cities and industrial zones, such as in Detroit and Kansas City, there is an abandoning of properties as young people move to neighboring districts or are displaced by gentrification.

2. **INCREASED POPULATION DENSITY:** Single residency housing is replaced by multi-unit condos and apartment buildings. Or several families move into housing designed for one family only. Hire rise buildings accommodate entire “villages” of people. An increasing number of people and family units now live in garages, cars or on the streets, especially in the sun-belt areas of the country. There is also an increase in institutionalized population, i.e. prisons (new definition of “coercive communities), hospitals, mental health care centers. The city tends to build up as well as out, because primary residential land is becoming increasingly less available and more expensive.

3. **INCREASED DIVERSITY OF POPULATION:** The larger the city, the more it is able to sustain subcultural communities more impervious to the processes of acculturation. In major cities across the United States as many as 100 student groups require bilingual services. This diversity not only ethnically and linguistically retains identity, but is also defined in terms of variant lifestyles, i.e. gays, gangs, beach cultures. Newer immigrants come from cultures much more distanced from European-originated cultures than has been true in the past.

4. **ETHNIC Ghettoes:** Certain communities become more stereotypes as “ethnic” because of “push and pull” factors. One population seeks advantage by moving out of the community to better school districts, while another population may be unable to do so. As the community become stereotyped, “redlined”, marginalized, the very institutions and leaders that could empower, also exit the community until the ghettoes become “frozen” by migration factors, both economic and psychological, that make movement out difficult. On the other hand, external wealth and power creates new ethnic communitites such as Chinatowns, Korea Towns, Little Tokyos, etc. Some of these communities are designed less by fate than by intentionality.

5. **PORT OF ENTRY SYNDROME:** Now cities all across the country are becoming Ellis Islands with ports of entry being the local Greyhound station for the poor and the airport for the international immigrants. Often the “draw” is the dream of employment, or educational advantage, or “connections” with “homeboys” back in the native lands. The changes then are abrupt, often without the transition experiences of a “Port Ellis”, resulting in social problems, cultural clash and community disruption from people who have not yet learned the skills or values of the “American way of life.”

6. **GROUP POLARIZATION:** The traditional population groups resent the sudden changes that occur in their communities and frequently organize political and social resistance in the name of anti-development moratoriums, “English Only” as official language petition drives, private school alternatives, anti-driver’s license legislation and curbs of social services for undocumented aliens. When these fail, those that can, move out while those who can’t, live in relative paranoia. Ironically where there is symbiotic economic advantage, i.e. mini-mart Korean owners, Hispanic service providers and African American customers, there is a delicate balance of power that in times of stress, pits one group against the other.

7. **INSTANT GENTRIFICATION:** Land developers and outside economic interests occasionally converge in the “upgrading” of decaying properties for the purpose of seeking an upscale clientele, both immigrant and yuppie, enamored by history and proximity to downtowns, thereby improving the economic status of communities. The cost of land and services goes up rather than down, displacing some of the older residential population that can no longer afford not to sell, while younger families are now unable to rent. The result is a rapid turnover of population with few institutional continuities and many displaced peoples, some now made homeless.

8. **LOSS OF COMMUNITY:** As migration and movement increase, along with the relentless expansion of the city, community boundaries lose their meaning, not only geographically but also psychologically. New definitions of personhood are created, much more related to peer groups, volunteer associations, occupational loyalties. Where one sleeps only has meaning as a status symbol when it “works for you” or as a financial investment. There is little
sense of neighborhood except in smaller ethnic units, i.e the “home-boy” network in some latino communities, or gangs that identify with geographical turf, or the euphemisms built around city sports loyalties.

9. **SOCIAL DISPLACEMENT:** Because of the above factors, the support network is fragile and often inadequate. Once shattered, the network seems irreparable. In major cities, persons are thought to be “homeless” not just as a result of vice and sin, but also because the social fabric of their personal lives has been ruptured. A new phenomenon is the working homeless, unable to sustain residency under conditions of pitiful minimal wage laws. Undocumented aliens work at sweat shops or as day laborers, leaving their young inadequately attended, though perhaps the greatest case of “child abandonment” is seen in the suburbs where lonely children await overworked professional parents. Welfare entitlement programs often work against the integrity of poor families, requiring eligible mothers to live without the benefit of legal husbands. Immigrant parents sometimes intentionally try to immunize their youth from American culture, creating family splits.

10. **INCREASED MARGINALITY:** Marginals are people in cultural transition, not at home in any single culture. Often the problem of “anomie” or “normlessness” is associated with this, where values and lifestyles seem apathetic to mainstream society. Marginals may find solidarity in the creation of their own subcultures, i.e. cult groups, rock music groupies, sports cults, gang affiliations, “squat” groups.

11. **INCREASED SOCIAL PROBLEMS:** The litany of these problems does not have to be described. These include: gang violence, wanton killings, drug dealing, child abuse, prostitution (both male and female), the Mafia, extortion, car jackings, teen suicide, unwanted pregnancies, homelessness, child abandonment, etc. Ironically in the past several years, several of these “evidences” have decreased in the urban areas, while increased in non-urban communities. The reasons for turnaround is attributed to a wild variety of explanations, including improved economy, more rigid penalization, segmentation of communities, the ageing of the population at large, the post-7-11 security emphasis.

12. **SECURITY AND PARANOIA:** The response of many is to find security in material paraphernalia—locks, chain, fences, window grates, alarm systems, video spy cameras, guard dogs, security personnel, insurance coverage and a general suspicion about the intent of all strangers. Furthermore entire communities are “gated,” or “caccooned” to limit the access of threat.

13. **INCREASED RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY:** Immigrant groups have brought non-Christian traditions with them, such as the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh faiths. Other have rooted themselves in ancient animistic traditions such as the Native American religions, “Santaria,” Kabbalah and New Age. Others have generated new and variant religious forms such as Scientology, Religious Science and Unity. In the mix, there is deep uncertainty as to whether these religion contribute or threaten both Christianity and the “American Way of Life.”

14. **RELIGIOUS CONSUMERISM AND SPECIALIZATION:** The spirit of the age is conspicuous consumption, where religion, too, is seen primarily as a commodity for sale and purchase. Religion is seen as a “take it or leave it” optional value in the commerce of life. Deeply held religious values pronounced publicly are the new taboo. Those religious programs that market well, specialize in high pressure sales technique that “deliver” the commodity advertised, be it child care, family counseling, political leverage, social status, spiritual “peace.” Thus, Western religious forms tend to reduce the cost of participation and exaggerate the claims of its usefulness in the attempt to attract adherents. If the consumer is not happy with the religious affiliation, there is always an option down the street. Many of the immigrant peoples do not comprehend this understanding of religion, but over time, learn to “ape” it in their own religious tradition.

15. **SPIRITUAL TURMOIL AND OPENNESS:** Yet in the plethora of religious confusion, there is an openness to religious dialogue. Latin Americans are historically receptive to the evangelical Gospel in part because their historic Catholicism serves more as a bridge than a block to their receptivity. The Black community has long made the Church an integral part of the community experience, as the major social institution in many of its communities. The Korean community has a vibrant Christian witness. Other groups have varying responses, though the current political climate has repressed Muslim response to the Gospel. The stress of immigration, along with economic difficulties, and timely qualitative religious care maximizes the opportunities of religious paradigm shifts.

16. **RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES:** Many immigrant groups bring ethical values compatible with conventional
Christianity, i.e. family values, respect for authority, search for spiritual meaning, strong work ethic and respect for religious ritual. Despite over religious theological differences, there are appropriate bridges and common values over which different religious perspectives may dialogue.

Fundamental Questions:

1. What is the role of the Christian Church in the midst of these changes?
2. How does Holy Scripture view the nature of these changes?
3. What is the message of the Christian Gospel in the midst of these changes?
4. What is the nature of the activity of Christian individuals, in confronting these changes?