Reassessing the Size of Mormons, Adventists and Witnesses: Exploring the Dynamics of their Global Growth and Testing the Reliability of their Membership Data*

Ronald Lawson, Queens College, CUNY

Contact information: RonaldLawson@nyc.rr.com; QBrutus@gmail.com; (718) 441-7205 (home)

Word count: 9,678

*The author thanks Sylvia Hordosh, Ryan Cragun, David Knowlton, Armand Mauss, Rick Phillips, Jolene Chu, James Pellechia, James Penton, Monte Sahlin, Kathleen Jones, Ronald Watts, Armando Mirando, Larry Evans, Matthew Bediako, Mitchell Tyner, Sylvester Wager, and anonymous reviewers for their help with this study and comments on earlier drafts.

Reassessing the Size of Mormons, Adventists and Witnesses: Exploring the Dynamics of their Global Growth and Testing the Reliability of their Membership Data

ABSTRACT

This study compares the aggregate growth of three religious groups which were born in America during the nineteenth century: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. It tests the validity of the data used by Stark and Iannaccone in their studies of the growth of Mormons and Witnesses and of the projections they made concerning their future growth. This study, like those of Stark and Iannaccone, uses the official membership data of each of the three groups when comparing their growth over time and assessing a recent slowing of that growth. Then, asking how reliable these statistics are, it shows that each group employs different criteria in selecting who it counts. Noting that some studies have found wide discrepancies between the numbers identifying as Mormons in censuses conducted by certain countries and the official church membership there, it uses census data from 20 countries in all regions of the world to test the validity of the official data for all three groups. The pattern found differs considerably from group to group. The study then uses the ratios between official and census data to estimate the aggregate adherents of all three groups, which results in a dramatic reordering of their sizes.

INTRODUCTION

The growth and global expansion of American-born Christian sects have been used as the basis for influential thinking in the sociology of religion. This study compares the growth dynamics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists (Adventists), and Jehovah's Witnesses (Witnesses), all of which were formed in the nineteenth century. Conklin includes them among the most significant "American Originals," noting that these three are distinctive in their international appeal (1997:ix).

These "upstart sects" (Finke and Stark 1992) emerged from what Nathan Hatch called "the democratization of American Christianity", a resurgence of religion in the early republic epitomized by the Second Great Awakening (1989). All three groups have characteristics, such as medium tension/strictness, found among religious organizations that succeed in the competitive environment shaped by the deregulation of religion according to the rules of the "new paradigm" (Iannaccone 1994; Stark and Finke 2000; Warner 1993). Stark and Iannaccone used their studies of the growth of Mormons and Witnesses as the basis for general theories of church growth (Stark 1984; Stark 1996a; Stark and Iannaccone 1997). Oddly, they have neglected the growth of Adventism, which became the largest of the three groups when its membership overtook the Mormons during the 1990s, and has since surged ahead.

Both the Stark and Stark/Iannaccone studies used the official Mormon and Witness data because these are the only source of aggregate membership data; Lawson also used the official data of all three groups because these are the only source allowing an examination of the global geographic distribution of members (2005). Similarly, this study utilizes these data to compare their growth over time and examine a recent slowing of their growth. Then, questioning their reliability, it shows that the categories of people counted by each group differ in important ways. Noting that recent studies have found wide discrepancies between the official Mormon data and

the number identifying as Mormons in the censuses of particular countries, it then tests the reliability of the official membership data of each group by comparing it with the self-reported adherence revealed in census data from 20 countries in all regions of the world. Finding sharp, patterned differences between the three groups, it uses the ratios found to estimate the aggregate number of adherents of each group.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

Observers focusing on the modernization of society had long predicted its secularization and the decline of religion. Many interpreted the widespread contraction of involvement in the established Christian churches in Europe after World War II and then, from the 1960s onwards, in the Mainline Denominations in North America, as fulfillment of these expectations (Berger 1969). However, some scholars, noting that religion remained both vibrant and diverse in America in spite of the malaise of the Mainline, argued against the application of secularization theory to America, developing instead what Warner would later dub the "new paradigm" (1993). At the core of this was a theory of American exceptionalism which held that the dynamics there differed from those in Europe because the disestablishment of religion had encouraged competition between religious groups which had, in turn, fostered growth. Stark and his colleagues argued that the engines of American religious growth had long been strict, energized sectarian groups, whose expansion had resulted in overall growth. Meanwhile, the mature Mainline denominations, comfortable in their compatibility with the dominant culture, stagnated or declined (Finke and Stark, 1992; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985; Stark and Finke, 2000).

Stark and Iannaccone paid special attention to Mormons and Witnesses as examples of such growth. In 1984, an article by Stark declared that the growth and expansion of Mormons was so substantial that it amounted to the rise of a "new world religion." He predicted that

Mormons would "soon achieve a worldwide following comparable to that of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and the other dominant world faiths. …Indeed, today they stand on the threshold of becoming the first major faith to appear on earth since the Prophet Mohammed rode out of the desert" (1984:18, 19)**.** Claiming that their statistics were "extremely reliable," and noting that the Mormon global growth rate had exceeded 50% for each of the three previous decades, he projected that growth rate exponentially into the future, predicting that the Mormon membership, which was listed as 4.6 million in 1980, could reach 265.2 million by the year 2080 (22). A decade later, Stark returned to the topic to check out the accuracy of his prediction against the data of the previous decade. He found that the total membership listed had climbed to 7.7 million in 1990, a growth-rate exceeding 67% during the decade (1994: 13, 14). After the release of the 1995 official membership statistics, he argued that his earlier prediction was still "on track": the reported membership (9.4 million) exceeded his projected membership for that year (8.5 million) by "almost a million" (Stark 1996b: 177). He continues to stand by his projections (Stark 2005:140-6).

In 1997, in a co-authored study, Stark and Iannaccone turned their attention to the Witnesses in order to test Stark's "Revised General Model" of why religious movements succeed or fail (Stark, 1996a). Arguing that Witnesses combined all the attributes that the model held were necessary for success and that a growth rate of 4% per annum would prove to be "conservative", they projected that rate exponentially into the future and predicted that the global active membership of Witnesses, which stood at about 4 million in 1990, would reach 194 million by 2090 (Stark and Iannaccone, 1997:154).

Warner, whose "new paradigm" was essentially an anti-secularization thesis, argued that sociologists and historians had become overly pessimistic about the future of religion in America

because they had focused too closely on the prominent but declining Mainline Denominations, and had neglected the vibrant newer sectarian groups (1993). He urged a shift in focus in order to capture the large, much more optimistic, picture. This study responds to that request. While Warner was concerned with the trajectory of religious vitality in America, Stark and Iannaccone, and now this study, in focusing on the growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses, inevitably used their aggregate global data.

In praising the diversity of religion in America, Warner seized on the vitality of religious groups catering to the new immigrants who poured in from 1968 onwards. The ranks of Mormons, Witnesses, and especially Adventists in America contain many members from the Developing World who have in turn become active in recruiting their fellow immigrants (Bennion and Young 1996:27-8; Lawson 1998). Nevertheless, the assumption by Stark, Warner, and others that the growth of such groups in America has been sufficiently robust to counter-balance the precipitous decline of the Mainline Denominations since 1960 must be questioned.

While the study of Mormons has flourished in recent years, neither Witnesses nor Adventists have yet attracted the attention they warrant. In particular, little attention has been paid to these three groups collectively and to comparing and contrasting them until very recently, in spite of the similarities of their origins and global spread (Cragun and Lawson forthcoming; Lawson 2005). This study helps to fill that gap.

TOTAL GROWTH OVER TIME

This segment compares the growth of the total membership of all three groups over time, using their official membership data as described above. It notes that in recent years the growth-rates of both Mormons and Witnesses have plunged below Stark's projections.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 shows that all three groups have flourished, achieving impressive growth rates. Their earlier beginnings gave Mormons a head-start over Adventists, and Adventists, in turn, over Witnesses. However, Adventism's growth-rate was the largest of the three during almost every decade; consequently, its membership finally caught up with that of the Mormons in the late 1990s and then bounded ahead. At the end of 2008, Adventists listed 15.9 million members, Mormons 13.5 million members, and Witnesses' 7.1 million Peak Publishers.[1]

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 compares the size of each of the three groups to each other across time. It shows that the ratio of Adventists to Mormons climbed steadily from 6.0% in 1870 to 118.7% in 2008. Meanwhile, the ratio of Witnesses to Mormons remained fairly steady, even as the growth-rates of first Mormons and then Witnesses slumped during the last two decades. However, the ratio of Witnesses to Adventists has declined steadily since 1970 and especially since the 1990s, as the growth-rate of Witnesses plunged but that of Adventists remained much larger.

[Table 3 about here]

Lawson contrasts the global distributions of the three groups and their membership profiles (2005). Table 3 illustrates some of the findings that are useful to the current analysis. Adventists set out early to take their message to "all the world", and have consequently become truly global in scope. They have been comparatively unsuccessful in the Developed World but have spread through the Developing World, including the poorest regions. Compared to the other groups, they are especially strong in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific islands, they have a presence throughout East and Southeast Asia with strength in South Korea, China

[1] This term is defined below.

and the Philippines, and they compete numerically with Mormons in Latin America. Because Adventists initially established their missions, schools, clinics and hospitals in rural areas, their converts are often poor, although their schools have provided a means for some to rise to positions of prominence. Mormons, on the other hand, expanded their missions much more slowly, with the result that even today 83% of their membership is in the Western Hemisphere. They have also been relatively successful in Britain, the Philippines, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and Polynesia. Their presence, though still often small, has spread much more broadly since 1990. Nevertheless, they are largely absent from the poorest countries of the Developing World. Even though their missionaries often target poor people because they are easier to recruit, their predominantly urban presence has drawn an active membership that is better educated and economically more successful than Adventists (Stewart 2008:343). Witnesses occupy the middle position among the three groups. They have been especially successful in Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Japan, and have been more successful than Adventists in North America. They have also developed a presence in many countries in the Developing World, especially in Africa and Latin America, but, like the Mormons, their members are still sparse in the poorest countries. Because they rely on members to spread their message, and this usually occurs around where they are located, they also tend to be largely urban, so that their membership is generally economically better off than Adventists.

[Table 4 about here]

To what extent have Stark's predictions concerning continuing rapid growth been confirmed? Table 1 above showed that the growth rates of both Mormons and Witnesses declined sharply after 1990, and especially since 2000, plunging below the projections of Stark/Stark and Iannaccone, and thus disconfirming their predictions of exponential growth for

both groups. Table 4 examines the annual average growth-rates for each group for five-year periods from 1980 through 2008 in order to examine recent growth in greater detail. All three groups have experienced a weakening of growth. The Mormon rate, which had stood at an average annual rate of 6.22% between 1985 and 1990, then plunged, falling to 2.70% between 2000 and 2005 and 2.51% between 2005 and 2008. The Witnesses' rate, which had peaked at 6.62% between 1980 and 1985, declined even more steeply, especially after 1995, to 1.92% between 2000 and 2005. However, it recovered to 2.57% between 2005 and 2008, on a par with Mormons. The Adventist growth rate experienced a decline of similar proportions, from a peak of 8.39% between 1985 and 1990 to 4.64% between 2000 and 2005, and 3.52% between 2005 and 2008, although its actual rates remained higher than for the other two groups.

The Adventist decline after 1990 followed a decision to reallocate resources away from the predominantly Christian and animist regions of Latin America, Africa, the South Pacific, and the Philippines, where growth had come easily between 1977 and 1990, to the more difficult regions dominated by Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism between the 10th and 40th degree north parallels, as they committed themselves to embrace a goal of "Global Mission." This change slowed their growth somewhat, but it nevertheless remained impressive. In 2000 Adventists recognized that their membership rolls had become exaggerated during the earlier years of extremely rapid growth. The focus on baptisms had created competition between the various Divisions of their world church at a time when those maintaining the rolls in the burgeoning congregations in the Developing World often lacked the necessary skills. They had overlooked members whose moves to urban areas and Developed countries had left them on the rolls of more than one congregation, missing members, and even deaths. Adventists therefore launched a comprehensive audit of their membership rolls. This resulted in dramatic adjustments in

membership after 2003, including large net losses in some regions in some years, as accumulated dead wood was excised (Brauner 2009; Kellner 2009). For example, the process reduced the listed membership in the Philippines, which had stood at 912,867 in 2002, to 521,802 in 2005, a loss of 42.8%. Other countries posting dramatic losses were Brazil and Pakistan, and also Russia, where the rapid growth posted following the re-opening of the region to evangelism after the fall of Communism proved hollow when many converts were left without nurture because there were too few churches and pastors in place. Some of the reports also reflected a slowing of growth in some regions: in China, as the economy burgeoned; in Russia, where the earlier burst of interest in Western things, including Western religions, was replaced by nationalism; and in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, where secularization and modernization are far advanced.

[Table 5 about here]

However, their roll audit had the effect of masking the fact that the total number of Adventist baptisms actually increased steeply during this time, while those of Mormons and Witnesses plummeted. Table 5 compares the total number of baptisms of the three groups for each year since 1989. Note that while Adventist and Witness data count all baptisms, Mormons omit baptisms of children raised in the church, listing only baptisms of converts. Bennion and Young noted in 1996 that convert baptisms had risen to be 80% of all baptisms (22). Mormon baptisms peaked in 1990, fell suddenly between 1991 and 1999 and then more steeply between 2000 and 2008, when the mean was only 80.4% of the 1990 number. The decline bottomed out between 2003 and 2005, before increasing somewhat. Witness baptisms followed a fairly similar, but later and sharper, trajectory, peaking in 1997 and then tumbling between 2000 and 2006, when the mean number was only 76.2% of that between 1995 and 1999. They bottomed out in 2005-6, before rising considerably in 2007-8.

In contrast, the number of Adventist baptisms not only far surpassed those of the other two groups throughout this period, but they also increased dramatically rather than declining. Baptisms climbed during the 1990s then jumped much higher after 1999, reaching an all-time high in 2006. These data confirm that the reduced Adventist growth-rate since the turn of the millennium was primarily a product of the roll audit rather than of a decline in baptisms. Figure 1 illustrates the contrasting baptismal patterns in quinquennial periods from 1989 through 2008.

[Figure 1 about here]

Why have the growth-rates of Mormons and Witnesses declined in recent years, and how broadly were these patterns distributed? Mormon growth diminished sharply almost everywhere after 1990. While they reported few actual losses, their growth has long been stagnant in the Developed World, especially in most of Western Europe. The decline during the 1990s was related to factors such as a falling birthrate among their members in America, where births had been much more important to their growth than conversions, and the impact of secularization in the Developed World, which has now extended beyond the Mainline Denominations to the groups under discussion (Bryant et al. forthcoming; Cragun and Lawson forthcoming). This affected Mormons because of their strong concentration in such countries, contradicting Stark's claim that modernization and secularization stimulate Mormon growth (2005:95-112; Gooren 2007b). However, the contraction of their growth after 1990 extended also to the Developing World. This occurred in spite of notable increases in the number of missionaries: the ratio of conversions to hours worked dropped. The steeper decline since 2000 flows partly from changes in practice following the recognition of high attrition among converts in the two months following baptism and of the fact that fewer than 20%-25% of all listed members participate in church activities, a figure that is lower still beyond North America. Consciousness of these

problems resulted in a shift of some missionary resources in endeavors to reclaim inactive members and to ground new converts more fully (Grover 2005:88). Church headquarters also introduced a change designed to address the problem of converts who never return to church after their baptism: it now insists that converts no longer be received as members on the day of their baptism, but wait instead until the first Sunday of the following month (Phillips 2006:63). It also issued a statement in 2002 requiring that converts attend church several times and overcome prohibited habits such as the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea and coffee, before their baptism, and in 2004 it published a new missionary manual. However, Stewart suggests that these changes have not yet had a great deal of impact on the growth-rate, for he finds that most missions are still not compliant (2008:356; Bryant et al. forthcoming). The slippage in growth is also associated with saturation flowing from the close concentration on urban areas, where those likely to be converted easily have already been exposed to their teachings (Fortuny and Gooren forthcoming). Indeed, the Mormon record in Latin America suggests that initial growth tends to be high, as those easily plucked are harvested, but then declines: growth has slumped in the countries where it was high earlier, and is now occurring in countries where access was limited earlier, as in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas (Gooren 2007b).

Witnesses have also experienced a sharp curtailing of their growth-rate in all regions, but this has been deepest and longest in Western Europe, beginning in the mid-1980s. Several countries there eventually experienced losses. When asked to explain the decreased growth, contacts at the Watchtower Society mentioned the problems caused by a French Parliamentary report in 1996 that labeled Witnesses a “dangerous cult” and by follow-up legislation in 1999 imposing a tax on their financial contributions to their congregations (*Yearbook* 2000:24)**.** **P**ublicity given to these events throughout Western Europe seems to have had a negative impact

(*Yearbook* 2008:16; 2010:195). However, these events are too recent to explain the broader trend. Penton ties this to the loss of credibility caused by failed prophecies-- that Christ would return in 1975, and that the end would occur before the generation alive in 1914 had passed away. He argues that many Witnesses became disheartened by the new lack of certainty (1997). Data also suggest that the preaching of Witnesses is resonating far less, especially in Europe. While the number of members actively witnessing ("Publishers"), the total number of hours put in, and the number of Bible studies arranged with the people contacted all increased over time, baptisms peaked in 1999. The number of hours per baptism increased sharply across the years, from 3,405 in 1992 to 5,139 in 2008—an increase of 51% during that time. The number of Bible studies per baptism also increased considerably, by 79.6% between 1999 and 2008, as it became more difficult to persuade people to be baptized. That is, the return on effort expended on witnessing, measured in terms of baptisms, has decreased dramatically. The sharp decline in their growth-rate, as with the Mormons, is no doubt also associated with saturation, since Witnesses visit homes so regularly in the areas where their members are located; it is also associated with the increasing impact of secularization given their strong presence in parts of the Developed World. Other factors include the movement of women to the workforce and the growing use of gated communities and security controlled apartment buildings for housing, which have made it more difficult for Publishers to gain access to people.

The sharp slowing in the growth-rates of both Mormons and Witnesses in recent years indicates that they are no longer "on track" to reach the massive total memberships predicted earlier by Stark and Iannaccone. Indeed, in a article updating his earlier projections, where Stark showed that the official Mormon membership had exceeded his projection from 1981 through 2003, he failed to note that the margin had contracted sharply since 1995 (2005:145). It became

negative in 2005. That margin, which had stood at "almost a million" in 1995 (Stark 1996b:177), had been reversed by 2008, when the official membership was almost a million (926,813) short of his prediction. This slippage demonstrates the illegitimacy of attempting to project a growth-rate exponentially into the future.

THE VALIDITY OF COMPARISONS BASED ON OFFICIAL CHURCH DATA

As noted above, both the Stark and Stark/Iannaccone studies of the growth of Mormons and Witnesses and the present study comparing the growth of the three groups have used the groups' official membership data. This segment addresses two questions: the reliability of these data sets, and the validity of comparisons based on them. That is, to what extent are the criteria used in defining and counting members by the three groups similar, and to what extent are the collection and processing of data trustworthy?

The data used in this paper were extracted from the LDS *Church Almanac*, the SDA *Annual Statistical Report*, and the *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* for the appropriate years. The criteria governing who the three groups count in their official membership statistics differ in key ways. Adventist membership totals count all baptized members on the rolls. They thus omit children who are being raised as Adventists but have not yet been baptized. The age of baptism varies among such children, for it is supposed to represent an individual expression of belief and choice. In America the mean age of baptism for children is 11.9 years; in Europe, where there are few Adventist schools, it is towards the late teens (Gillespie et al 2004:212-3); it is my sense, from widespread interviews in the Developing World, that there the age typically ranges from the early- to mid-teens. In 2000 Sahlin calculated that unbaptized minor children who had been dedicated in church ceremonies as infants made up 19% of adherents in North America (2010).

Since Adventists baptize children later than Mormons but have smaller families, this figure seems in accord with their estimate.

Mormons also count baptized members, and the age of baptism of children raised in Mormon families is typically eight years of age. However, they also count "children of record"—that is, children younger than eight whose parents arranged to have them blessed and named in a church ceremony as infants. It was estimated in 1996 that these made up about 15% of the American members (Bennion and Young, 1996: 9). That is, Mormons count more people as members than they would if they followed the criteria used by Adventists.

Witnesses, on the other hand, count only those they call "Publishers"—that is, those engaged in regular witnessing to nonmembers. They thus exclude baptized members who are not witnessing regularly, and include both children and others who have entered the ranks of publishers shortly in advance of baptism (*Watchtower* 2010:25). The Witnesses' *Year Book* lists both "peak" and "average" Publishers. This study uses the former. Witnesses report their activity monthly, and some are active some months but not others. Once listed as active publishers, they are not considered "inactive" until they have not reported for six consecutive months. The "Peak Publishers" are "the highest number reporting for any one month during the service year." This is a larger figure than the "Average Publishers", which is the average number reporting each month that year (Chu 2008a). That is, the totals listed for the Witnesses are consistently smaller than they would be if they used the less stringent criteria employed by the other two groups: their "publishers" are expected to be much more heavily involved in church activities than are Mormon and Adventist "members", many of whom are more marginal, to the point where significant numbers rarely if ever attend services.

The analysis of census data that follows levels the playing field, allowing an exploration of the extent to which baptized Witnesses who are not active enough to be counted as publishers continue to identify as Witnesses, and also of the extent to which "members" counted in the official Mormon and Adventist totals in fact no longer identify as such.

Comparing Membership Rolls with Census Data

How reliable are the official membership data? Although Stark asserted that Mormon membership data were "extremely reliable" (1984:22), recent studies have questioned this as a result of comparing them with self-reported religious identity data found in some census reports: Knowlton (2005) and Phillips (2006) examined the Mexican, Chilean, and Brazilian censuses, and Stewart (2007, 2008) added those of Austria, Australia, and New Zealand. All showed a wide discrepancy between official and census data.

I set out to extend this kind of analysis to all three groups covered in this paper and to broaden the range of census data sets to all regions of the globe. This involved searching widely for censuses asking a question concerning religious identity, seeking those that have published religious affiliation data for all three groups.[2] I found 15 such recent census reports. I chose to add five other censuses that report data on only two of the groups to the analysis. Four of these are in Africa and the Caribbean, which would otherwise be under-represented with only one case apiece because Mormons, having entered the regions late, are too small there to be published

[2] Some countries do not ask religious identity in their censuses, and several that do publish the data in broad groups, lumping all Christians, Protestants, or Evangelicals together. Others publish denominational data separately only if they pass a certain size threshold. I presented these findings initially at the meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in 2007.

individually in the census reports; the other is the South Pacific island kingdom of Tonga, where Mormons have many members but Witnesses' data are not published.

I was broadly successful in reaching my objective: the 20 census reports represent both the Developed (5) and Developing (15) Worlds, and also all regions of the globe: North America (1), Eastern (2) and Western (2) Europe, Mexico/Central America (2), South America (1), the Caribbean (3), Asia (1), Africa (3), the Antipodes (2), and the South Pacific Islands (3). The data were drawn in each case from the official census reports as published on the Internet. In presenting the data, the census and official data are, in each case, compared for the year in which the census was taken.

Considering the different ways in which the three groups count members, how should we expect the membership rolls to align with census data on religious identity if the rolls were well maintained? Since Mormon rolls count unbaptized children as well as those who have been baptized, I would expect that their rolls would match the census totals rather closely. On the other hand, since Adventist rolls count only baptized members but a census also counts children below the age of baptism, I would expect the census count to exceed their membership rolls. Since Witnesses count only publishers and exclude others who are likely to identify as Witnesses, such as members not engaged in regular missionary work and children too young to be publishers, I would expect that their census numbers would exceed their Peak Publishers by an even greater margin than that among Adventists.

[Table 6 about here]

Table 6 lists the ratio between census identification totals for each of the three groups and their membership/peak publisher rolls for each country. A ratio of 1.00 indicates that the totals

by both measures are equal. A strong pattern emerges, for each of the three religious groups has a very different mean ratio.

The mean ratio for Witnesses in 19 countries is 2.15, indicating that more than twice as many people identify as Witnesses in the census data than are listed as Publishers. The difference, then, goes in the expected direction, but is much higher than interviews with staff of the Watchtower Society had led me to expect: the latter had suggested that members who cease being active publishers tend to become uncomfortable and to drop out because the meetings and activities of Witnesses focus so heavily on publishing (Chu 2008b). The mean ratio for the five countries of the Developed World (1.17) is much lower than that for the other 14 countries (2.50). Although this discrepancy can be partly accounted for by the larger number of unbaptized children in the Developing World, it also indicates that large numbers of people who identify as Witnesses there are not doing the publishing work that is expected of members. While the ratio is unexpectedly less than 1.00 in two European countries, suggesting that more people there are listed as active publishers in church records than are willing to identify as Witnesses when responding to a question from their census, it exceeds 2.00 in 8 countries, is greater than 3.00 in three others, and rises to 4.05 in the Seychelles and 5.91 in Papua-New Guinea.

The disparity in these statistics raises questions concerning who the non-publishers are. To what extent do they attend services, which are designed to prepare publishers for missionary work, without doing sufficient witnessing to be counted as a publisher? Alternately, to what extent are they only nominal Witnesses—non-attenders who retain sufficient Witness identity to express it when asked their religion? Beckford found a “peripheral group of lapsed and inactive publishers who make only occasional appearances at Kingdom Hall” in the UK (1975: 88). According to Singelenberg, “nominal membership has set in” in the Netherlands—“in some

congregations 50% of the membership consists of 'free-riders'" (2003). The statistics suggest that this pattern is stronger still in the Developing World. Penton explains that peripheral members swell attendance at the annual "memorial service": Witnesses invite everyone remotely connected to them to this celebration of the Lord's Supper, and many attend "to please family members or to indicate that they still have vague, if illusive, ties with the Witness Community" (forthcoming). In 2008 the total attendance was 17,790,631 (*Yearbook* 2009:31).

Among Adventists, the mean ratio among the 20 countries is 1.15. While this confirms that the number identifying with the group in the censuses is usually higher than the number of listed members, the ratio is often not quite as high as expected. Unlike Witnesses, the Adventist ratio is similar in the countries of the Developed World (1.10) and the other countries (1.17). However, given the larger numbers of not yet baptized children in the Developing World, the latter ratio indicates exaggerated rolls. This was indeed the case, for these censuses were all taken before its rolls were cleaned recently. The ratio falls below 1.00 in six countries, indicating that the inflation of the church rolls there is higher still. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that it stood at 0.76 the Philippines, where roll cleaning only a few years after the census was taken reduced the total listed membership by 42.8%.

Mormons have a very low mean ratio of 0.52 from 16 countries: that is, the mean number identifying as Mormons in the censuses is barely over half those on their church rolls, indicating that the latter are highly inflated. Papua-New Guinea, an outlier for all three religious groups, is the only country where the ratio exceeds 1.00. The ratio for the five countries of the Developed World is 0.64, while that for the other 11 is lower still—0.46; indeed, when Papua-New Guinea is removed, the ratio for the remaining 10 countries of Eastern Europe and the Developing World falls to 0.31. This pattern stands in sharp contrast to those of the two other groups, indicating

that Mormon membership data are grossly inflated, especially in the Developing World. Although their official data indicate that the majority of members is now outside North America, in fact the majority of those identifying as Mormons, and also the majority of active members, are still located there: surveys indicate that if religious identity were included in the American census, the ratio there would be higher, especially in Utah.

How Large are the Three Groups Really?

It has been demonstrated that the reliability and meaning of the official membership statistics published by the three groups vary markedly from one another. When the mean census:membership roll ratios discussed above are applied to the world membership figures published in 2008, this puts the total number identifying as Witnesses at 15.3 million, which is close to the Adventists' published membership. However, the number identifying as Adventists rises higher still—to18.3 million. On the other hand, the number identifying as Mormons are only 7 million, and thus just below the number of Peak Publishers currently listed by Witnesses. These calculations drastically re-order the aggregate membership of the three groups. Table 7 compares these estimates with the official membership/peak publisher totals for 2008.

[Table 7 about here]

The estimate of Adventist adherents is shy of the estimate of 22-23 million made recently by their Office of Archives and Statistics. Since 18 of the 20 censuses used were completed between 1996 and 2001, before Adventists threw themselves into their roll audit, their mean census:membership roll ratio as listed here is lower than it would be if the censuses were taken today. Because that ratio has been applied to post-cleaning 2008 listed aggregate membership, it produces an estimate that is lower than it should be. This problem would be corrected if new calculations were done using data from censuses due to be taken during the next two years.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the estimate today would reach 22-23 million if such data were already available: as seen above, the Adventist growth-rate has slowed.

DISCUSSION

Exploring the Reasons for the Differing Census:Membership Roll Ratios

Missionaries and strategies: Mormon missionaries volunteer for service for two years. Their primary strategy is calling door-to-door with the goal of persuading people to engage in a short uniform series of studies designed to lead to baptism. Mormons claim proudly that they have "the largest full-time missionary force in the world" (Bryant et al. forthcoming). The number of missionaries serving increased sharply during the 1990s, even as the flow of converts faltered. However, that number declined sharply between 2001 and 2005, from 60,580 to 52,060, partly in response to an earlier decline in the birthrate of Mormons in America, partly because of a tightening of requirements designed to ensure that missionaries practice church standards, and partly because the number volunteering to serve declined (Phillips 2009; Stewart 2008:346). Although members who are not part of the missionary force are also encouraged to engage in outreach, this occurs relatively rarely: reports indicate that only 3-5% of members in North America do so regularly (Stewart 2008:347). Mormons outside America continue to be heavily dependent on American personnel and funds.

The outreach of Witnesses also focuses primarily on door-to-door contacts. The number engaged in this dwarfs the Mormon missionary force: in 2009 Witnesses had 1,787 international missionaries, the main force entering new areas (Pellechia 2010); 732,912 Pioneers, who commit themselves to spend 70 hours per month witnessing; and an average monthly number of 6,829,455 Publishers. Collectively these witnessed for 1,488,658,249 hours during the year.

Many of the Pioneers are recent high school graduates doing short-term service, and thus akin to Mormon missionaries (Penton forthcoming). Both Pioneers and Publishers are usually active close to the location of their congregations.

As noted above, Adventists embraced foreign missions early, establishing a presence on every continent by 1901, typically in rural areas. Their strategies were very different from the door-to-door calls of Mormons and Witnesses, focusing instead on founding schools, hospitals, clinics and, more recently, branches of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. High schools and university colleges were added to the grade schools over time, though more slowly than in America. During the second-half of the twentieth century, national and regional leadership in the Developing World was localized and the staffing of institutions was also indigenized. Americans became only a small minority among newly commissioned missionaries (only 31% of the 134 sent out in 2008), as personnel serving outside their home regions were drawn from an increasing number of countries under the slogan "from everywhere to everywhere" (Thompson 1983:8-9). However, the total number of expatriots has tumbled, becoming mostly specialists and student and elderly volunteers on short-term assignments (New Interdivision Employees 2008, International Deployment of Personnel 2008). In 2008 Adventists listed 1,834 secondary schools, colleges and universities; 171 hospitals; 429 clinics and dispensaries; 162 orphanages and nursing homes; 61 publishing houses; 23 health food factories; and 11 media centers. These institutions employed 129,851 people, while "general employees", who included pastors, administrators, office staff, Bible instructors, literature evangelists, and primary school teachers totaled 75,232 (*Annual Statistical Report* 2008:4).

As the growth-rate swelled, it became impossible to educate all the youthful converts in the Developing World in church-run institutions. Evangelistic meetings, usually presented as a

series lasting two or three weeks, became the central outreach tool. Some such meetings are large, featuring professional speakers, and baptize as many as two or three thousand people; other recent series have been broadcast by satellite to arenas or churches throughout a region or even globally. More typically they are small meetings held in local churches where pastors or, more frequently, laypersons who are often women, speak. The prominence of laypersons in such roles flows from the fact that the typical Adventist pastor in the Developing World is responsible for perhaps 20 churches where worship and outreach are run by the laity, and the pastor acts as the overseer whose tasks during infrequent visits include doing the actual baptizing.

Retention: Stark commented that "although more than 90 percent of the population in most Latin American nations are claimed as Catholics, levels of practice are extremely low" (1998:43); however, he failed to recognize that this is also true of the majority of those listed as Mormon members, and that Mormon statistics are only "extremely reliable" (1984:22) in keeping record of all who have ever been baptized. The primary thrust of Mormon missions has been "achieving arbitrary monthly baptismal quotas" rather than "building the church with active members." Consequently, "only a fraction of international converts" are "participating members" (Bryant et al. forthcoming). Studies show that half of the new converts disappear within a year, the majority of these within the first two months, and they suggest that fewer than one quarter of them become active members, observant of Mormon behavioral standards, and integrated into the life of congregations. Researchers suggest several reasons for such low retention: too short a recruitment process, which does not ground converts sufficiently or allow time for them to become integrated into congregations or overcome addictions to alcohol, tobacco, or caffeine, all of which are unacceptable to Mormons; a uniform syllabus that is insensitive to cultural differences and needs; converts who fit poorly into congregations because they tend to be poor

while the core members are better off; the importance of close ties fostered by attractive youthful missionaries, who then move on, with the result that converts feel deserted; and the fact that the socialization of converts ("fellowshipping") is often neglected because it is left to church members who frequently, in the Developing World, feel overwhelmed by the flow of poor, needy converts whom they have come to expect will soon, in most cases, disappear (Gooren 2008; Knowlton 2005; Phillips 2008; Stewart 2008).

While the largest category of Mormon dropouts are poorer, less socialized and rooted recently baptized members, some are better established Mormons. These include a surprising number of families whose children are listed as "children of record" but whose children are not baptized as expected when they reach eight years of age; youth in areas where potential Mormon marriage partners are in short supply or who break Mormon rules by, for example, living in sexual relationships before marriage; gay and lesbian members; women irked by the structural discrimination they face within the church; and academics, such as historians and social scientists, whose studies have led them to grapple with problems of Mormon doctrine (Gooren 2007; Phillips 2009; Stewart 2008).

The major reason why Mormon rolls are exaggerated is what Mauss described as "an optimistic ecclesiastical policy, which holds that once a person is baptized as a member of the LDS Church, he or she remains as such forever—unless and until a formal break is effected…[, which is] rather uncommon" (2010). "In short, the church meticulously counts those who join, but does not attend to those who leave" (Phillips 2006:54). There is no process where membership is aligned with active participation or where the names of those who have dropped out and no longer consider themselves Mormons are removed. While such persons can ask to have their names removed, most fade away without attracting attention. Indeed, if a missing

member dies and the church is not told informed, that person remains on the roll until (s)he would have been 110 years old (Mauss 2010; Phillips 2006). Such situations must be especially common in the Developing World, where converts are poorly rooted and exit rapidly.

In spite of the huge numbers of people and hours involved in the outreach of Witnesses, their baptisms are very similar in number to the Mormon total. This is because the preparation of converts is far more intense and they must reach extraordinarily high standards before their baptism: they must be already engaged in publishing, be able to answer questions about beliefs that mimic those typically asked in Bible studies with potential converts, and be living a life in accord with the standards expected of Witnesses (Chu 2010).

Those interviewed at Watchtower headquarters argued that the high standards imposed before baptism make the newly baptized highly unlikely to pull back from publishing during their first year. This opinion is based on their impressions, for Witnesses have done no study to verify it. However, during the past decade the annual fall-off from those poised to become or continue as publishers ranged from 52.0% to 60.1% of the equivalent of the total number baptized during the previous year. The interviewee explained this in terms of publishers tiring of the task and losing commitment, and pointed especially to a high drop-out rate among youth. She thought it unlikely that many of the newly baptized would fall away so quickly given the careful preparation and their experience publishing preceding baptism (Chu 2010). However, the fact that the drop-out rate was highest when the baptisms peaked and lowest after a steep fall in their number suggests a higher dropout rate among the newly baptized.

Such an attrition rate can add up rapidly, as the discrepancy between publishers and those identifying as Witnesses in censuses indicates. However, there are also a substantial number who were baptized and were thus publishers for a while, but who no longer identify with the group.

Some of these are embittered, as web sites catering to ex-Witnesses illustrate. Bitterness may originate from the traumatic disfellowshipping process, which can occur if a member remains unrepentant after questioning a teaching or committing a serious sin. The process includes being shunned by all Witnesses, no matter how close they once were, an experience endured by tens of thousands of newly former members annually (Penton 1997: 329-332).

Witnesses who lose their ardor and exit the ranks of publishers are especially likely to be youth growing up in the church, the majority of whom exit (Penton forthcoming). They also include members who hide their loss of faith in order to avoid being shunned, or who feel overwhelmed by the time demands, which include meetings during the week and the actual time spent going door-to-door. As the baptism rate per hours worked has declined, this has no doubt increased the likelihood of feeling discouraged and ineffectual. Others who face problems include those who grew up in the church only to find themselves gay or lesbian, the more independent spirits within a rigid, hierarchical system, etc.

I chose to analyze Adventist exit data from 1998 through 2008 because of the increased number of names dropped after their audit of membership rolls gathered speed about 2003. I compared the total number added with those dropped plus net "adjustments," the category often used recently to list names that should have been dropped in earlier years. The number dropped between 1998 and 2002 was equal to 30.4% of the additions, and between 2003 and 2008 it rose to 46.1%; the proportion during the whole 11-year period was 39.4%. It seems, then, that the normal Adventist drop-out rate is the equivalent of about 35% of baptisms. While this is substantial, it is much lower than those of Mormons or Witnesses.

The drop-out rate among Adventist youth in the Developed World is 50%-60%, in spite of the fact that in America close to half have attended church-sponsored schools (Dudley 1989;

Sahlin 2009). Although studies have found that 75-90% of those baptized following large evangelistic campaigns in America are attending church services one to two years later (Sahlin 2009), retention from large campaigns elsewhere is often much lower. For example, at a meeting with all the Adventist pastors in Kinshasa, Congo, two and three years after 1,600 people had been baptized at the end of two such evangelistic campaigns, I asked them to count how many of those converts were still attending church services. They talked animatedly together, counting on their fingers, and then told me "about 50." The new members had not received adequate socialization in advance of baptism, and the influx was too great for members to provide sufficient nurture afterwards. In contrast, socialization is more thorough and nurture more likely to be a continuing process where campaigns are conducted by laypersons and the numbers baptized are more modest. Adventist eagerness to use women in evangelism also helps give them an edge, especially as these are then central to nurturing their converts. Others exiting are more diverse: women in the Developed World discouraged with their slow progress towards equality, gay and lesbian Adventists, some whose education has raised questions concerning Adventist beliefs, who have become discouraged concerning Adventist behavioral norms even as some of these have been relaxed, or developed significant ties to non-Adventists, especially where these have reduced the member's sense of the special religious status of Adventism.

The retention rates thus vary considerably from one religious group to another, and these impact real growth rates and group size as the above analysis of census data revealed. All three groups have a substantial flow-through membership phenomenon: for example, the realization that there are probably more former Adventists than currently attending members in America has caused heartburn. Nevertheless, the fact that the Adventist drop-out rate has been considerably

lower than that of both Mormons and Witnesses is an important component of their larger growth rate and of the fact that they have become the largest of the three groups.

CONCLUSION

All three religious groups have experienced rapid growth in recent decades, although growth-rates have slowed considerably in the last decade or so, especially for Mormons and Witnesses. Expansion has been greatest in the Developing World, especially since 1960, so that all three have globalized. This is especially true of Adventists, who have built on their early commitment to go into "all the world," their proven ability to attract the poor, and their higher retention rate to become the largest of the groups. Although, on the whole, all three continue to grow in the Developed World, where Christianity is generally in retreat, their growth there has flattened and continues largely through the addition and conversion of recent immigrants from Developing Countries, so that their faces there are changing.

When the reliability of their official membership data was tested against census data, considerable disparity was found between the three groups. Adventist data show evidence of exaggeration in some regions, but on the whole appear to be the most reliable; moreover, they have recently worked hard to improve reliability. Many people identify as Witnesses without being listed as active publishers, especially in the Developing World. This suggests that if common membership criteria are applied to Witnesses, their membership far exceeds the listed number of publishers. On the other hand, when these criteria are applied to Mormons, their membership data prove to be grossly exaggerated: their turnover rate is extremely high, especially among the poor in the Developing World, but this is ignored in their official statistics because they have no system in place to audit their rolls.

A formula was developed by comparing the census data from twenty countries with the official membership there. When this was applied to the official membership totals for each of the three groups it reordered their global size. Adventists remain the largest, but they are trailed fairly closely by Witnesses. Mormons emerge as much smaller, and with the majority of their adherents still in North America.

This study has shown that the factors impacting the growth of religious groups such as these are far too diverse and unpredictable to allow growth rates to be projected exponentially into the future, as was attempted by Stark and Stark/Iannaccone. It also shows that close attention must be paid to the reliability of internal membership statistics—to who are counted as members, and how accurately membership turnover is acknowledged. It also reveals that the growth rates of these groups in America have been heavily impacted, though relatively belatedly, by secularization, so that the claims by Stark and Warner that the growth of such groups has counterbalanced the decline of the Mainline denominations are not supported. To the extent that religion in America remains strong, so that it remains a special case in the Developed World, this is now largely the result of the faith and outreach of recent immigrants arriving from the Developing World.

REFERENCES

Annual Statistical Report. Various years. Silver Spring, MD: Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Beckford, James A. 1975. *The Trumpet of Prophecy.* New York: Wiley.

Bennion, Lowell C., and Lawrence A. Young. 1996. “The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950-2020.” *Dialogue*: 8-32.

Berger, Peter. 1969. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion.* Garden City, NY: Anchor.

Brauner, Megan. 2009. "Baptism not the End of the Road, Adventist Church Leader Says." *Adventist Review,* May 21:10-11

Bryant, Seth, Henri Gooren, Rick Phillips, David Stewart Jr. Forthcoming. "Conversion and Retention in Mormonism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion,* edited by Lewis R. Rambo, and Charles E. Farhadian. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chu, Jolene. 2008a. Email letter to author, July 4.

-----. 2008b. Email letter to author, July 9.

-----. 2010. Phone interview with the author, January 1.

Church Almanac: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Various years. Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News.

Conklin, Paul K., 1997. *American Originals: Homemade Varieties of Christianity.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Cragun, Ryan T., and Ronald Lawson. Forthcoming. "The Secular Transition: Worldwide Growth of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists." *Sociology of Religion.*

Dudley, Roger L. 1989. *A Ten-year Study of Youth Retention in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.* Berrien Springs, Michigan: Institute of Church Ministry.

Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Gillespie, V. Bailey, Michael J. Donohue, Barry Gane, and Ed Bryant. 2004. *Valuegenesis Ten Years Later: A Study of Two Generations.* Riverside, CA: Hancock Center.

Gooren, Henri. 2007a. "Conversion Careers in Latin America: Entering and Leaving Church among Pentecostals, Catholics, and Mormons." Pp. 52-71 in *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America*, edited by Timothy J. Steigenga and Edward L. Cleary. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

-----. 2007b. Review of *The Rise of Mormonism,* by Rodney Stark. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) *MSSA Newsletter,* 28(1):3-9.

-----. 2008. "The Mormons of the World: The Meaning of LDS Membership in Central America." Pp. 362-388 in *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's* <u>*The Mormon*, *edited by*</u> Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffmann, Tim B. Heaton. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Hatch, Nathan. 1989. *The Democratization of American Christianity.* New Haven: Yale University Press

Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1994. "Why Strict Churches are Strong." American Journal of Sociology, 99:1180-1211.

"International Deployment of Personnel." 2008. Unpublished table compiled by the Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Kellner, Mark A. 2009. "Church 'Dropouts': Is there Any Hope?" *Adventist Review,* June 18:16-19

Knowlton, David Clark. 2005. “How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Mexico and Chile.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38(2):53-78

Lawson, Ronald. 1998. "From American Church to Immigrant Church: The Changing Face of Seventh-day Adventism in Metropolitan New York." *Sociology of Religion,* 1998, 59:4, 329-351.

-----. 2005. “Comparing the Global Growth Rates and Distributions of Adventists, Mormons, and Witnesses.” A paper presented at the Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Rochester, NY, November.

Mauss, Armand. 2010. Email letter to the author, January 31.

“New Interdivision Employees Sent out from North America.” 2008. Unpublished table compiled by the Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Pellechia, James. 2010. Email letter to the author, January 13.

Penton, M. James. 1997. *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah’s Witnesses.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2nd ed.

_____. Forthcoming. “The Witness Community.” Chapter 10 in *Endzeit ohne Ende,* an updated and translated edition of *Apocalypse Delayed.* Hamburg: Bruderdienst Missionsverlag e.V.

Phillips, Rick. 2006. “Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism.” *Nova Religio,* 10:1, 52-68.

-----. 2008. "'De Facto Congregationalism' and Mormon Missionary Outreach: An Ethnographic Case Study." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, December.

-----. 2009. E-mail letter to the author, Feb. 15.

Sahlin, Monte. 2009. E-mail letter to the author, Dec. 31.

_____. 2010. E-mail letter to the author, Jan. 20.

Singelenberg, Richard. 2003. Review of Andrew Holden, *Jehovah's Witnesses: Portrait of a Contemporary Religious Movement,* in *Religion,* 33: 393-5.

Stark, Rodney. 1984. "The Rise of a New World Faith." *Review of Religious Research,* 26 (1), 18-27.

-----. 1994. "Modernization and Mormon Growth: The Secularization Thesis Revisited." Pp 13-23 in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives,* edited by Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton and Lawrence A. Young. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

-----. 1996a. "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A revised general model." *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 11 (2): 133-146.

-----. 1996b. "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections." *Review of Religious Research,* 38 (2), 175-178.

-----. 1998. "The Basis of Mormon Success: A Theoretical Application." Pp. 29-70 in *Latter-day Saint Social Life,* edited by James T. Duke. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University.

-----. 2005. *The Rise of Mormonism.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Stark, Rodney, and William Sims Bainbridge. 1985. *The Future of Religion.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Stark, Rodney, and L.R. Iannaccone. 1997. "Why Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application." *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 11 (2): 133-157.

Stewart, David G. 2007. *The Law of the Harvest: Practical Principles of Effective Missionary Work.* Henderson, Nevada: Cumorah Foundation.

-----. 2008. "Growth, Retention, and Internationalization." Pp. 328-361 in *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives, edited by* Cardwell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffman, and Tim B. Heaton. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Thompson, G. Ralph. 1983. "From Everywhere to Everywhere." *Adventist Review,* Oct.20:8-9.

Warner, R.Stephen. 1993. "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*, 98: 1044-1093.

Watchtower. 2010. "'Welcome to the Best Way of Life!': Why Get Baptized?" February 15: 25.

Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses. Various years. "Worldwide Report." Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

_____. 2000. "It will Turn Out…for a Witness," 23-30. Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

_____. 2008. "France," 16. Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

_____. 2010. "Albania," 195. Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

TABLE 1. COMPARING WORLD MEMBERSHIP GROWTH OF MORMONS, ADVENTISTS, AND WITNESSES OVER TIME, 1830-2008

	MORMONS		ADVENTISTS		WITNESSES	
Year	Membership	% Incr.	Membership	% Incr.	Publishers[3]	% Incr.
1830	280					
1840	16,865	5923.2				
1850	51,839	207.4				
1860	61,082	17.8				
1870	90,130	47.6	5,440[4]			
1880	133,628	48.3	15,570	186.2		
1890	188,263	40.9	29,711	90.8		
1900	283,765	50.7	75,767	155.0		
1910	398,478	40.4	104,526	38.0		
1920	525,987	32.0	185,450	77.4		
1930	670,017	27.4	314,253	69.5		
1940	862,664	28.8	504,752	60.6		
1950	1,111,314	28.8	756,812	49.9	373,430[5]	
1960	1,693,180	52.4	1,245,125	64.5	911,332	144.0
1970	2,930,810	73.1	2,051,864	64.8	1,483,430	61.8
1980	4,639,822	58.3	3,480,518	69.6	2,272,278	53.2
1990	7,761,207	67.3	6,694,880	92.4	4,017,213	76.8
2000	11,068,861	42.6	11,687,229	74.6	6,035,564	50.2
2008[6]	13,508,509	29.7	15,921,408	56.7	7,124,443	21.0

Sources: Extracted from LDS *Church Almanacs*, SDA *General Conference Annual Statistical Reports,* and JW *Yearbooks.*

[3] Witnesses list the peak number of active publishers, not total membership.
[4] Although Adventists trace their origins back to 1844, they did not organize formally until 1863
[5] Although they were formed in the 1870s, Jehovah's Witnesses, who were known as Bible Students until the early 1930s, did not list detailed statistical data until 1950.
[6] The increases given on this line are for the period 1998-2008.

TABLE 2. COMPARING TOTAL MEMBERSHIPS OF MORMONS, ADVENTISTS AND WITNESSES OVER TIME, 1870-2008

Year	Adventists / Mormons %	Witnesses / Adventists %	Witnesses / Mormons %
1870	6.0		
1880	11.7		
1890	15.8		
1900	26.7		
1910	26.2		
1920	35.3		
1930	46.9		
1940	58.5		
1950	68.1	49.3	33.6
1960	73.5	73.2	53.8
1970	70.0	72.3	50.6
1980	75.0	65.3	49.0
1990	86.3	60.0	51.8
2000	105.6	51.6	54.5
2008	117.9	44.7	52.7

Source: Calculations based on data extracted from LDS *Church Almanacs*, SDA *General Conference Annual Statistical Reports*, and JW *Yearbooks*.

TABLE 3: COMPARING THE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF MORMONS, ADVENTISTS, WITNESSES, 2006

	MEMBERS			DISTRIBUTION		
REGION	LDS%	SDA%	JW%	LDS%	SDA%	JW%
North America	5,954,699	1,108,503	1,179,840	46.3	6.7	17.5
Western Europe	406,087	134,967	1,003,708	3.2	0.9	14.9
Eastern Europe	17,970	116,481	244,421	0.2	0.8	3.6
Former USSR	29,883	138,581	350,232	0.2	0.9	5.2
Mexico, Central America	1,638,811	1,329,567	732,361	12.7	8.8	10.9
S. America less Guyanas	3,081,438	3,056,627	1,275,642	23.9	20.2	18.9
Caribbean plus Guyanas	151,296	1,092,680	206,070	1.2	7.2	3.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	255,050	5,121,819	1,049,143	2.0	33.9	15.6
Middle East	460	16,720	6,665	0	0.1	0.1
Southern Asia	7,562	1,283,034	32,732	0.1	8.5	0.5
East & SE Asia	885,522	1,409,476	500,231	6.9	9.4	7.4
Australia, New Zealand	214,319	63,923	76,074	1.7	0.4	1.1
Pacific Islands	212,715	333,266	12,512	1.7	2.2	0.2
"Other"[7]		0	0	13,184	0	0
0.2						
Total	12,868,606	15,115,006	6,741,444	100	100	100

[7] Where Witnesses experienced of feared persecution, they held their membership numbers in this category.

TABLE 4. COMPARING THE AVERAGE ANNUAL INCREASES PER QUINQUENNIUM IN THE WORLD MEMBERSHIP OF MORMONS, ADVENTISTS, AND WITNESSES, 1980-2008

Period	MORMONS	ADVENTISTS	WITNESSES
1980-1985	5.52%	7.10%	6.62%
1985-1990	6.22%	8.39%	6.57%
1990-1995	4.19%	6.34%	5.89%
1995-2000	3.71%	6.52%	3.21%
2000-2005	2.70%	4.64%	1.92%
2005-2008	2.51%	3.52%	2.57%

Source: Calculations based on data extracted from LDS *Church Almanacs*, SDA *General Conference Annual Statistical Reports*, and JW *Yearbooks*.

TABLE 5. COMPARING THE ANNUAL TOTAL NUMBER OF BAPTISMS OF MORMONS, ADVENTISTS, AND WITNESSES, 1989-2008

Year	Mormons[8]	Adventists	Witnesses
1989	318,940	577,105	263,855
1990	330,877	630,611	301,518
1991	297,770	601,190	300,945
1992	274,477	626,176	301,002
1993	304,808	654,055	296,004
1994	300,730	629,710	314,818
1995	304,330	659,899	338,914
1996	321,385	719,679	366,579
1997	317,798	744,798	375,923
1998	299,134	789,619	316,092
1999	306,171	1,068,329	323,439
2000	273,973	1,022,399	288,907
2001	292,612	931,355	263,431
2002	283,138	953,171	265,469
2003	242,923	966,541	258,845
2004	241,239	1,042,510	262,416
2005	243,108	1,032,330	247,631
2006	272,845	1,074,938	248,327
2007	279,218	1,040,642	298,304
2008	265,893	1,033,534	289,678

[8] Mormons list “Convert Baptisms”—of people not born into the church—rather than all baptisms.

TABLE 6. CENSUS: MEMBERSHIP ROLLS RATIO

COUNTRY, YEAR	MORMONS	ADVENTISTS	WITNESSES
Canada 2001	0.64	1.24	1.40
Australia 2006	0.46	1.05	1.29
New Zealand 2006	0.47	1.27	1.31
Austria 2001	0.97	1.18	1.14
Finland 2000	0.68	0.77	0.69
Estonia 2000	0.23	0.84	0.99
Lithuania 2001	0.31	0.60	1.38
Mexico 2000	0.23	0.93	1.98
Belize 2000	0.34	0.55	2.79
Brazil 2001	0.26	1.21	2.06
South Africa 1996	0.41	1.27	2.62
Philippines 2000	0.39	0.76	2.66
Netherlands Antilles 2001	0.22	1.10	1.36
Cook Islands 2001	0.46	1.52	1.65
Papua-New Guinea 2000	2.01	2.51	5.91
Mauritius 2000	NA	1.15	1.67
Seychelles 2002	NA	1.24	4.05
Jamaica 2001	NA	1.49	3.64
St. Lucia 2001	NA	1.23	2.23
Tonga 2001	0.23	1.14	NA
MEAN	0.52	1.15	2.15

Table 7: Comparison of Church Roll Global Membership with Estimate of total numbers identifying with Mormons, Adventists and Witnesses Based on Mean Roll:Census Ratios, 2008

	Rolls 2008	Census Estimate of Adherents 2008
Mormons	13,508,509	7,024,425
Adventists	15,921,408	18,309,619
Witnesses	7,124,443[9]	15,317,552

[9] Publishers