

**COMPARING THE GLOBAL GROWTH, GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION
AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF
MORMONS, ADVENTISTS AND WITNESSES***

Ronald Lawson, Queens College, CUNY

Contact information: Ronald Lawson, 115-25 Curzon Rd, Kew Gardens, NY 11418;

RonaldLawson@nyc.rr.com; (718) 441-7205 (home)

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ABSTRACT

Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses are all “American originals”, formed in America during the nineteenth century. The fact that all three have grown rapidly and expanded globally in spite of their centralized polities raises questions concerning the significance that other researchers, and Warner’s “new paradigm”, have attached to the decentralization and flexibility of Pentecostals in accounting for the growth of the latter. This study contrasts the growth, global distribution, and socioeconomic status of their members. It finds that the three groups have sharply differing profiles: Adventists are concentrated much more in the Developing World, especially in the poorer countries; Witnesses and Mormons are proportionately much stronger in the Developed World, albeit with contrasting patterns there, and while both have expanded into the Developing World, they are found mostly in the economically more robust countries there. Adventists are not only more heavily concentrated in poorer regions, but within individual countries their members are also typically poorer than Witnesses and especially Mormons. Having explored these contrasting profiles, this article sets out to account for their differences.

INTRODUCTION

Warner's "new paradigm" traces American religious vitality to religious innovation and competition fostered by the constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom in the new republic (Warner 1993). Conklin has shown how this gave rise to certain "American originals"—unique interpretations of Christianity, several of which have thrived in the American religious marketplace while "mainline" churches have declined (1997). The largest of these movements, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists (Adventists), Jehovah's Witnesses (Witnesses) and Pentecostals, have moved beyond the confines of their nation of origin, attracting a global membership. The striking success of Pentecostals has been attributed to their modular, atomized congregational polity. In contrast, the polities of the other three are highly centralized. Interest in why some religious groups have grown while others have declined led Stark and his colleagues to focus on Mormons and Witnesses, and to use their histories to build theories concerning growth (Stark, 1984, 1996, 2005; Stark and Iannaccone, 1997; Stark and Finke, 2000). Oddly, they neglected Adventism, which became the largest of the three during the 1990s and has since spurred ahead. Do these centralized sects have a model for success that differs from that of Pentecostals?

Mormons trace their roots to the 1820s, Adventists to the 1840s, and Witnesses to the 1870s. All three "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). Each views itself as God's special vehicle in the "last days" of Earth's history, called to deliver a special message to the world and to gather the saved around its banner. Consequently, each has felt called to evangelize globally, and has expanded geographically over time. However, their distributions, both regionally and in terms of

the socioeconomic status of their members, present contrasting profiles. This paper explores and explains the reasons for these differences, and weighs their significance.

While all three groups continue to grow slowly in the US, their expansion, like that of Christianity in general, is now concentrated in the Developing World. This pattern has repercussions for the “new paradigm.”

Rather than examining each of these religious groups singly, this study presents a comparative analysis. After comparing their aggregate growth over time, it contrasts their geographic distributions and member profiles, comparing changes over time. It then accounts for the different patterns found.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

It became evident after World War II that the established religious groups in Europe were declining as societies secularized. In the 1960s the US Mainline Denominations also began a long decline, and Berger, linking both phenomena, predicted general secularization (1969). However, some scholars rejected this, developing a theory of American exceptionalism. This asserted that American dynamics differed from those in Europe because its religious freedom had encouraged competition among religious groups, fostering growth. Kelley and then Stark and his colleagues, invoking “rational choice theory,” argued that growth had continued especially among strict sectarian groups, counterbalancing stagnation and decline among Mainline denominations (Kelley 1972; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Stark and Finke 2000).

Stark and Iannaccone focused on Mormons and Witnesses as examples of such growth. In 1984, Stark declared that the growth and expansion of Mormons was so substantial that it amounted to the rise of a “new world religion.” Noting that their global growth rate had exceeded 50% for each of the three previous decades, he projected that rate exponentially into

the future, predicting that Mormon membership, listed as 4.6 million in 1980, could reach 265.2 million by 2080 (22). In 1997, Stark and Iannaccone used Witness data to test Stark's "Revised General Model" explaining the success or failure of religious movements (Stark 1996). Arguing that Witnesses combined all the attributes necessary for success and that a growth rate of 4% per annum would prove "conservative", they predicted that their global active membership, which stood at 4 million in 1990, would reach 194 million by 2090 (Stark and Iannaccone, 1997:154).

While the study of Mormons has flourished recently, both Witnesses and Adventists remain neglected. This is especially surprising concerning Adventists, whose growth has exceeded the others. Moreover, little attention has been paid to these groups collectively, and to comparing and contrasting them, in spite of the similarities of their origins and global spread.

Meanwhile, other researchers observed that growth in America is occurring especially among Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Noting that these have become de facto congregational organizationally in spite of the existence of denominational structures, they argued that decentralization is the new recipe for growth. Miller's study of two Pentecostal denominations showed how flexible responses to local needs contribute to growth (Miller 1997).

Warner brought these various insights together in what he dubbed the "New Paradigm," in contradistinction to Berger's "Old Paradigm" featuring secularization and decline (Warner 1993). He noted that one result of disestablishment and religious competition in the US was structural flexibility, whose impact was seen first in the emergence and growth of a variety of denominations, and then, later, in de facto congregationalism.

Meanwhile, Jenkins noted that Christianity was growing rapidly in the Developing World while it stagnated or declined in the Developed World (2002). He labeled this process the "Southernization of Christianity." It was clear that insight into how religious groups cross socio-

cultural boundaries was essential to understanding growth. Studies of Latin America had found that decentralized structures have eased the spread of Pentecostal groups (Martin 1990; Stoll 1993). In his later overview of global Pentecostalism, Martin further developed his portrait of a diverse, ambiguous and flexible movement, which “keys in to local cultures but is sufficiently adaptable to forge links with very different social formations” (2002:169-171). Miller and Yamamori noted that many Pentecostal congregations are independent though “networked” together: denominational structures hinder growth (2007:19-20).

That is, scholars have argued that the recent global expansion of "strict" Christianity has been possible because of the rising power of decentralized religious groups and networks, where the individual congregation is key. They point especially to Pentecostalism, which is now largely decentralized and fragmented into congregational "cells" that can easily cross international and cultural boundaries and adapt to local environments. These flourish because their structural flexibility and syncretism allow them to be nimble and adaptable.

However, Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses have also demonstrated remarkable growth in the Developing World, even though they have retained the centralized denominational model. Does this mean that decentralization and flexibility are less important to global growth than has been argued? Do these three groups represent an alternative model of how religious organizations can flourish in disparate environments?

Meanwhile, the predictions by Stark and Iannaccone that Mormons and Witnesses would continue to experience exponential growth have proved incorrect, for their growth rates have slumped sharply in recent years. Those studies used only aggregate data, but more local data are the key to understanding the growth patterns. These enable us to explore the dynamics of these groups in greater depth.

In seeking to account for the differences in the profiles of these three groups, this article attempts to utilize the theories mentioned above. These groups provide an excellent test of the theoretical issues: all are centralized sectarian groups born in America during the nineteenth century that have become important participants in the globalization of Christianity.

DIFFERENCES IN THE MEMBERSHIP DATA PUBLISHED BY EACH GROUP

The hierarchical structures of all three groups collect statistics carefully. These are the only available source of the data needed for this study: aggregate membership data, and national data necessary to compare where members are concentrated and how regional growth-rates have changed over time. These data 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 groups count differ in key ways. Adventist membership totals count all baptized members. They thus omit children who are being raised as Adventists but have not yet been baptized. The age of baptism of children varies widely, reflecting individual decisions. In America the mean age 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 the age there typically ranges from the early- to mid-teens. It is also Adventist policy to purge their rolls of members who no longer claim to be Adventists or cannot be located.

Mormon criteria are much looser. Like Adventists, they count baptized members, and children raised as Mormons are baptized at eight years of age. However, they also count "children of record"—younger children blessed as infants in a church ceremony. It was estimated in 1996 that these made up about 15% of the American members [Bennion and Young, 1996:9]. Moreover, Mormons make no attempt to remove missing and inactive members from their rolls:

indeed, if they are not informed of their deaths, their names remain on the roll until they would have been 110 years old. Consequently, many “members” have long lost contact with the church, their whereabouts are unknown, and some are undoubtedly deceased [Knowlton, 2005a, Mauss 2010]. However, the children who reach the age of nine without being baptized are removed.

Witnesses use a stringent criterion, counting only “publishers”—those reporting regular witnessing to nonmembers. They exclude baptized members who are not witnessing regularly, but include both children and converts entering the ranks of publishers shortly before baptism—a practice that is encouraged (Watchtower 2010a: 25; Chu 2008a). Their Yearbook lists both “peak” and “average” publishers. This paper uses the former. Witnesses report their activity monthly, and some are active some months but not others. The “peak publishers” are “the highest number reporting for any one month during the service year.” This figure is somewhat larger than “average publishers”—the average number reporting each month that year (Chu 2008b). Consequently, the totals listed for Witnesses are much smaller than they would be if they employed the criteria used by the other groups: their “publishers” are expected to be much more heavily involved in church activities than are Mormon and Adventist members.

DATA

Total Growth over Time

Table 1 shows that their earlier beginnings gave Mormons a head-start over Adventists, and Adventists, in turn, over Witnesses. All experienced strong growth over time. However, Adventists consistently reduced the Mormon lead, and broadened their advantage vis-à-vis Witnesses after 1960. Their membership finally surpassed that of Mormons in the late 1990s and then spurted ahead. At the end of 2008, Adventists listed 15.9 million members, Mormons 13.5 million, while Witnesses’ Peak Publishers stood at 7.1 million.

(Table 1 about here)

Contrary to the predictions of Stark (1984) and Stark and Iannaccone (1997) that both Mormons and Witnesses would experience exponential growth during the following century, Mormons have experienced a sharp slowing of their growth-rate since 1990, and Witnesses an even more precipitous decline in theirs since 1995. Adventists showed a shallower slowing of their growth after 1990 that climaxed in the early years of the 21st century. However, Lawson has shown that these statistics exaggerate the decline in their growth-rate because it is largely a result of a careful cleaning of their membership rolls since 2000: their baptisms actually rose sharply after 1998, while those of both Mormons and Witnesses plunged (2007).

The Distribution of Members by Geographic Region

This segment compares the regional distributions and growth-rates of the groups, noting changes between 1960 and 2006. The geographic distribution of Adventists in 1960 reflected the fact that they had focused early on the whole world: they had established missions on every continent by 1901, and then set out to enter every country. By 2006 only 6.7% of their members were located in North America: they had concentrated increasingly in the Developing World.

Witnesses also attempted to build a global presence. They were active in seven countries in 1885, 14 in 1918, 32 in 1928, and 96 by 1948 (Yearbook 1979:32). They grew somewhat faster than Adventists in North America before 1960, and were much more successful in Europe than either other group. They hid their numbers in the USSR and Eastern Europe in an “other” category until the collapse of the Soviet regime in an attempt to minimize oppression; they then revealed that they had built a strong presence there. Their growth in the former USSR continued after both Adventists and Mormons lost steam there. They operate as an underground church in China, hiding their numbers; however, the small size of the “other” category since 1990 indicates

weakness there. Their growth in Europe stalled in the 1990s, with small aggregate declines in some countries. In 2006, 17.5% of publishers were located in North America.

Mormons were still heavily concentrated in North America in 1960, a pattern resulting from their earlier policy of encouraging converts from abroad to uproot and “gather in Zion” (Utah). Although their President had written in 1911 that “it is desirable that our people shall remain in their native lands and form congregations of a permanent character to aid the work of proselytizing” (Stewart 2008:329), international expansion did not become a key goal until the 1950s (Prince and Wright 2005:358). They were established in England, and had reached out to Latin America and Polynesia, but their numbers were still low everywhere except in America. Between 1960 and 1980 they expanded strongly in Latin America, and made progress in Western Europe, Japan, and the Philippines. However, teachings which had prevented them from ordaining men of African descent to the lay priesthood, in essence denying them full membership and rendering it impossible to create viable congregations among such populations, had sorely limited their attention to Africa or the Caribbean, and they listed no members in Eastern Europe, the former USSR, Southern Asia, or the Arab States. This pattern changed dramatically once they switched their position on men of African descent in the 1978 and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union: they entered 59 new nations during the 1990s and had established a beach-head in each region by 2000. Nevertheless, although the proportion of their membership in North America now fell below 50%, Mormons were still concentrated in the Western Hemisphere, which contained 82.8% of their membership in 2006.

(Table 2 about here)

Table 2 contrasts the regional distributions of the groups and changes in these between 1960 and 2006. In 1960 Mormons were especially strong in North America, Witnesses in

Europe, and Adventists in many parts of the Developing World. The concentration of Mormons and Witnesses in North America and Europe weakened over time as their growth-rates there faltered and they grew elsewhere. Adventists concentrated further in the Developing World. By 2006 they stood out especially in Africa, the Caribbean, India, and the South Pacific islands. All three groups increased in strength over time in the two Latin regions and, to a lesser extent, in East and Southeast Asia. Their strength varied considerably within these regions, however. In Latin America, Mormons were strongest in Mexico, Chile, and Argentina, while Adventists were far ahead in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic; Witnesses were also strong in Brazil, Mexico, and Columbia, but were much weaker than the others in Peru, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. In Asia, Witnesses developed a strong presence in Japan after World War II, while Adventists showed substantial growth in the Philippines and South Korea; Mormons also grew well, but to a lesser extent, in all three countries. Adventists proved to have a special advantage in China. When Christianity was legalized there following the end of the Cultural Revolution, Protestants were forced to amalgamate in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Adventists, who had long had a presence there but had been forced to function as an underground church since 1950, became part of this organization; however, because they insisted on using church buildings for services on Saturdays while everyone else worshipped jointly on Sundays, they were able to retain a separate identity. Their members were very active and successful in outreach. However, their growth-rate contracted sharply after 1995 as the Chinese economy expanded rapidly (Lawson 1990, 2000b). In 2006 their membership was 352,916.

Economic Variables and Growth Patterns

This segment focuses on the correlation between economic variables and the distribution of the members of the three groups. Table 3 examines their presence in the Developed World in

2006. This is identified with the high-income members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as listed in the UN's Human Development Report for 2005: America and Canada, Japan and South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and the countries of Western Europe. Witnesses have a strong presence in Europe, while Adventists are the smallest of the three there. The same is true of Japan. Mormons are now the largest group in America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; Adventists are again the smallest. The only one of these countries where Adventists are not the smallest is South Korea, the most recent arrival in the Developed World, where Adventists are the largest of the three. The contrast between the groups is striking: 52.7% of Mormons and 38.1% of Witnesses were located in the Developed World, but only 9.6% of Adventists.

(Table 3 about here)

Table 4 compares the distribution of members of the three groups between 1960 and 2006 among countries divided into three categories according to Gross National Income per capita data presented in the UN's Human Development Report in 2005 (United Nations 2005). "High income" countries have a GNI per capita of \$9,386 or higher and overlap considerably with those just examined as part of the "developed world", "low income" countries earn \$765 or less per capita, while "middle income" countries fall between those amounts. The proportion of members in the highest category declined over time for all groups as globalization fostered growth in less developed countries; however, their distributions varied considerably. Mormons and Witnesses grew mostly in middle income countries, where Adventists were already well established by 1960. The major Adventist growth was in the poorest countries, where its concentration far exceeded that of the other two groups, neither of which expanded the proportion of its members there much during the 46-year period. These data show that as the

membership of all three groups globalized, they became less concentrated in countries with a high gross national income per capita; however, the reach of Adventists into the poorest countries far exceeds that of the other groups.

(Table 4 about here)

To what extent do the differing distributions of Mormons, Adventists, and Witnesses among countries falling in different GNI per capita categories also suggest the income of their members within those countries? Here available census data that bear on this question are revealing. The detailed data available from the 2000 Mexican census present striking patterns.ⁱ Table 5 divides those who identified with the three groups in the census into three categories based on their income: those receiving the minimum wage or less, those receiving between one and three times the minimum wage, and those receiving three times the minimum wage or more. Mormons are highly concentrated (80.8%) in the top two categories, while half of the Adventists are found in the lowest category; Witnesses fall between these extremes. Moreover, Mormons are concentrated in Mexico City and the northern states, and Witnesses also though less strongly so; Adventists are concentrated in the rural southern states. While 97.4% of Mormons and 94.4% of Witnesses are literate, this is so for only 84.2% of Adventists. While 18.4% of Adventists speak indigenous languages, only 5.2% of Witnesses and 2.9% of Mormons do so. Table 6 shows that Adventists, on the whole, had received much less education than Mormons, with Witnesses again falling between these two groups: 60.5% of Adventists received primary education or less, while 50.9% of Mormons have post-secondary education (Knowlton 2005a).

(Tables 5 and 6 about here)

The differences between Mormons, Adventists and Witnesses found in the Mexican census strongly parallel the patterns found internationally in the varying distributions of per

capita Gross National Income. Adventists, for example, are not only a much greater presence in countries with a low per capita GNI than are the other groups, but Mexicans with low incomes are much more likely to identify with them. To what extent is this a consistent pattern, found also in other countries? Although I have not found a similar range of data in other censuses, data from two other very diverse countries support such a conclusion. The Papua-New Guinea census divides religious adherents between urban and rural. The huge number of Adventists there (520,623 in 2000 compared with 20,723 Witnesses and 20,586 Mormons) is a good example of the concentration of Adventists in poor countries in the Developing World. The population is heavily rural, but the Adventist membership there is more rural than either Mormons or Witnesses (Papua-New Guinea Census 2000). In Canada, where 18.4% of the population is foreign-born, their proportion among Adventists is more than twice that, while Witnesses are at the national level and Mormons fall well below it. The contrast between the three groups is stronger still when the focus is shifted to members who arrived from abroad during the previous decade, for Witnesses then also fall below the national level, while Adventists and Mormons maintain their contrasting ratios (see Table 7) (Canada Census 2001).

(Table 7 about here)

Census data counting the number of people identifying with these religious groups vary greatly from the official membership/publisher statistics for both Mormons and Witnesses. In Mexico in 2000, Mormons listed their membership as 918,975 but the census showed only 205,229, 22% of that number. This discrepancy indicates that many people who were baptized as Mormons and are still listed as members no longer consider themselves affiliated (Knowlton 2005a; Phillips 2008; Gooren 2009). In the case of Witnesses, the discrepancy was in the opposite direction: while they listed 533,365 publishers there that year, the number identifying as

Witnesses in the census was 1,058,736, almost twice (198.5%) that number. That is, many who identified as Witnesses were not active in witnessing. The discrepancy between the two statistics was much smaller for Adventists: while they listed 524,207 members in 2000, the number of people indentifying with them in the census was 488,945, 93% of this. A comparison of the census totals in 19 other countries with the official memberships there found that similar patterns reappeared consistently (Lawson 2007).

DISCUSSION

Factors Shaping the Contrasting Growth Rates and Geographic and SES Distributions

Tension/strictness: According to rational choice theory, central factors distinguishing growing from declining religious groups in America are tension with society and strict behavioral expectations of members—ideally a “medium tension” reflected in a strictness that is “not too strict” (Stark 2005:121). All three groups show the key indicators of tension: they are exclusive, believing they are God’s special church for the “latter days;” their cultures encourage ties within and social distance without; their separation from society has been strengthened by distinctive behavioral rules and histories of tensions with governments, other churches, and the broader society. These factors created a level of tension and strictness that has fostered growth, since it has encouraged the commitment of resources to their programs (Stark and Bainbridge 1985, Stark 1996, Stark and Iannaccone 1997). Tension between both Adventists and Mormons and most societies has decreased over time (Gottlieb and Wiley 1986, Lawson 1995), in spite of efforts by church administrators to reverse the process of compromise with the world (Pierson 1978, Mauss 1994). However, in terms of the theory, both retain sufficient levels of strictness, tension and zeal to continue to foster growth: for Mauss these are “optimum” levels (1994). Witnesses, on the other hand, have behaved more like an “established sect” (Yinger 1946,

Lawson 1995), showing much less compromise with society. However, in their case external, rather than internal, changes have reduced tension: court victories in some countries have created a more comfortable environment, while the growth of Islam and the emergence of radical religious cults with non-Christian roots have made them seem less peculiar and dangerous in many countries. Since variations in tension/strictness among the groups are insufficient to explain the differences in their growth and distribution, other explanations are needed.

Doctrines have shaped Decisions: The international spread of Mormons was shaped by their beliefs. They initially encouraged all foreign converts to move to Utah, and were thus slow to build Mormon communities abroad that could have acted as lay missionaries and welcomed new converts (O'Dea 1957). They entered Mexico in the 1870s because of tensions between their Utah settlements and the US government: they needed a location where they could continue polygamy (2005b). They took a special interest in the peoples of Latin America and Polynesia, because they are given attention in the *Book of Mormon*. Meanwhile, their teaching prohibiting the ordination of men of African descent delayed their penetration of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean until it was abandoned in 1978. Their embrace of US foreign policy shaped the timing of their penetration of other regions: their strong anti-Communism kept Communist societies closed to them during the Cold War; however, they entered Russia and Eastern Europe as these opened to Americans after the collapse of the USSR in 1988, as they had entered Japan on America's coattails after World War II (Knowlton 2005). The continuing concentration of Mormons in the Western Hemisphere is a consequence of such factors.

The theologies of both Adventists and Witnesses also helped shape their outreach, for the belief of each that it is their special duty to go into "all the world" to evangelize propelled their global spread. They are consequently distributed far more broadly than Mormons.

Government relations can impact growth: All three groups have faced problems with authorities and responded differently to them. These have in turn helped shape their growth. Mormons, having endured persecution in America during their early decades, became cautious, and have often chosen not to enter countries where they might again face persecution, especially as they identified increasingly closely with both America and capitalism. Consequently, they made no serious attempt to enter Communist countries until after the fall of the Soviet Union, and they are still not active in China or Cuba (Young 1994).

Adventists were established in these countries in advance of Communism. Although their theology led them to expect persecution, they have in fact faced little. Instead, they learned to pander to authoritarian governments and to establish exchange relationships with them. This allowed them to function under most Communist regimes, even if their right to evangelize was restricted for a time.ⁱⁱ Earlier, they had avoided Nazi persecution, even though they had feared that their observance of the Sabbath could result in their being confused with Jews, by celebrating Hitler as “almost an Adventist” because of his abstemious lifestyle and by agreeing that members would serve in the German army as regular soldiers and work in munitions factories on the Sabbath, both significant compromises of their teachings (Sapiets 1990, Sicher 1977, King 1982). Later, they and their educational and medical institutions flourished under military dictatorships in Latin America and South Korea (Lawson 1996a).

In contrast, Witnesses often faced severe problems from governments. Since they did not sponsor institutions, authoritarian regimes did not regard them as useful (Lawson 1998b). Moreover, their refusal to participate in military forces or to honor national symbols caused tensions to erupt on many occasions with both democratic and authoritarian states, while their missionary activities sometimes caused widespread irritation. Their refusals to compromise

resulted in the imprisonment of their leaders in the US during World War I, in their being declared illegal in many countries at various times, and in the death of many members in Nazi concentration camps and the imprisonment of many more in the US, Canada, Britain, Australia and Greece during World War II (*Awake!* 1946:3). Similar problems occurred under the military regimes in Spain and Portugal and behind the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, Witnesses doggedly continued their missionary work underground. Their persecution and the imprisonment of their local leaders no doubt slowed their growth at the time, but it also earned them admiration, which fostered rapid growth after these regimes were replaced (Penton 1990, 1997, Lawson 1995). The average number of publishers expanded rapidly from 47,143 in 1938 to 230,532 in 1948 and 717,088 in 1958; much of this growth occurred in Europe (*Yearbook* 1979:32). However, their missionary methods created such irritation in France in recent years that they were labeled a “dangerous cult” and punishing taxes were imposed on monies given them (*Yearbook* 2000: 24). These events attracted considerable negative publicity in Western Europe.

Outreach methods affect success: Adventist missions were usually established in rural areas because their prophet, Ellen White, had given them an anti-urban bias and also because governments often assigned them to more remote areas because they had arrived later than the mainline missions. They typically founded schools, hospitals and clinics; high schools, colleges and publishing houses were added over time. Since colonial governments usually sought to harvest resources rather than plow them back into local economies, Adventist institutions were often important locally, resulting in numerical growth (Lawson 1998b). However, in Europe they were disadvantaged by difficulties gaining accreditation for their colleges and hospitals and competing with established institutions, and their growth there was slowed. In 2008 they listed 1,834 secondary schools, colleges, and universities; 171 hospitals; 429 clinics; 162 orphanages

and nursing homes; 61 publishing houses; 23 health-food factories; and 11 media centers. These employed 129,851 people (Annual Statistical Report 2008:4).

However, their recent rapid growth among the poor in the Developing World has made it impossible for Adventists to continue to educate most of their converts, diminishing the role of their educational program as an evangelistic tool. Meanwhile, the emergence of successful government-sponsored medical institutions has made Adventist hospitals and clinics less prominent and economically viable. Consequently, ADRA International, the Adventist-sponsored development and relief agency, which is largely funded through grants from various governments, has replaced its hospitals as its main “entering wedge.” Adventism's evangelistic quiver has become more diverse, including a widespread use of radio and television programs, “friendship evangelism”, and “reaping campaigns.” The latter usually last three or four weeks and range from large meetings in public spaces featuring widely advertized speakers to global and regional series featuring the best-known Adventist preachers broadcast via satellite, with simultaneous translation as necessary, in local arenas and churches, to thousands of local meetings featuring pastors and laypersons as speakers. All these rely on members to invite contacts and to nurture those attending. Large meetings tend to be more successful where little public entertainment is available: for example, a satellite-linked campaign drew huge crowds to a sports field in Port Moresby, Papua-New Guinea, before television became available there.

In contrast, Witnesses focus on door-to-door witnessing. In 2009, 732,912 Pioneers, who are committed to spend 70 hours per month witnessing, an average of 6,829,455 Publishers per month, and 1,787 international missionaries spent a total of 1,488,658,249 hours witnessing (Yearbook 2010). Their visits might irritate many people, but their persistence allows them to find those open to their message. However, the success of their door-to-door strategy can be

hindered by changes in access: for example, it is more difficult to gain access to apartments in large buildings than to private houses. Dependence on volunteered time means that most of their outreach occurs in the urban areas where members are concentrated.

Mormons rely primarily on college-aged missionaries, who volunteer for two-year terms. There were 53,164 serving in 2006, down from 60,550 in 2001 (Church Almanac 2008:6). Like Witnesses, these make house calls, but rather than being local members, they are visitors, usually from abroad. Mormons have few parallels to the Adventist schools, clinics, hospitals, or development agency, and although they have used TV advertisements, they have not developed radio networks or TV programs. The logistics of their reliance on missionaries has helped shape the geography of their growth: “outside of the Americas, the contemporary LDS church is almost exclusively a large-city church” (Stewart 2008:343). Even though much of Africa and Asia remains rural, Mormons have paid little attention to how to reach such areas.

Saturation. Growth spurts often occur while a group is small in a region. Since such growth occurs on a small base, the growth-rate can be very large while the numerical growth is relatively modest. Good examples of this occurred among Mormons in some parts of Africa and the Caribbean after the restrictions on the ordination of Blacks to the priesthood were lifted. All three groups experienced rapid growth in the former Soviet Union following the fall of the Iron Curtain. These examples can be seen as the activation of pent-up demand following the entry of a new competitor to an area. Such spurts can accumulate, creating concentrations of members.

However, growth usually slows once those easily attracted have been harvested. Such saturation occurred in the former Soviet Union for both Adventists and Mormons. The continued growth of Witnesses there may reflect their greater strength throughout Europe and admiration of their courage when facing persecution. However, Voas questions the quality of that growth, for

Witnesses are so short of local leaders there that they have been unable to subdivide growing congregations as usual (2008). Similarly, in the Eastern Highlands of Papua-New Guinea, where people earlier poured into Adventism, that growth has now tapered off: “almost everyone there has already heard the Adventist message” (Kemp 2009). Meanwhile, Adventism continues to grow in the remote Western Highlands, where there are still unentered areas.

Gooren notes that countries in Central America where Mormons experienced rapid growth in the 1980s and 1990s have not been the locus of more recent growth. This has shifted especially to Nicaragua, where they were banned by the Sandinistas, creating pent-up demand (2009). Voas found that Witness’ growth stagnates in countries or regions where it is already strong (2008). Cragun and Lawson confirm that there is a substantial negative relationship between the proportion of Witnesses in a population and their growth-rate (forthcoming).

Saturation creates a disparity between where a group’s membership is concentrated and the locus of its current growth. This effect has been more marked among Witnesses and Mormons than Adventists. The urban focus of Mormons and the tendency of Witnesses to concentrate effort where members already exist narrowed their range so that saturation occurred earlier. The Adventist growth trajectory was shaped by their arrival in most of the Developing World during colonial times, and thus before the modernizing phase that followed independence and fostered faster growth. Their early growth there was consequently more gradual, but their later growth was rapid even though the growth-rate was lowered because it was built on a larger base (Cragun and Lawson, forthcoming). Their persistent advances into new religious markets have helped them maintain rapid aggregate growth.

Decentralization. It was noted above that researchers have suggested that the flexibility allowed by their decentralized organization has fostered Pentecostal growth. However, the three

groups discussed here have experienced notable growth with highly centralized structures. How does their experience speak, then, to the relationship between decentralization and growth?

To what extent have these groups decentralized and increased flexibility as they have globalized and their members have diversified? Mormonism has not decentralized at all, indeed Phillips described it as “ultracentralized”: “It has a centralized missionary system, it has centralized floor plans for meetinghouses, it has centralized rules for what kinds of music and instrumentation can be used on the dais, it has centralized rules for how gender roles function in the congregation. Everything that matters is dictated from Salt Lake City... (It exhibits a) high degree of uniformity across political and cultural boundaries” (Phillips, 2009). Mormons introduced a standardized, one-size-fits-all, missionary program in 1959. Stewart argues that a new program, introduced in 2004, which again gives detailed outlines of each of the studies that must be presented when preparing potential converts for baptism, remains highly standardized and inflexible. Moreover, the continuing reliance of most foreign Mormon congregations on US resources, missionaries, and leaders reduces their flexibility. He argues that inflexibility is a source of their problem with convert retention (2008:329, 355-56).

The Witnesses’ Governing Body in Brooklyn also continues to exercise very broad control. As the group has grown it has established branches at the national level, where the leadership is more likely to be indigenous. Decisions concerning certain local matters, such as relief efforts, are left to the branch. However, although input can be sought from local leaders, Watchtower leadership continues to make the major decisions impacting local groups (Chu, 2009; Yearbook 2006:17, 19). Like the Mormons, Witnesses have a detailed syllabus, one-size fits all, updated in 2005, which all potential converts must cover in Bible studies before baptism (Watchtower 2007: 25, 26). In short, the system remains highly centralized with little flexibility.

The balance within the Adventist system is more complex. Its structure is less centralized, at least in theory: it is described as “representative”, since power is funneled upwards from the members, churches, and local conferences to the General Conference, and leaders of the latter body are elected at business sessions attended by delegates from all geographical segments of the global church every five years (Church Manual, 2005:38). However, top-down power is considerable: the system is hierarchical and bureaucratic, with three administrative layers between congregations and the General Conference, and higher level administrators have considerable power over the careers of lower level leaders. Traditionally the majority of delegates to General Conference sessions were church employees; although this balance was changed recently, it has made little practical impact so far. A nominating committee dominated by third-level administrators continues to suggest only one name for each position, and its choices are almost always rubber-stamped by delegates. Moreover, the General Conference reallocates tithe income according to its view of local needs. The Church Manual declares that the General Conference in session, and its Executive Committee between sessions, is “the highest authority...among Seventh-day Adventists” (2005:27).

The replacement of expatriate with indigenous leaders within countries, which occurred rather suddenly following the end of colonization, and the rapid growth of Adventism in the Developing World which followed, created fears that the structure would rupture. However, the gradual promotion of leaders from all regions to General Conference positions secured their loyalty and strengthened the corporate culture. Meanwhile, the new rules providing that laity, including quotas of women and younger members, form a majority of delegates at business sessions, have also been implemented at all structural levels. This attempt to bolster the loyalty of members to the global structure is related to an increasing independence in how the latter

channel their giving. The impact of these changes depends on the sophistication of those delegates, which often correlates with both their education and how much they have to give. Meanwhile, the realization that cultural differences require different policies has led to an increased decentralization of decisions that have local impact (Watts 2010). That is, Adventism is becoming more flexible: while it remains hierarchical and ponderous because of its determination to maintain organizational unity, the size and dynamics of its bureaucratic structure, and the extent to which administrators continue to control elections, congregations increasingly follow their own programs and members are being heard more clearly. Unlike Mormons and Witnesses, Adventists have considerable flexibility concerning the material used in preparing converts for baptism: nothing is prescribed other than the goal that converts be prepared to assent to core Adventist doctrines at the time of baptism.

Since growth is greatly impacted by the human resources available for outreach, and women form a majority of the active members of all three groups, the openness of each group to women's input and activity is a good measure of their flexibility. The vast majority of Mormon missionaries are males, and there is no room for women in the Mormon hierarchy or in leading congregations. Similarly, the Witnesses' Governing Body is exclusively male, and women cannot lead congregations. Although the majority of Publishers are women and many single women trained earlier to be missionaries, recent changes in rules restrict these to married couples (Chu 2009). In contrast, Adventists have gradually made more room for women. They have permitted women to be elders of congregations since the 1970s, and in many congregations, especially in the Developed World, the First Elder is now a woman; the number of women serving as pastors, including senior or solo pastors, has increased steadily and this has spread recently to the Developing World; many women serve on committees, as delegates to business

sessions, and some have been elected as officers (vice-presidents, treasurers, secretaries) and department heads at all administrative levels (Lawson 2000c). Nevertheless, their numbers are still sparse compared with the numerical dominance of women in the pews, and women remain ineligible for the position of president at any level of the church's structure. Adventism has not yet learned the obvious lesson from its experience in China, where it had assumed it had lost most of its members after its missionaries were expelled and its institutions closed, but discovered when communications improved that there was a flourishing, largely congregational, church there where the vast majority of clergy, who had been trained at the Protestant seminaries during the decades of isolation, were women (Paulson 2009; Lawson 2000b).

While all three groups have experienced considerable global growth, this is small when compared to that of the decentralized Pentecostals: the latter add more members every year than the total Adventist membership, and they have grown faster than the three groups discussed here combined (Jenkins, 2002a). The evidence, then, suggests that all three of these groups grow in spite of, rather than because of, their more centralized structures. An excellent example is found in the experience of Adventists in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, where Adventism has added close to one million members during the past decade. Almost all of these converts are Dalits (Untouchables). During this time, Adventists have been approached frequently by representatives of the high Brahmin caste there, begging that they work also with them. Adventists were eager to do this, but they insisted that the Brahmins follow the Adventist expectation that converts become part of existing congregations and constituencies, for they embrace the equality of all members and allow no separation based on class or caste. Since mixing with members of the low caste was not acceptable to the Brahmins, no headway was possible among them (Watts 2009).

Pentecostal flexibility would have created totally separate organizations and congregations catering to the needs of the different cultural groups.

Nevertheless, although Adventists exhibit little decentralization and flexibility when compared with Pentecostals, the fact that they exceed both Witnesses and Mormons in this respect has probably contributed to their more widespread and sustained growth.

Socioeconomic Variables and Growth Patterns

The differing evangelistic methods discussed above in turn impact who the groups convert and retain. Mormon missionaries have often focused primarily on the urban poor because these are more responsive. However, retention of such converts is low. These are often baptized because they have developed ties to the missionaries, who then break those ties as their attention shifts to other potential converts, they are moved elsewhere, or return home. The tone of Mormon congregations also makes the better-off comfortable, while the poor are likely to feel ill-at-ease there. Moreover, although the members are supposed to nurture all new converts, those outside America often feel overwhelmed because their numbers are relatively small but the flow of new members is high. Consequently, they learn to focus on the middle class converts, who are more like themselves and who, they learn quickly, are more likely to stay (Knowlton 2005a, 2005b; Gooren 2009). In Africa, Mormon leaders are encouraging missionaries to focus on the English- and French-speaking in urban centers—that is, on the better educated, the potential priests (Bennion and Young 1996: 25). After speaking to foreign bishops about their congregations, Mauss concluded that “the Mormon message appeals more to upwardly-aspiring urban types than to peasants.” “Upwardly mobile converts and potential converts find an ‘elective affinity’ with the Mormon message, which obliterates the line between the spiritual and the material and stresses ‘progress’ both in this world and the next” (Mauss 2005a, 2005b).

More surprising is the fact that Witnesses are, in general, better off than Adventists. Since Witnesses discourage higher education, while Adventists sponsor a large education system extending to the tertiary level, one might expect that Adventists would experience greater upward mobility than Witnesses. What are the sources of the pattern that was found?

The report of the Mexican national census for 2000 shows that the Adventist membership there is, overall, poorer than any other listed religious group, including Pentecostals (Knowlton 2005a). The pattern found is related to the fact that Witnesses are more heavily concentrated in Mexico City and the economically developed north, while Adventists are found especially in the much poorer rural south. The Witness' insistence that publishers have presentable clothes for missionary work is a problem for the poor. Their expectation that publishers attend every meeting is also costly to poor people reliant on public transport, and can create a huge obstacle to those working night shifts (Chu 2008c; Watchtower 2002:21, 2010b:23). In contrast, although Adventists talk about wearing their "Sabbath best" to services, they are under less pressure: I have occasionally seen rural members arrive at services unshod.

In his study of British Witnesses, Beckford described them, there at least, as a middle-class movement whose members have lower incomes because of the amount of time devoted to witnessing and church meetings (1975). However, Holden, in a recent study of British Witnesses, concluded that door-to-door witnessing allows them to find people who have been left behind and marginalized by modern post-capitalist society, and are fearful of its trajectory (2002). Penton wrote that in the Western World and Japan Witnesses "attract persons who long for 'old-time virtues'." He describes the social status of Witnesses as covering a broad range, but disproportionately small at both extremes. However, in the US they are poorer, with relatively more black members. In the Developing World, where they have promoted literacy, some

converts have intellectual aspirations (Penton forthcoming). In Western Europe and the US their converts increasingly include many immigrants from developing nations, who are marginalized almost by definition. These factors help account for the mixed, middle position of Witnesses.

There are dramatic examples of Adventist schools providing members with opportunities for upward mobility. This occurred broadly in America, where the Adventist colleges and medical school gained accreditation early and Adventist students were readily admitted: indeed, Adventists applying to medical school have been advantaged as favored applicants to Loma Linda University. These institutions opened a route to the professions for Adventists, many of whom initially trained for work in mission hospitals and schools. However, because accreditation was attained more slowly in other countries of the Developed World, Adventists there had to wait for public universities to become accessible and to overcome problems concerning examinations and classes on their Sabbath. In Australia, for example, a wave of Adventists entered universities after 1959 through a new government scholarship program. They were successful in arranging to take exams scheduled for Saturdays in the evening after the end of the Sabbath until the universities stopped scheduling exams on Saturdays.ⁱⁱⁱ

The impact of the founding of Adventist schools was sometimes more dramatic in countries of the Developing World. For example, when Adventists planted schools in the Peruvian highlands around Lake Titicaca, they brought literacy to the poor tenant-farmer class. This resulted in rapid growth, a political movement demanding a redistribution of the land and, eventually, in Adventists becoming the political leaders of the region (Lewellen 1979).

Adventists flourished in Jamaica, where they established a full range of educational institutions and grew to be second in size to the Anglican Church. Consequently, in recent decades there have been as many as four Adventist cabinet ministers serving concurrently, and in 2009 the

president of the Adventist Church in Jamaica was chosen as Governor-General, the titular head-of-state (Lawson 1986; Kellner 2009).

In some countries, Adventist teaching has fortuitously promoted upward mobility. For example, in the Highlands of Papua-New Guinea I was told frequently, with enthusiasm, that “God blesses Adventists—they get rich!” I found that the key to this had been the Adventist prohibition of keeping pigs, eating pork, and drinking alcohol. Before the Australian colonial government penetrated the Highlands, wealth was counted in pigs; however, these could not be accumulated because of the obligation of those with them to throw parties for their extended kin. Adventist missionaries banned participation in such parties because pork and alcohol were consumed there. This policy had the unintended consequence of encouraging individualism just as the monetary economy was being introduced. Some Adventists did in fact get rich. They also built a high school with dormitories in the region which, as one of only five high schools in the entire country for many years, prepared students for leadership positions. Consequently, when I researched there in 1999, Adventists occupied a disproportionate number of positions in Cabinet, Parliament, the Supreme Court, the civil service, and even the post of Governor-General.

The fact that Adventists observe the Sabbath on Saturday, a day when they prohibit secular work, is a severe hindrance to their upward mobility in some countries. The scheduling of classes and exams on that day has frequently caused severe problems in Eastern Europe and the former French colonies of Africa, while their entry to particular careers, such as the civil service in India, is impeded where Saturday remains a regular work-day.

The vast majority of Adventist converts, especially in the Developing World, are poor. The Adventist reputation for providing educational opportunities continues to foster hope of upward mobility, even though their schools there are now incapable of accommodating more

than a small fraction of the surging number of youthful converts. The Mexican education data shown in Table 6 above illustrate a common pattern. Although, on the whole, Adventists there have received less education than Witnesses, the proportion of their members with advanced education is higher. This is mainly the result of their three universities there, including one with medical and dental programs. However, they lag far behind Mormons in this category, and the vast majority of Adventists there remain poorly educated.

Adventism appeals to those who yearn for better things both now and in God's soon-coming Kingdom. It is thus especially suited to people with aspirations in poor societies. When economies stagnate, as they do frequently in the poorest countries, the lives of Adventists may nevertheless improve marginally. Members frequently stated in interviews that they are doing better than their neighbors, even where they have been unable to gain access to Adventist educational institutions (Lawson 1998b). This is partly because Adventism continues to encourage its members to seek whatever education is available without transgressing the Sabbath commandment, and partly because the strict Adventist lifestyle and the expectation that members tithe their income has produced an Adventist version of Max Weber's Protestant Ethic, where income is managed more carefully and therefore goes further. Many also use church networks to migrate to countries with stronger economies. For example, many Jamaican Adventists have migrated to England, Canada, and the US, achieving a level of upward mobility impossible in their homeland (Lawson 2000a). Meanwhile, they continue to hope that Jesus will return soon to reward them handsomely. However, when economies bloom, the Adventist growth-rate tends to plummet: for example, their surging growth in China during the 1980s and early 1990s has slowed sharply since the late 1990s (Lawson 2000b).

Another factor that has fostered Adventist growth in the poorest countries is that they, through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, offer widespread social services to people in need, and often do much to better lives through their development programs which provide permanent water supplies, teach income-producing skills, etc. In contrast, Mormon and Witness social programs are much more limited, congregationally based, and internally focused.

It is not surprising, then, that Adventists have experienced considerable success in poorer countries—they appeal especially to people who have little. While their converts, and especially second-generation members, do often experience upward mobility, this phenomenon is masked statistically by the fact that they continue to attract large numbers of poor converts in the Developing World and by the continued influx of poor immigrants to their ranks in the Developed World (Lawson 1998a, 1998b, 2000a). In contrast, Witnesses, who also spread abroad early, brought only their strict and complex theology, and so have tended to appeal to a limited group of people who are typically literate and seriously minded. Their income may actually decline after their conversion because of the time commitment expected of publishers.

Growth Patterns in the Developed World. Meanwhile, all three groups have been proving increasingly less successful in the Developed World. Both Bruce (2002) and Cragun and Lawson (forthcoming) see this as an inevitable result of modernization and secularization. The latter, using individual countries as the unit of analysis, found a curvilinear relationship between the growth of these groups and modernization/secularization: growth tends to be slow in pre-modern societies, strong where modernization is proceeding, as in post-colonial societies in the Developing World, and it tapers off sharply once societies become modern and secular. Consequently, the record of these groups there has ranged recently between slow growth and

declining membership. Both Mormons and Witnesses have been strongly impacted by secularization because their membership is more highly concentrated in the Developed World.

To the extent that these groups are continuing to grow there, it is often among recent immigrants from the Developing World. Bennion and Young noted that immigrants had proved receptive to the Mormon message in North America, Europe, and Oceania since 1970, and that 60% of their converts in Europe between 1985 and 1995 were immigrants (1996:27). Immigrants have proved to be an especially important source of Adventist growth because of the strong bases they have established in the former colonies from which most immigrants to the Developed World come and the evangelistic zeal that Adventist newcomers have focused on their fellow immigrants (Lawson 1998a, 2000a). A good example of this is the extent to which immigrants have fueled Adventist growth in Canada (see Table 7).

Conclusion

All three groups have all experienced rapid growth in recent decades, although this has slowed recently, especially for Mormons and Witnesses. As all have globalized, their expansion has been greatest in the Developing World. This is especially true of Adventists and least true of Mormons, who are still largely concentrated in the Western Hemisphere. According to membership data, Adventists became the largest of the groups in the latter 1990s.

The regional distributions of the three groups vary considerably. Adventists are heavily concentrated in the Developing World, and have become strongest in the least developed countries. Both Mormons and Witnesses were more successful in the Developed World, although in different parts of it.

Not only do Adventists have a greater presence in poorer countries, but their average member is also much poorer. At the opposite extreme, the active membership of Mormons is of

much higher socioeconomic status because they retain few of their poor converts. Witnesses persistently hold the middle position among the groups. These differences undoubtedly impact the flow of tithes from members, and thus the relative resources of the groups.

The growth of all three groups has flattened in the Developed World, and continues largely because of immigrants. The decline of growth in such countries has extended also to America, where Stark and his colleagues had put these groups forward as prime cases in their argument against the secularization thesis. That is, the secularization of modernized societies is affecting these groups also, even amid America's free religious competition.

Although data show that Adventists, Witnesses and Mormons have spread more slowly and are now much smaller than charismatic groups espousing "de facto congregationalism," each has found a niche and therefore success in its own way: Mormons rely on contributions to support their largely imported missionary labor, so they are consequently more money-intensive and hold converts who are relatively better off; Witnesses rely on members for outreach, and are thus, like Mormons, an urban phenomenon but much more time- than money-intensive; Adventists provide institutions that fill the gaps in services that the governments of developing countries cannot provide, and are found especially among the rural and the poor. They rely primarily on evangelistic meetings to harvest converts, rather than the door-to-door calls that the other two groups are known for. All three groups have made significant contributions to the "Southernization" of Christianity as they have expanded into the Developing World.

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ⁱ I am grateful to David Knowlton for sharing these data with me and later his paper based on them (2005a). The data were drawn from www.inegi.gob.mx (June 6, 2004, June 30, 2006).

ⁱⁱ The major exception was China, where Adventist institutions and administrative buildings were expropriated and all foreign missionaries expelled after the Communist victory in 1949, forcing Adventism to try to function as an underground church.

ⁱⁱⁱ The author was one of these students.