

Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses:

Three "American Originals" and How They've Grown | BY RONALD LAWSON AND

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Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses have all felt called to take their teachings to the world, and have all experienced significant growth. But they have varied considerably in their geographic spread and where they have been most numerically successful. The result is sharply differing profiles: Adventists are concentrated in the developing world, while Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are stronger in the developed world, but in different parts of it. Within countries, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons are more urban; Adventists are more rural. Adventists also tend to be poorer than Jehovah's Witnesses and especially practicing Mormons. Exploring why these differing patterns developed, we employ our theory that religious growth depends (at least in part) on the synchronization of supply and demand and their corresponding components.

Recent theorizing in the history and sociology of religion in America points to the Constitutional separation of church and state in the United States as a source of religious innovation and competition among religious groups. Extant groups that developed as a result of this innovation have been dubbed "American originals." The three we focus on here—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Adventists), and Jehovah's Witnesses—are among the few that have spread beyond US borders and become truly international. All three continue to slowly grow in the United States, but their expansion is

now concentrated in the developing world. While all three have globalized, their geographic profiles vary considerably.

Our Approach

We ask two questions: Why has their geographic spread varied so much? and, why has their growth diverged regionally and nationally? To provide answers, we will use an approach we developed, arguing that both supply and demand factors contribute to religious growth and decline. The histories of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses illustrate the importance of both kinds of factors.

In recent decades, Christianity has grown rapidly in the developing world while stagnating or declining in the developed world. Although Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses have maintained growth in the developed world longer than most of the mainline denominations, their experience generally reflects the same patterns.

Growth is the result of a combination of supply and demand. People are usually susceptible to joining a religious movement only if makes overtures to them (supply). Significant growth occurs, however, only if demand for spiritual understanding and connection is also present, and if the outreach strategies connect successfully with that demand. Thus, alignment of supply and demand is necessary for a religious group to grow in any location.

Supply and demand do not, however, simply exist; numerous factors influence them. Supply, for instance, is variable: one group may have

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greater supply than others, shaped by multiple factors that we will discuss. Demand for religion is also shaped by various factors that can increase or limit the demand, which we will also discuss. Demand may be high for one group, but simultaneously much lower for others in the same region. Synchronicity means that both supply and demand are present, resulting in rapid growth. If supply is not present when demand is high, or if demand is sparse when there is ample supply, or if the outreach strategies do not connect with the

demand, growth is unlikely. If neither supply nor demand exists, the result is secularization.

Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses provide excellent illustrations of our theory of supply and demand: all are significant participants in the globalization of Christianity, although their regional presence and growth patterns vary markedly.

We obtained membership data for the past decade from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Church Almanac*,¹ the Seventh-day Adventist *Annual Statistical Report*,² and the Jehovah's Witnesses' *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*.³ We obtained earlier data from the library of Brigham Young University; from the website of the Adventist Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research; and from earlier Jehovah's Witnesses' *Yearbooks*.

The membership data differ in noteworthy ways. Adventists count all baptized members, omitting unbaptized children. The age at which they baptize their children varies from a mean of 11.9 years old in America to the later teenage years in Europe. Adventists purge their rolls of members who no longer claim to be Adventist or cannot be located. Mormons count baptized members and also "children of record"—younger children blessed as infants in a church ceremony, who may make up as much as 15% of the religion's US membership. The age of baptism is set firmly at eight, and the names of children who reach the age of nine without being baptized are removed. But there is no attempt to remove missing or inactive members from their rolls; consequently, the whereabouts of many listed as members are unknown. Of the three groups, Jehovah's Witnesses use the most stringent criterion for membership, counting only

Table 1. Comparing world membership growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses over time, 1830–2009

Year	Mormons		Adventists		Jehovah's Witnesses	
	Membership	Increase (%)	Membership	Increase (%)	Publishers ^a	Increase (%)
1830	280					
1840	16,865	5,923.2				
1850	51,839	207.4				
1860	61,082	17.8				
1870	90,130	47.6	5,440 ^b			
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	3,868 ^c	
1930	670,017	27.4	314,253	69.5	23,988	520.2
1940	862,664	28.8	504,752	60.6	96,418	301.9
1950	1,111,314	28.8	756,812	49.9	373,430	287.3
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
2009 ^d	13,824,854	28.6	16,307,880	49.1	7,313,173	23.7

Sources: Extracted from the Church of Jesus of Latter-day Saints' *Church Almanac*, 1972–2012 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book), Seventh-day Adventists' *General Conference Annual Statistical Report*, 1899–2012 (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists), and Jehovah's Witnesses' *Yearbook of the Jehovah's Witnesses*, 1927–2013 (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society).

- a. Jehovah's Witnesses list the peak number of active publishers, not total membership.
- b. Although Adventists trace their origins back to 1844, they did not organize formally until 1863.
- c. The Bible Students/Jehovah's Witnesses were formed in the 1870s, but did not list detailed data until 1940. We searched their other publications and were able to find earlier statistics published there.
- d. The increases given on this line are for the period 1999–2009.

Table 2. Comparing the regional distribution of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1960, 1990, and 2009

Region	Mormons			Jehovah's Witnesses			Adventists		
	1960	1990	2009	1960	1990	2009	1960	1990	2009
Europe	51,535	334,528	501,703	196,779	1,003,284	1,593,511	144,366	244,683	386,925
North America	1,454,645	4,395,702	6,261,847	271,262	946,770	1,242,283	332,364	760,148	1,119,567
Central America	20,487	865,849	1,928,064	26,664	354,518	807,503	13,577	541,516	1,582,595
South America	14,797	1,358,256	3,378,257	35,817	558,509	1,353,690	147,180	1,375,837	2,406,574
Caribbean	0	36,464	139,387	20,253	102,696	153,122	47,322	385,448	1,045,448
Asia	3,767	435,991	977,278	38,648	333,775	606,010	121,551	979,685	3,155,835
Middle East	0	363	1,134	666	2,825	4,884	458	275	1,493
East Africa	0	2,850	51,422	55,455	153,042	384,918	59,299	1,215,705	4,051,398
Middle Africa	0	2,400	30,155	7,387	83,745	262,516	16,689	173,923	1,002,278
North Africa	0	0	0	504	589	1,676	817	3,850	7,519
West Africa	0	25,633	170,799	39,639	183,634	429,166	2,720	262,603	722,236
Southern Africa	2,901	19,365	55,158	17,447	50,036	90,736	17,338	51,673	149,560
Oceania	28,408	251,442	432,582	16,789	68,503	86,773	40,678	239,893	421,078
“Other” ^a	0	0	0	123,283	196,509	19,004	0	0	0

a. Where Jehovah’s Witnesses experience or fear persecution, they hide their membership numbers in an “Other” category. In 1960 and 1990, this was especially true of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite states, and also of its relatively few members in China.

“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. The issues of the *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses* list both “peak” and “average” numbers of publishers; we use the latter because they are more representative. Tables 1–5 are based on the official statistics for each group.

Table 1 shows that earlier beginnings gave Mormons a head start over Adventists, and Adventists in turn over Jehovah’s Witnesses. All three groups report strong growth over time, but in general the number of Adventists has grown the fastest, their official membership surpassing the Mormons in the late 1990s.

Contrary to expectations that Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses would experience exponential growth well into the twenty-first century, Mormons experienced a slowing of growth after

1990, and Jehovah’s Witnesses an even sharper decline after 1995. Adventists showed a smaller decline in growth after 1990.

Factors of Supply

Differences among the geographic profiles of the groups are primarily a result of supply factors—that is, in outreach. Six factors influence the supply of religion:

1. The level of urgency regarding outreach
2. The number and training of missionaries, and the hours spent in outreach
3. The group’s theology
4. The group’s attitude toward other religions
5. Government regulations
6. The impact of wars and revolutions

We illustrate the variations in the regional distributions of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses from 1960 to 2009 in Table 2. The geographic concentrations of the three groups

For most of their history, all three groups focused their outreach efforts on Christian regions.

Table 3. Skewed distributions: countries with more than 200,000 members or 150,000 publishers, 2009

Number	Adventists		Jehovah's Witnesses		Mormons	
	Country	Membership	Country	Publishers ^a	Country	Membership
1	India	1,468,642	U.S.	1,096,502	U.S.	6,058,907
2	Brazil	1,065,485	Brazil	689,577	Mexico	1,197,573
3	U.S.	1,043,606	Mexico	668,876	Brazil	1,102,428
4	Philippines	674,816	Nigeria	291,179	Philippines	631,885
5	Zambia	659,336	Italy	240,262	Chile	561,904
6	Kenya	657,447	Japan	217,530	Peru	480,816
7	Mexico	647,484	Germany	162,890	Argentina	380,669
8	Zimbabwe	616,875	Philippines	162,647	Guatemala	220,896
9	Congo	504,708	Russia	154,387		
10	Rwanda	468,384				
11	Tanzania	452,199				
12	Peru	425,080				
13	China	382,039				
14	Angola	369,317				
15	Ghana	357,260				
16	Haiti	338,223				
17	Malawi	327,131				
18	Colombia	278,933				
19	Nigeria	276,936				
20	Dominican Republic	265,905				
21	Papua New Guinea	249,348				
22	Jamaica	247,448				
23	Mozambique	247,338				
24	Honduras	229,574				
25	Venezuela	217,538				
26	S. Korea	215,227				
27	Guatemala	214,976				
28	Indonesia	207,284				
29	Uganda	205,875				

Sources: Data from the Seventh-day Adventist *146th Annual Statistical Report—2008* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists), 8–38; Jehovah's Witnesses' *2009 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2009), 32–9; and the Church of Latter-day Saints' *2010 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2010), 182–7.

a. Jehovah's Witnesses list average and peak number of active publishers, not total membership. The average number of publishers is used here. The cutoff for these was lowered to 150,000 because the rules concerning who is counted as a publisher are more demanding.

differed considerably by 1960, and these patterns changed further during the subsequent decades. Mormons became especially strong in North America; Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe; and Adventists in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. All, but especially Mormons, grew rapidly in Latin America. These concentrations, however, have been shifting: the growth rates of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses declined in North America and Europe, but increased in some developing countries; Adventists fell farther behind in much of the developed world, while bounding farther ahead in many parts of the developing world.

Table 3 further illustrates the extent to which the membership of the three groups is more or less concentrated in particular regions and countries. It lists the countries in which each group had more than 200,000 members in 2009 (150,000 for Jehovah's Witnesses, given their more stringent criterion for publishers). The Mormon membership is skewed, with only eight such countries, which collectively contain 76.9% of the total membership; the United States alone contains 43.8%. Adventists present a sharp contrast, with twenty-nine countries having more than 200,000 members and together containing 81.6% of the total membership; India, the country with the largest membership, has only 9.0% of the total. Jehovah's Witnesses fall between the other two groups: the country with the largest number of publishers, the United States, contains 15.8% of the total; six countries have more than 200,000 publishers, and eleven, with 56.4% of the total, have more than 150,000.

1. Urgency

All three groups see outreach as an urgent responsibility because they believe we are living in the “latter” or “last” days of earth’s history, and have been entrusted with God’s final message to humanity.

Mormons began their outreach in the United States and Canada in 1830, and soon established foreign missions, entering Britain in 1837 and then extending their program to northwestern Europe. By 1853 they were also active in Australia, New Zealand, Chile, China, India, South Africa, French Polynesia, and southern Europe. But in the 1850s, an abrupt change of policy encouraged all converts to immigrate to Utah. This “gathering” prevented Mormons from building a strong base in other countries. In Canada, for example, where 2,500 had joined by 1845, only seventy-four listed themselves as Mormons in the 1861 census. This policy slowed Mormons’ outreach to foreign countries from 1870 to 1950, as they focused primarily on establishing Zion in America’s Great Basin. As world wars and economic upheavals distracted church leaders and severely limited the availability of missionaries, Mormon supply was cut severely.

Adventists were slow to launch outreach efforts. Tracing their origins to the Great Disappointment of 1844, when Christ did not return as William Miller had predicted, they continued to see the Advent as imminent, and since they regarded only Millerites as eligible for salvation, further outreach was pointless. Eventually, they were persuaded that the door to salvation had not closed, and in 1874 they sent to Switzerland their first foreign missionary. During the next quarter-century, they expanded throughout Europe.

Once Adventists embraced missions, they expanded rapidly. They entered Australia and South Africa in 1885, and founded schools and health-care facilities. These locations became hubs from which they moved into the South Pacific islands and central Africa. Missions were also established in the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. By 1900, Adventists had established beachheads on every continent,

and 20% of their membership was outside North America. Expansion prompted Adventists to reshape their denominational structure in 1903, creating regional headquarters that could make decisions more efficiently. These launched missions in rapid succession, as they sought to blanket the world, and by 1921 more than 50% of Adventists were outside North America. Over time, they extended into poorer countries, where numerical growth remained relatively slow because demand in premodern societies was modest. But the services provided by their medical and educational institutions brought credibility and positioned them for rapid growth in subsequent decades, when religious demand increased during modernization.

Charles Taze Russell, founder of what became the International Bible Students Association and later the Jehovah’s Witnesses, urged his followers to share their beliefs, and he prepared publications for this purpose. Since participation in outreach was not mandatory, he recruited full- and part-time colporteurs, who bore the brunt of the publishers’ efforts from 1881 until the mid-1930s. This approach, however, proved relatively ineffective at building the organization abroad, for colporteurs were responsible for large tracts of territory, and having offered the publications, tended to move on rather than following up with the people’s interest.

Joseph Franklin (“Judge”) Rutherford, who succeeded Russell, introduced the expectation that all members engage in door-to-door witnessing. Congregations began to adopt this outreach as their central purpose in 1922, and the program got into full swing about 1933–1935, after Rutherford renamed the group Jehovah’s Witnesses and further emphasized door-to-door publishing and reporting the numbers of hours worked. In 1935, publishers and pioneers witnessed in 113 countries, but in half of these there were fewer than ten active members. During World War II and the following years, Jehovah’s Witnesses became better organized; in 1943, they revamped their outreach efforts to improve geographic expansion, opening the Gilead

Mormons have their highest concentration in the most prosperous countries.

Adventist converts [in the nineteenth century] were typically people who had autonomy over their work schedules.

School, a program to train missionaries for foreign service at the Watchtower Educational Center in Patterson, New York. Thus, they were preparing for truly global outreach.

2. Workforce

To staff their missionary endeavors, Mormons originally relied on married men, later replaced by younger men who volunteered for two years of service. But young men were in short supply during the wars and Great Depression of the first half of the twentieth century. During the 1960s, the number of full-time missionaries tripled as a result of a massive new proselytizing program. The number of missionaries continued to increase steeply, reaching a peak of 60,550 in 2001, but declining by 20% in the next eight years.

In 2009, Adventists employed 81,977 people in full-time pastoral and evangelistic roles, not including laypersons active in outreach. But it was their educational and medical institutions that set Adventists apart, with 134,814 employees.

In 1943, Jehovah's Witnesses reported 129,070 publishers in 54 countries; by 1992, these numbers soared to 4,472,787 in 229 countries. In 2009, publishers, "pioneers," and full-time international missionaries invested a total of 1,488,658,249 hours in witnessing. This workforce was thus several times larger than either the number of full-time Mormon missionaries or the salaried Adventists engaged in evangelistic activities.

3. Theology

A group's theology may determine which countries or peoples are targeted or excluded, and the impact on Mormons' outreach was notable. Early on, it motivated them to proselytize Native Americans, regarded as descendants of people described in the Book of Mormon; and it also caused them to neglect people of African descent, regarded as ineligible for the priesthood. Since priests must lead congregations, there seemed to be no point in engaging in outreach where no one was eligible to assume leadership responsibilities. This policy continued after other groups began to experience great success in both Africa

and the Caribbean, following the dismantling of colonization in the 1960s. Mormon missionaries were sent to Africa and the Caribbean after 1978, when a divine revelation opened the priesthood to men of African descent.

4. Dominant Religion

For most of their history, all three groups focused their outreach efforts on Christian regions, for Christians were seen as the most likely converts. In non-Christian areas, evangelism often targeted the small Christian populations, following on the heels of missionaries from other Christian groups. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses were especially slow to evangelize non-Christian populations. In Japan, Mormons made some headway among Shinto Buddhists, through work begun by American military personnel stationed there after World War II; Jehovah's Witnesses were much more successful. Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses to some extent, have yet to address Muslim and Hindu countries seriously. (We will discuss Adventist outreach to these religions later in this article.)

5. Government Regulations

Adventist institutions needed licenses in developed countries, but they were usually welcomed by colonial governments looking to skim off resources rather than expend them. Jehovah's Witnesses, who were seen as contributing nothing useful, were sometimes prohibited, but they persisted with underground evangelism, even though working illegally complicated their efforts. Since Mormons sought prior approval to enter a country, their outreach was delayed. In 2010, for example, Mormon leaders negotiated to enter mainland China, but to avoid offending the Chinese government, they offered to limit their work to foreigners.

6. Wars and Revolution

Military conflict slowed Mormons in particular because of their close identification with America and its foreign policy. Before the Bolshevik Revolution, they were not active in Russia and

the rest of what became the Soviet Union; they did not enter that territory until after the Soviet collapse in 1989–90. They also withdrew their missionaries from Nazi Germany and its allies during World War II.

Adventists, on the other hand, were established in Germany and in what became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics well before World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. Their response to such developments was set in Germany during World War I, when, in order to protect their organization and institutions, they agreed to major compromises, including military service as active combatants without Sabbath privileges. They continued this policy in both the U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany.

In contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses refused to participate in military forces or to honor national symbols, and were banned by several governments and often faced severe repression.

Factors of Demand

Demand, plus interaction between supply and demand, helps to account for geographic differences in growth. While supply is necessary, significant growth occurs only if there is demand for the religion being offered, and if that demand connects with the outreach strategies being employed. Like supply, demand is influenced by a variety of factors:

1. Modernization
2. Rapid growth, saturation, and reduced demand
3. Socioeconomic status
4. Cultural norms and values resulting in persecution.

Additional factors flow from interactions between supply and demand:

5. Outreach strategies and receptivity
6. Member fertility
7. Retention of children and converts

1. Modernization

The level of demand changes over time as societies pass through different phases of economic development, from premodern to modernizing to postmodern/secular. Following a trajectory akin to an inverted U, demand peaks during the modernizing phase. Around 1850, when Mormons attempted to establish missions in Chile, China, India, and French Polynesia, all of which were then premodern societies, they found so little demand that they eventually

withdrew. And early Adventist missions in Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific between 1890 and World War II grew relatively slowly because of limited demand; but the fact that Adventist missions were often centered on institutions that offered education, healthcare, and employment opportunities enabled them to establish a presence in these premodern societies. Prior to 1943, Jehovah's Witnesses, without such institutions, were slow to put down roots in premodern societies.

Once colonization ended during the decades following World War II, these areas began to modernize, and demand increased rapidly. When Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses launched major mission programs, these grew much faster than had Adventist programs during the premodern period. But Adventist numerical growth was now even more rapid because of the foundations laid previously.

Earlier, in the years immediately following World War II, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons focused their outreach efforts on Western Europe and Japan, where demand for spiritual help rebounded after the devastation of the war. Jehovah's Witnesses were especially successful, building on their earlier work in both regions, and apparently benefiting in Europe from a halo effect associated with their persistent outreach while suffering persecution. Consequently, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses in Western Europe far surpassed Mormons and Adventists (see Table 2).

As economies in Western Europe recovered and prospered, becoming culturally postmodern and secular, established and mainline Christian denominations lost ground. The growth of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses also slowed, with declining membership in some countries. This accords with the finding that once the process of modernization raises the United Nations' Human Development Index past 0.85, there is a "secular transition" that causes the demand for religion to recede sharply. The main exceptions to this pattern occur in countries where there has been a heavy flow of immigrants who are already members or are receptive to outreach—in England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and eventually the United States and South Korea.

Adventists in China provide an excellent example of changes in demand matching the phases of modernization. Adventists entered China in 1901 and quickly established a publishing house, schools, and hospitals. However, because China was still premodern, demand was weak, and membership reached just 19,000 by 1940.

Table 4. Mormon, Adventist, and Jehovah's Witnesses membership in the developed world,^a 2009

Region	Country	Mormon	% World Membership ^b	Jehovah's Witnesses	% World Membership	Adventists	% World Membership
North America	U.S.	6,058,907	43.8	1,096,502	15.6	1,043,606	6.4
	Canada	179,801		110,467		60,825	
	Total	6,238,708	45.1	1,206,969	17.1	1,104,431	6.8
Western Europe	Austria	4,023		20,662		3,871	
	Belgium	5,980		23,764		2,022	
	Denmark	4,387		14,153		2,502	
	Finland	4,578		18,940		5,037	
	France	35,427		118,085		12,514	
	Germany	37,796		162,890		35,386	
	Greece	718		28,569		511	
	Iceland	247		340		560	
	Ireland	2,799		5,713		526	
	Italy	23,430		240,262		9,070	
	Luxembourg	291		1,955		*c	
	Netherlands	8,901		29,452		4,853	
	Norway	4,206		10,384		4,607	
	Portugal	38,509		48,610		9,322	
	Spain	45,729		105,558		15,254	
	Sweden	9,091		22,054		2,800	
	Switzerland	7,947		17,301		4,310	
	UK	186,082		128,435		30,002	
	Total	420,141	3.0	997,127	14.2	143,147	0.9
Asia	Japan	124,041		217,530		15,337	
	South Korea	82,472		96,620		216,093	
	Total	206,513	1.5	314,150	4.5	231,430	1.4
Antipodes	Australia	126,767		63,454		55,010	
	New Zealand	100,962		13,462		10,835	
	Total	227,729	1.6	76,916	1.1	65,845	0.4
Total		7,093,091	51.3	2,595,162	36.8	1,544,853	9.5

Source: Kevin Watkins et al., *Human Development Report 2005* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2005), 365.

a. The developed world is defined as the high-income members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as listed in the United Nations' *Human Development Report 2005*.

b. Proportion of world membership.

c. Included with Belgium.

Following the Communist victory in 1950, missionaries were expelled, church organization was dismantled, and institutions were confiscated. But many members remained active, meeting in homes and evangelizing privately. When Christian churches were legalized after the Cultural Revolution, all Protestants were required to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Adventists accepted this mandate, and many pastors were trained in the Protestant seminary, but because they used church buildings only on Saturdays, they were able to retain a separate identity. As China modernized rapidly, Adventist growth spurted at an average rate of 10% per year between 1986 and 2001, with membership climbing from an estimated 75,000 to 311,347. After 2002, growth slowed sharply to an average of 2.4%, as the Chinese economy matured and China began a secular transition.

This pattern is illustrated equally well by Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy and other countries in Western Europe, where initial rapid growth after World War II slowed sharply, and by Mormons in Guatemala and other Latin American countries, with a similar pattern of high growth when missionaries arrived during modernization.

2. Saturation

Demand also changes over time according to the degree to which an evangelizing group has saturated a population: initially high growth rates decline once those easiest to recruit have been harvested. However, disentangling saturation from other factors that influence demand, particularly modernization, is difficult because the resulting growth patterns can be quite similar. For instance, when Mormons entered Portugal in the 1970s they initially experienced rapid growth, but this slowed by the late 1980s and early 1990s. Had Portugal's level of development been constant during that time, the change in demand could be attributed to saturation. But Portugal modernized rapidly during that time, and membership growth slowed, with Portugal's secular transition at about 0.85 on the Human

Development Index, apparently an effect of modernization rather than saturation.

For us to isolate the impact of saturation, a country's level of development has to remain relatively constant while a religious group experiences both growth and decline. This can be seen for Jehovah's Witnesses in the northern, heavily Muslim region of sub-Saharan Africa—especially Chad, Mali, Gambia, Liberia, and the Central African Republic. Although they had initially experienced high growth rates after entering these countries, these rates trailed off rapidly. Because the HDI of these countries changed little during the Jehovah's Witnesses' changing growth trajectory, the decline was probably due to saturation.

In most highly developed countries, conversion among indigenous populations has declined and is largely stagnant. But for Adventists in South Korea, Jehovah's Witnesses in Ireland, and Mormons in Singapore, growth continues to be high despite the countries having experienced the secular transition. This suggests that for these groups in these areas, saturation has not yet occurred.

3. Socioeconomic Status

The countries in Table 4 are all members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the contrasts among the groups are striking: 51.3% of Mormons and 36.8% of Jehovah's Witnesses are located in the developed world, but only 9.5% of Adventists.

Because Adventists were the first of the groups to enter several of these countries, in 1960 Adventist membership was still the largest of the groups in Australia, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Portugal, and Norway. But precisely because of its long presence there, Adventism's growth rate was already slowing in most of the countries, since it attracts less affluent people. By 2009, it was largest only in South Korea; Adventism has become the smallest of the three denominations in four of the other five remaining countries. In Japan, for example, its membership is aging, pastors are retiring, and few ministerial students are preparing to fill the vacancies.

**Women form
a majority of
the active
members of all
three groups.**

Table 5. Comparing changes in the distribution of Mormon, Adventist, and Jehovah’s Witnesses members among countries categorized according to gross national income per capita, 1960–2006^a

Income category	1960	1980	2000	2006
Mormons				
High ^b	94.3	84.4	55.8	53.2
Middle ^c	2.8	11.8	42.0	44.2
Low ^d	0.0	0.1	1.6	2.4
Jehovah’s Witnesses				
High	57.6	59.2	42.5	39.2
Middle	15.3	20.5	42.6	44.5
Low	12.4	10.7	14.4	16.1
Adventists				
High	37.9	23.6	11.1	9.9
Middle	38.4	44.6	45.6	43.1
Low	22.7	30.0	42.5	47.0

Source: Kevin Watkins et al., *Human Development Report 2005*, (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2005), 365.

- a. The nations belonging to the United Nations were categorized according to gross national income per capita in the Appendix to the United Nations’ *Human Development Report 2005*. Geographic areas that are not UN members, usually because of colonial status, are excluded from this analysis.
- b. Countries with a gross national income per capita of \$9,386 or higher.
- c. Countries with a gross national income per capita between \$9,385 and \$766.
- d. Countries with a gross national income per capita of \$765 or less.

Table 6. The percentage of religious groups’ adherents falling in different income categories in Mexico, 2000

Income category	Mormons (%)	Jehovah’s Witnesses (%)	Adventists (%)
Minimum wage or less	13.2	25.4	49.5
Between one and three times the minimum wage	45.6	50.3	32.4
Three times the minimum wage or more	35.2	19.6	14.0
Not specified	5.0	4.7	4.1

Source: Abstracted from David Clark Knowlton, “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, no. 2 (2005): 53–78.

Table 5 compares the changing distributions of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses between 1960 and 2006 among countries divided into three categories according to gross national income (GNI) per capita. In 2006, “high income” countries had a GNI per capita of \$9,386 or more and “low income” countries had \$765 or less, with the GNI of “middle income” countries between the two figures. Mormons were again strongest in the highest category, and Adventists weakest; yet in all three groups, the proportion of members in the highest category declined over time, as growth slowed there and modernization fostered growth in less developed countries. But distributions varied considerably: Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses grew mostly in middle-income countries, where Adventists were already well established by 1960, and Adventists grew in the poorest countries, where their concentration far exceeded those of the other two groups.

The low supply of Mormon missionaries in the poorest countries can be explained largely by their concentration in the United States and Latin America, and by the group’s later entry into Africa and the Caribbean. Thus, Mormons have their highest concentration in the most prosperous countries.

International comparisons between countries also translate to the meso and micro levels within countries. All three groups have a strong presence in Mexico. Table 6, drawn from the Mexican census of 2000, shows that people identifying as Mormons were highly concentrated in the top two of three income categories, while half of Adventists fell into the lowest category, with Jehovah’s Witnesses in between. This census also shows similar contrasts in educational levels: while 61.0% of Adventists received only primary education or less, 50.9% of Mormons had post-secondary education; Jehovah’s Witnesses again fell in between. Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses were concentrated in Mexico City and the more developed northern states, though Jeho-

vah's Witnesses less so. Adventists, in contrast, were concentrated in the rural southern states.

Data from three other countries suggest that the differences found in Mexico among the active members of the three religious groups are not unique. The large number of people identifying as Adventists in the Papua New Guinea census (520,623 in 2000 compared with 20,723 Jehovah's Witnesses and 20,586 Mormons) is an example of the concentration of Adventists in poor countries in the developing world.⁴ The population there is heavily rural, but the Adventists are more rural than either Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses.

Likewise, in 2001, 18.4% of Canada's population was foreign born. However, the percentage of foreign-born members was twice as high among Adventists, while Jehovah's Witnesses were at the national level and Mormons well below it. The contrast is stronger still in regard to members who immigrated during the previous decade: Jehovah's Witnesses fell below the national level, while Adventists and Mormons diverged even farther from each other; Adventist growth in Mexico continues to be mostly limited to immigrant populations.

In the United States, a Pew Forum survey in 2008 found that 26% of Mormons, 42% of Jehovah's Witnesses, and 46% of Adventists earned less than \$30,000, and 47%, 65%, and 72%, respectively, less than \$50,000.

4. Persecution of Converts

All three groups advocate norms that attract criticism from the press, public, and government, and in some instances the stigma becomes so strong that it results in persecution. This makes identifying with the groups more costly, reducing demand. Hostility engendered by the Mormons' practice of polygamy was a key reason for the martyrdom of their founder, Joseph Smith, and for their decision to uproot themselves several times, and eventually to flee from Illinois to Utah. In 1890, Mormons abandoned the practice to avoid further conflict with United States authorities.

Jehovah's Witnesses attracted negative publicity because of their insistence that publishers witness door-to-door, and their expectation that members refuse blood transfusions even when medically indicated. But it was their refusal to be conscripted into military forces and to participate in patriotic activities, such as the American Pledge of Allegiance or the Nazi "Heil Hitler" salute, that resulted in persecution. During World War I, leaders in the United States were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms; during World War II, many Jehovah's Witnesses faced imprisonment in Canada, Australia, and Greece, and death in Nazi concentration camps. They also experienced severe problems under military regimes in Spain and Portugal, behind the Iron Curtain, and in parts of Africa.

Several of the norms embraced by Adventists, involving food, dress, and medical treatment, initially brought ridicule—but their religious observance of Saturday, a normal work day during the nineteenth century, imposed especially heavy costs by excluding them from many occupations. Consequently, Adventist converts were typically people who had autonomy over their work schedules—housewives, independent artisans, and small farmers—but when Adventist farmers worked on Sundays, they were sometimes arrested and imprisoned for violating state "blue laws," created to impose religious standards. Adventists faced similar problems in many other countries, as well. When the five-day week became law in the United States and other industrialized countries, the situation improved.

5. Strategies and Receptivity

Both Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses use door-to-door approaches as their primary strategy for evangelism, with the goal of arranging lessons that will result in baptism. The Mormon plan is based on a format developed in the late 1950s, which employed a standard syllabus containing six lessons (later reduced to five). Missionaries are encouraged to invite prospects to be baptized soon after beginning the lessons. Jehovah's Witnesses also employ a standard syllabus,

All three groups advocate norms that attract criticism from the press, public, and government.

but because they teach all their beliefs before baptism, they expect the lessons to last six months or more.

In earlier decades, the main Adventist strategies were public evangelistic meetings and Bible studies that lasted several months in homes or classes. Adventists built schools and health facilities to meet people's needs, to teach Adventist beliefs and lifestyle, and to anchor the communities they formed. In the late 1930s, local leaders in the developing world initiated a shift in evangelistic focus—from biblical prophecies to family, personal, and social health benefits—and the number of baptisms doubled.

Adventists began regular radio broadcasts in the United States in 1930, television broadcasts shortly after World War II, and shortwave radio broadcasts in 1971. Meanwhile, public evangelism ranged from local meetings featuring pastors or laypersons as speakers, to international satellite transmissions with instantaneous translation of professional evangelists. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency, formed in 1956 and funded largely by governments, became a significant humanitarian presence in much of the developing world.

Although Adventists learned from the Millerite disappointment never again to set a date for the Second Coming of Jesus, Jehovah's Witnesses persisted in making predictions, stirring up excitement and spurring growth. Focusing successively on 1914, 1925, 1975, and the 1980s, each prediction caused a surge in the supply of publishers, and each nonfulfillment caused a falling off.

Since growth is greatly affected by the supply of 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 has an important impact on their strategies and growth. The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses is exclusively male, and women cannot lead congregations or, since 1986, attend Gilead School classes unless their husbands are also enrolled; but women are prominent among door-to-door publishers.

The majority of Mormon missionaries are men, and women are absent from the highest levels of the Mormon hierarchy, but women play a major role in maintaining local congregations.

During the lifetime of the Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White, women frequently served as church officers, pastors, and evangelists. From her death in 1915, through 1970, women were increasingly marginalized, but since

then they have been appointed as congregational elders, conducted evangelistic meetings (especially in the developing world), and served as pastors. Since 2012, Adventist women have been ordained as ministers in Europe and North America. This increasing involvement of women has facilitated Adventist growth.

The ability of the three groups to adapt their outreach strategies to non-Christians has varied. In Burma (Myanmar), Adventists originally recruited new members almost exclusively from minority tribes such as the Karens, who are Christian, rather than from Burmese Buddhists; and in India, they baptized Baptists and Anglicans rather than Hindus and Muslims. Over time, all three groups realized that Animists in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific were ready converts, but they experienced little success when they attempted outreach among Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists.

Mormons have yet to place missionaries in most of the countries of the "10/40 Window," a quadrant in the eastern hemisphere between the 10 and 40 northern lines of latitude, stretching from northern Africa through the Middle East, Southern Asia, and the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union, and to China, where the dominant religions are Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Even in Africa, Mormon evangelism has been largely confined to Christian and Animist regions. In Nigeria, the African country with the highest Mormon membership, all five missions are in the predominantly Christian south; not one is in the Muslim north. Thus, Mormons have provided limited supply to most countries where non-Christian religions are dominant.

The training of Jehovah's Witness missionaries at the Gilead School lasts only five months, so they are inadequately prepared for outreach to adherents of non-Christian religions.

6. Fertility

Because religious groups have a special opportunity to shape the religious identities of children born to their members, variations in birthrates are likely to affect both growth and future outreach. Mormon birthrates are relatively high, dating back to the years of polygamy, as Mormon families continue to average about one child above the norm in the United States. Yet in the developed world, Mormon birthrates have declined in recent decades, part of a broad trend associated with modernization.

Families of Jehovah's Witnesses tend to be smaller than the norm, for they are encouraged to wait until after Armageddon to have their children, so that childrearing does not interfere with their publishing activities. For their part, Adventist families in the United States and other Western societies tend to reflect cultural norms when it comes to size, while their families are larger in the developing world, following the norms there.

The combination of immigration, polygamy, and extra-large families was the initial foundation of Mormon growth in the United States. In recent decades, as their birthrate has declined, the Mormon growth rate there has fallen behind that of Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, who have proved more effective in evangelizing immigrants.

7. Retention

What initially appears as strong demand may in fact be fleeting, resulting in poor membership retention. Loss of members is also related to ineffective socialization and failure to create strong bonds to the group. Loss of members in turn affects supply to the extent that it lowers internal support for a group's outreach programs.

Early Mormon converts tended to be drawn from the urban and rural working class. Their descendants in the United States, however, were upwardly mobile, and by the latter part of the twentieth century had become more prosperous and better educated. Nevertheless, most converts, especially in the developing world, continue to be poor, and the majority of these converts soon become inactive. This pattern is not visible in the official published data because of the Mormon practice of leaving the names of missing members on the rolls, but it becomes very clear when official data are compared with the much lower numbers of persons who identify themselves as Mormons in a national census, and in lower-than-expected numbers of congregations among large listed memberships in certain areas. The areas with the greatest membership

increases—Latin America and the Philippines—have extremely low retention rates. This is likely due to the use of short-term foreign missionaries, a rush to baptism without sufficient preparation, and the low commitment of congregations to continued socialization and nurturing when the attention of missionaries shifts to other potential converts. As many as 50% of converts may disappear within six months, and the total exit rate may reach 75%. Mormons are more successful in retaining those who have already experienced some upward mobility. This finding helps to explain the data from the 2000 Mexican census we discussed earlier, showing that those who still identify as Mormons have relatively high incomes.

For Jehovah's Witnesses, a comparison of the number of baptisms with the number of publishers from 1999 through 2009 indicates that publishers expanded at a rate equivalent to 51.5% of total baptisms, suggesting that just over half their converts became active Jehovah's Witnesses. Evidence also suggests that the loss of children raised as Jehovah's Witnesses is high compared to Mormons and Adventists. The latter groups have education systems designed to socialize their children into the religion, while Jehovah's Witnesses lack such a system. Additionally, several interviews indicated that Jehovah's Witnesses teenagers often become deeply resentful of their peculiarity.

Among Adventists, the loss of converts from large evangelistic campaigns can be high. Pastors meeting in Kinshasa, Congo, two and three years after campaigns by visiting American evangelists had resulted in a total of 1,600 converts, reported that only fifty (3%) were still attending church. In the developed world, at least 50% of youth become inactive. In 2000, Adventists decided to audit membership rolls everywhere. As this project proceeded, Brazil and the Philippines, both of which had experienced rapid growth, reduced their membership figures by about 300,000. Other regions saw losses as well. A comparison of the total number of members dropped or missing,

All three groups have experienced a slowing of growth since 1990.

with the total added through baptism and profession of faith during the past decade, shows the impact of the audit during the second half of the decade: between 2000 and 2004, the mean number lost was 27.6% of the number added; between 2005 and 2009, this figure rose to 38.4%. These statistics suggest that the loss of Adventist converts, while substantial, is lower than that of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Asynchronous Supply and Demand

While most of the examples previously given illustrate synchronous relationships between supply and demand, these often do not align to or result in rapid growth. This was true until recently for all three groups in the Muslim countries of the Middle East and northern Africa.

Other examples come from Africa, where Mormons have had missions for nearly thirty years and have recently seen rapid growth, but have not yet gained momentum in twenty-seven countries—mostly those with Muslim majorities. The same is true of Jehovah's Witnesses in several African countries, even though their history there is longer. In each of these cases, demand for these two American original religions has been low or, at times, the supply limited. (Adventists have experienced much higher numerical growth in most of these countries.)

Examples of supply without demand are readily apparent; finding demand without supply is more difficult, but there are some clear examples. We have already mentioned one: self-started, would-be Mormon congregations in Nigeria in the 1970s that wanted supply at a time when, for theological reasons, Mormons did not send missionaries to Africa.

A second example is the Adventist experience in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, which has added nearly one million members since 1995, almost all of whom are Dalits. During this time, Adventists were frequently approached by representatives of the high Brahmin caste, who sought missionaries to work with them, too. Adventist leaders were eager to respond, but insisted that Brahmin converts become part of existing congregations and constituencies; they refused to supply missionaries who would deal with Brahmins separately. Since mixing with members of the lowest caste was unacceptable to the Brahmins, the demand evaporated.

A third example is the experience of Jehovah's Witnesses in Zambia, where their missionaries were banned. Howev-

er, poorly educated migrant workers, returning from South Africa, where they had been converted, were able to respond to demand.

In short, when supply and demand coincide, growth is rapid. At times, demand is low while supply is high, and sometimes demand is high and supply is low. Either way, growth is either slow or nonexistent.

Summary and Conclusion

Wanting to explain the diverse geographic distributions of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, we have developed our theory that successful geographic spread and growth depend on a confluence of supply and demand factors. For a group to spread and grow, it must have representatives present to make overtures to potential converts and employ outreach strategies that appeal effectively to the population of the targeted locations. Success also depends on the readiness of groups within the population being evangelized to positively respond to what is presented to them, and on the degree to which converts remain committed and are retained. Spread and growth depend on the alignment of these two groups of factors.

Demand over time is shaped like an inverted U: it is low prior to modernization, high during the modernizing process, and lower again once societies become postmodern, secular, and materialistic. When outreach occurs during a period of modernization, the result is rapid growth. The experiences of Mormons, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses confirm this theory. Each group has grown rapidly in countries during periods of modernization, but more slowly in premodern and modernized countries. Differences in timing and strategies created significant variations in their geographic spread and in where members are concentrated. Additionally, the differing messages, strategies, and cultures of these three groups resulted in vastly different socioeconomic profiles and dissimilar membership-retention profiles.

All three groups have experienced a slowing of growth since 1990. This has been especially so for Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. The number of Mormon converts tumbled from a high of 330,877 in 1990 to a low of 241,239 in 2004. In spite of their impressive workforce, Jehovah's Witnesses' baptisms declined even more sharply, from a peak of 375,923 in 1997 to a low of 247,631 in 2005. Baptisms for both groups have increased only erratically since. The amount of effort required per baptism of a Jehovah's Witnesses member has increased globally, from

one thousand to two thousand hours per convert in 1970–76, to five thousand to six thousand hours per convert since 2004. Three key factors are at work with both groups:

1. The secularization of the developed world, where the groups were well represented
2. A slowing of growth in several countries in the developing world, including parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia, because of saturation and spreading secularization
3. Poor retention

In contrast, Adventist baptisms have increased during these years, from 505,250 in 1988 to 1,022,399 in 2000, to more than 1,000,000 per year since 2004, with a peak of 1,074,938 in 2006. Nevertheless, the Adventist overall growth rate has declined gradually since 1990, though not as steeply as those of Mormons and Witnesses. Adventists are much less affected by the secularization of the developed world because their membership is much less concentrated there, and their retention is higher than that of the other two groups.

Our understanding of religious growth and decline combines three important elements: supply, demand, and secularization. When supply synchronizes with demand, growth occurs; otherwise, it does not. And all of this takes place along an ever-changing path toward secularization, when both supply and demand diminish, curtailing growth and resulting in eventual decline. ■

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For most of their history, all three groups focused their outreach efforts on Christian regions, for Christians were seen as the most likely converts.