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Matthew A. Jordan

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The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints:
Growth and Beliefs

Matthew A. Jordan

Dr. Leatherman
Directed Study
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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Growth and Beliefs

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of the fastest growing Christian religions that exists in the world today. They are growing in places where other churches have given up hope, and seem to be reaching the they are or it is? their once persecuted religion. Hundreds of Mormon temples exist throughout the world, showing they are reaching far beyond the reaches of Salt Lake City. While its beginnings were in the United States, it has surpassed the boundaries of borders clearly, taking the *Book of Mormon* into millions of homes throughout the world. Their missionary movement is unparalleled by any other Christian church except the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is precisely this mission focus that causes the tremendous amounts of growth in the Mormon church that are seen today.

A Brief History of the Mormon

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has its origin in one man who they ^{is}revere most highly, Joseph Smith. Early in life, he was confused about all the different denominations in the Christian religion and wondered which one was the right one. He turned to James 1:5 which says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him," and claimed that promise. In 1820; Smith went into the woods to pray seeking the right denomination. While praying he was seized by a dark power which seemed to doom him, then a brilliant light surrounded him and he saw two beings standing before him. One of the beings pointed to the other one and said, "This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Smith, 1949b, p. 48). Smith then proceeded to ask the being which denomination was the right one, and the being told him that none of

them were right and he shouldn't join any of them. Three years later he had a second vision where a being who called himself Moroni appeared to him and told him that he had a great work to do of translating gold plates that told the story of the saints on the North American continent. He was led to the place where the plates lay and he dug them out and attempted to take them, but was stopped and told that the time had not ~~_____~~ ^{could} shouldn't come for four more years.

The golden plates along with two stones, called the Urim and Thummim, were entrusted to Joseph Smith in the year 1827. The Urim and Thummim were the key he needed to translate the plates. In one year he transcribed all the writing on the plates; then he was required to give everything back to the messenger, Moroni, who the Mormons believe is protecting them to this day. After translating a little of the text, a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris took the text and translation to New York where they were studied by Professor Charles Anthon who was acclaimed for his literary attainments. He confirmed that the portion of text that had been translated was written in Egyptian hieroglyphics and it was a very good translation. Then he said the rest of the text was Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic. Smith then began to translate the rest of this text which is now known as the *Book of Mormon*.

During the translation Smith and his friend Oliver Cowdery believed they were visited by John the Baptist who restored the Aaronic Priesthood on them giving them the authority to establish the true church to replace the ~~_____~~ ^{restored... on} ~~_____~~ [?] and the world. In a later vision Peter, James, and John supposedly visited them ~~_____~~ ^{_____} the even higher priesthood of the Apostles (Smith, 1949a, p. 21). This began the long line of priests that still exist in the church today.

The translation of the *Book of Mormon* ~~_____~~ ^{exists} and by 1830 then published, and Joseph Smith started on a new mission, to start the Latter-day Saints church. On April 6, 1830, the very first

meeting of what was then called the Church of Christ was held. Very shortly the name was changed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recognizing the gap between former and latter-day saints. The very first elders of the church were ordained in a service held on that day. Almost instantly there was a group of people inquisitive about this new religion. The church began to grow and face minor persecution. The headquarters first moved to Kirkland, Ohio in 1831 where the construction of the first temple began. Smith continued to have revelations which he wrote down and published in *The Doctrines and Covenants* in 1835. From Ohio they moved to Missouri in 1838 where they were ordered out almost immediately.

What was the basis of the persecution & being ordered out?

The first city that was established by ~~the church~~ was Nauvoo, Illinois in 1839. It rapidly grew into the largest city in the state and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints looked to be getting its feet under it. They began a European missionary effort which later proved to be a great source of members, and they began to build a new temple. Smith introduced one of the most debated practices of Mormons while there, polygamy. He set the example with somewhere between 27 and 84 wives. No one is really sure of the number. It turned out to be a bad idea because it started to turn many people against him including his prime counselor, Sydney Rigdon, who accused him of trying to seduce his daughter. *The Nauvoo Expositor*, a local independent paper, challenged Smith, and he ordered it destroyed. A controversy ensued and Smith found himself in jail. Before he had a chance to make his case, a mob broke in to the jail and murdered him on June 27, 1844.

What was going to *happ* he church? Who was going to take over the leadership role Joseph Smith filled? These questions were flying back and forth in Nauvoo after Smith's sudden death and they set the stage for a battle of power. No real leader came out above the rest for a long period

power struggle

take over Smith's leadership role

of time. Then Sydney Rigdon claimed the leadership role because of his importance before Smith's death, but the leadership group, the Council of the Twelve Apostles, gave their support to their leader, Brigham Young. He was officially recognized as president on December 27, 1847 (Shipps, 1985, p. 162).

Trouble was brewing again for the Mormons and restrictions were lifted that had been keeping them safe in Illinois. They had to set off to a new place where they could once again escape persecution. Brigham Young came shining through as a clear leader in the organization of the exodus to Salt Lake City, Utah. There they thought no one would bother them for a long time and they would be free to live their lives as they saw fit. They even went so far as to establish a state that was powerful enough to be dangerous to even the federal government itself. Brigham Young was now not only the spiritual leader of the people, but also the temporal leader of the people as governor of the state of Deseret. From then until now numerous presidents have presided over The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, each bringing with him new revelations and regulations. One thing is for sure, though, Salt Lake City was and is a city for Mormons. Today, seventy-five percent of the population of Salt Lake City is still Mormon.

The Mormon's Core Doctrines

The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and The Pearl of Great Price are all accepted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints above the authority of the Bible, and in fact more of their doctrine comes from them than from the Bible. Joseph Smith is the author or translator of each one of these books in their entirety. Mormon doctrine differs from all other churches to the extent that they are considered the fourth monotheistic religion next to Christianity, Judaism, and

*Why are they not
considered Christian?
You speak of them as such.*

Islam. They only need to grow a little more from their current status of roughly 10 million members (Jacobs, 1998, p. 1) for this to happen.

*For what to happen?
They are considered
the 4th church*

The Mormons believe themselves to be the restoration of the original Christian church established by Jesus Christ and the apostles. They believe that the church was infiltrated with apostasy in the early centuries and not until their own beginnings have any others had the proper beliefs. They have thirteen "Articles of Faith" which outline their core doctrines:

We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: Faith in the Lord Jesus

Christ Repentance

Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins

Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost

We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, viz. apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc.

We believe in the gifts of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, etc.

We believe the bible (King James Version) to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.

We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be built upon this (the American) continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.

We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may.

We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law.

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all men; indeed we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul- We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things and have to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after those things.

These "Articles of Faith" lay an outline for the Mormon belief and are the creed of the church similar to the creeds of the Christian church throughout the centuries. There is much more to their faith than these beliefs because these are only the core beliefs. Most of them are commendable by any Christian's standard, but others are more questionable.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seeks to answer three questions as a foundation of their faith:

- 1) Where did we come from?
- 2) Why are we here?
- 3) What awaits us hereafter?

Human beings are indeed “spiritual offspring” of God the Father and lived as spirit beings before their existence on this earth according to the LDS. As spirit beings, all humans were considered sons of God. Thus the question of where we came from is answered, but two more questions still remain.

The LDS belief about our existence on this earth is probably the most unique belief that they have. Joseph Fielding Smith, not the same as Joseph Smith the founder of the church, was a president-prophet of the church from 1970-72, and “he is universally esteemed as the chief doctrinal authority of the Church” (Pond, 1978, p. 23) He wrote a book called *Doctrines of Salvation* that brought forth the current beliefs of the Mormon Church, and in it he stated, “It was necessary, in order that we might receive a fulness of blessings and opportunities and become like unto our Father, for us to pass through this mortal probation. Hence, this earth was prepared; and we were sent down here to receive bodies of flesh and bones and to be quickened by blood; and to partake of all the vicissitudes of life as we find them here on this earth, that we might, through obedience to the principles of the gospel, know good from evil” (Smith, 1955, p. 1, 2). The LDS actually believe that Adam was put on this earth to sin and thus lead the earth’s population through an education that they could not have received as spirit beings. Mortality is part of that lesson. Memories of previous life were erased to give us equal opportunities to be tested and learn from our mortal experiences. Therein lies the ultimate purpose of life on this planet.

The question that every person wants to know the answer to is clearly answered in Mormon theology. What awaits us in the hereafter? Mormonism declares three degrees of glory or salvation. These are the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Telestial. Every person will be included in salvation going to one of these three degrees of glory, although some of them in the Telestial degree must spend some time in

Hell. Celestial Salvation is for those who keep the full law and commandments of God. Anyone who died without the opportunity to receive the full gospel, but who would have accepted it will also be included in this degree. One must be married in a sacred temple ceremony to be a part of this kingdom and will eventually have the opportunity to become gods like the Father, creating their own spirit children through the sacred marriage eternally established on earth in a Mormon temple. Terrestrial Salvation is for those who died without the law. They refused the testimony of Jesus Christ, but later received it. Others who will be included are honorable men who were blinded by the craftiness of men, those not willing to receive the fulness of His glory, and those who were not valiant in their testimony of Jesus. The last degree of salvation, Telestial Salvation, is reserved for the ungodly. They will have no part in the first resurrection, but will be raised in the second resurrection. Before they can enter their kingdom, they must repent and bow down before Jesus. Thus the future is sure. They know exactly what is going to happen and have one of the most extensive eschatologies of any religion (Pond, 1978, pp. 204-214).

The LDS beliefs are quite extensive and complicated, but they are also complete. No area of time is left uncovered. They extensively cover pre-human time, human-time, and post-human time. Joseph F. Smith wrote in *Doctrines of Salvation*, "The Latter-day Saints are the only people in the world, as far as my knowledge goes, who have a clear distinct doctrine in regard to the questions: Where did we come from? Why are we here? and, Where are we going?" (Smith, 1954, p. 56). Whether or not the Mormons are correct, they are serious about what they believe and how they believe it.

The Life of a Mormon Missionary

The missionary work is not an easy task and requires extreme dedication to the church and their job. It is a rite of passage that the church places on them, men and women. Seventy-five percent of the young people accept this and save money their entire lives for it because they do not receive a salary (Dahl, 1998, p. 22). They are responsible for all their expenses except their flight to their mission destination and their one flight home. They receive a monthly stipend of \$200 to help with rent and food, but that does not go very far. The rest comes out of their own pocket. At the age of 19 they get their two-year assignment and head out into the mission field. Men are not the only missionaries. Women also serve as missionaries, but they are not as encouraged which is reflected in the number of women in the mission field. Women only make up 17% of all the missionaries (Jacobs, 1998, section 14, p. 1). They are given different assignments than the men often involving things like being tour guides at the temples. When I visited Salt Lake City's Mormon temple, I was led around by two female missionaries who did their best to lead me to Christ throughout the tour.

The missionaries keep a very rigorous schedule leaving no time for temptation to get in the way. Their days began at 6:30 a.m. with breakfast and a shower. At 7:30 they get together with the others in their group that live with them to study the church teachings. After a couple of hours of study, they head out to the streets to proselytize for twelve hours. Around 9:30 p.m., they return to the apartment to finish off their day only to begin the next day the same way. Staying that busy keeps them out of trouble. As missionaries, they are forbidden to smoke, drink alcohol, coffee, tea or caffeine, date, masturbate, have premarital sex, watch television, listen to pop music, and read magazines or unapproved books. The business of their day takes the place of all these things.

Their lives are carefully monitored by each other and the church. Each missionary has a companion, and together they are known as a "companionship". They are not allowed to do anything without that companion even to the extent of walking down the stairs to let someone in the door. The companion is to act as a "firewall" against accusations and is also to hold the other accountable. They become good friends and usually keep in contact the rest of their lives. The missionaries are only allowed one letter a week to their families and two phone calls a year on Mother's Day and Christmas; they do not get vacations. After all these commitments and standards, there is only a five percent dropout rate. Those five percent are usually ostracized by the church and eventually leave it.

The missionaries' daily duty is to take the Mormon message to everyone. This is done by appointments that are set up by people seeking contact with the church. Another way is door to door evangelism. When they do have an appointment, they show up at the appropriate time then meet with the people. In the visit they show a most caring attitude. They share a free copy of the *Book of Mormon* with the person and take time to listen to him or her. People do not have anyone to talk to in today's fast paced society, so the Mormon missionary is a welcome ear. Kevin Mower, a Mormon missionary, said, "I can say a few words, listen to somebody and do miracles" (Gonzalez, 1994, p. B1). They do their best to get inside peoples' homes rather than preach in the streets thus achieving more respect. They have distinct advantages of reaching people that no one else can reach. Lillian Rivera, a convert, said of the missionaries, "They made it fun to learn and they were my age. Most of the things they said made sense. In other religions, they tell you something and you ask why it is and they say that's the way God presented it to me. Here, they explain" (Gonzalez, 1994, p. B1). Ten to twenty percent of their contacts continue after the first visit which is a rather large amount. When they

have no appointments or someone fails to show up, they simply go door to door wherever they are, spreading the Mormon message.

Growth in the Mormon Church

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of the fastest growing churches in the world today. In 1978 there were about four million Mormons worldwide, and today that number has more than doubled to ten and a half million members. In the last ten years they have baptized about 300,000 converts to the faith a year (see table 1), and in 1995, the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches recorded a net increase of 98,400 members in North America, more than any other denomination in the United States making it the seventh largest denomination (Mims, 1998, Internet). In the five decades since World War II, the Mormons have doubled their membership every 15 years. They attribute their growth to many different things, but one of the most important is the missionary efforts of the young people in the church. They are sent throughout the world to over 160 countries to spread the Mormon message (Van Orden, 1999). As a result of their work, temples are being built throughout the world and currently there are about 50 temples with 15 more planned (Niebuhr, 1996, p. A14). Also, many different ethnic groups are rapidly converting to Mormonism, especially Spanish speaking people. Dr. Jan Shipps who is a professor of history and religious studies at Indiana University in Indianapolis, Indiana said, "They [the Mormons] have lifted up their essential Christianity and minimized their uniqueness" (Goldman, 1993, p. 35). They are using the Biblical principle stated in John 12:32, "But I [Christ], when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." It is working well for them even though they believe differently about Christ than all other Christians.

blessing that Guatemala . . . has not had the missionaries pulled out as has happened in some of the other countries in Central America.” He also stressed the main focus of the Central America Area; every young man should serve as a missionary. Today there are 164,000 Mormons in Guatemala making up 1.3% of a twelve million person population.

Another country in Central America that has not had nearly as much success as Guatemala is Costa Rica (see table 2). Missionaries were first sent to Costa Rica in 1946, but a few years later they were pulled out because of civil war in the country. Now there are 200 missionaries in one mission compared to Guatemala’s 800. The number of Mormons in Costa Rica, today, is less than in Guatemala both in raw numbers and in percentages of the population. Costa Rica is a three and a half million person nation, but only 28,000 of them are Mormon, that is only 0.77% of the population. Guatemala’s advantage is clearly the uninterrupted missionary efforts as opposed to Costa Ricans smaller, interrupted missionary movement.

Without the missionaries the Mormon church would not exist as it does today. They are the key to spreading the Mormon message of Christ and family unity. The Mormon church’s message could not be heard by nearly as many people if they didn’t supply as many missionaries as they do. Granted they don’t convert everyone they talk to, but ten to twenty percent of their contacts continue after the first visit (Gonzalez, 1994, p. B2). The growth rates are directly affected by the number of missionaries in the field, and the Mormons have consistently had more missionaries than most other religions in the last couple of decades. Dr. Bruce Van Orden, a professor at Brigham Young University said, “It is true that we barely grow where there are no missionaries” (Van Orden, 1999). The missionaries play a vital role in the growth of the church. Change is taking place in the Mormon church as it is faced with such

growth. It does not consist of the same type of people it did a couple of decades ago. Third or fourth generation Mormons made up the majority of the church membership but Jan Shipps said, "the typical Mormon today is a first-generation convert" (Sheler & Wagner, 1992, p. 74). In fact, Larry Stamer said, "Since 1960 there have been more converts won . . . than born into the Mormon church," (1998, p. 22), and Bruce Van Orden said 60% of the membership today are first generation converts from contacts with missionaries and the teachings (Van Orden, 1999). The Mormon message is appealing to people today more than ever, but first there has to be someone to deliver it. That is where the missionaries take over. Because many of them are first-generation converts, they really have a passion to tell others about their new found religion making them more effective than most third or fourth-generation Mormons. When a missionary knocks on a door, the owner can see a difference in this young man or woman right away, and that attracts many people. Many people like how different the missionary is from the world so much they have to find out why he or she is that way. The missionaries are bringing about this change in Mormonism for the betterment and growth of the Mormon church.

The Latter Day Saints are reaching people that many other Christians are ignoring. In upper Manhattan, Mormons are building churches in the Hispanic, low income neighborhoods that no other church will come near. They earnestly struggle to reach those people with a message of eternal salvation as well as earthly salvation to a better lifestyle. Their health message is a key component of evangelism, challenging people to live healthier by avoiding alcohol, drugs, tobacco, tea, and coffee. All members are to live chaste lives abstaining from premarital sex, pornography, foul language, and gambling. The prospective Latino members have a Christian background so they are open to the message, and when they see the Mormons investing time and money in them they are attracted to them. Moises Perez the

executive director of Allanza Dominica, a local social service agency, said, "People turn to religion when they are under stress especially when it recruits aggressively and comes with money" (Shanahan, 1998, section 14, p. 8).

In Mexico, similar results are happening because of active proselytizing by missionaries. Their numbers have increased from 25,000 in 1961 to more than 700,000 today, and a new stake was founded in Mexico City in 1994. Mexico is listed among the fastest growing countries along with Chile, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, the Philippines, and Argentina according to Bruce Van Orden (1999). In a country where 95% of the people are Catholic this is a great accomplishment. Lino Alvarez, president of the Mexico South area, "attributed his church's growth, which has taken place primarily among middle- and working-class people, to its focus on family values and the possibility of individuals' shaping their own environment" (Christian Century, 1995, p. 9). He also pointed to a growing number of native-born missionaries that were converting more people every year including a great number of young people (Niebuhr, 1994, December 11). Currently, about half of the missionaries are native and the other half from the United States and Canada (Van Orden, 1999). The Mormon's have more missionaries in Latin America per member than any other denomination. This work is paying off for them in terms of conversions.

The Mormon church is not only growing in third world countries, but rather it is growing in the United States, too. When other churches are declining in the U.S., the Mormon church is showing significant growth. One reason is the care that is shown for each individual when a missionary visits. It shocks a lot of people, and they realize it is something they have been missing. Jan Shipps said that a Mormon congregation provides a sense of community, values, and stability that many crave, particularly

in the big and busy cities of the Northeast (Goldman, 1993, p. 35). Americans are getting tired of being unrestricted and have realized a need for religion in their lives. The Mormon church, through their missionaries, is there to give those people what they need.

The Mormons take the Great Commission very seriously and it shows through their actions. Every denomination should take a lesson from them about caring for the world. Their missionary efforts should reflect their desire to reach the world just like the Mormon's do. If every Christian denomination took missionary work as seriously as the Latter-day Saints do the world would know Christ as well as their next door neighbor. When I visited the temple at Salt Lake City, Christ was lifted up in every way by the missionaries there; their other beliefs took a back seat to the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It was most impressive.

Conclusion

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is growing because the work of their missionaries is drawing people into the church. The missionaries are faithful and sincere about their work, and they take it very seriously. Their ministry reaches people where they are, and they see hope for a better future, converting them to the Mormon faith. They care for people in need and make religion relevant in a world of secularism. They are the ones that spread this message throughout the world, and they don't just spread their message or don't try to spread it at all, but they care for them and their missionaries are more successful. Nothing beats the Mormon way of life, and fundamental changes in their beliefs. People see the Mormon way of life and want to own

They are also growing because of how they treat & care for their members.

lives because of that powerful witness. The missionaries are the key to the growth in the Mormon church today.

Table 1

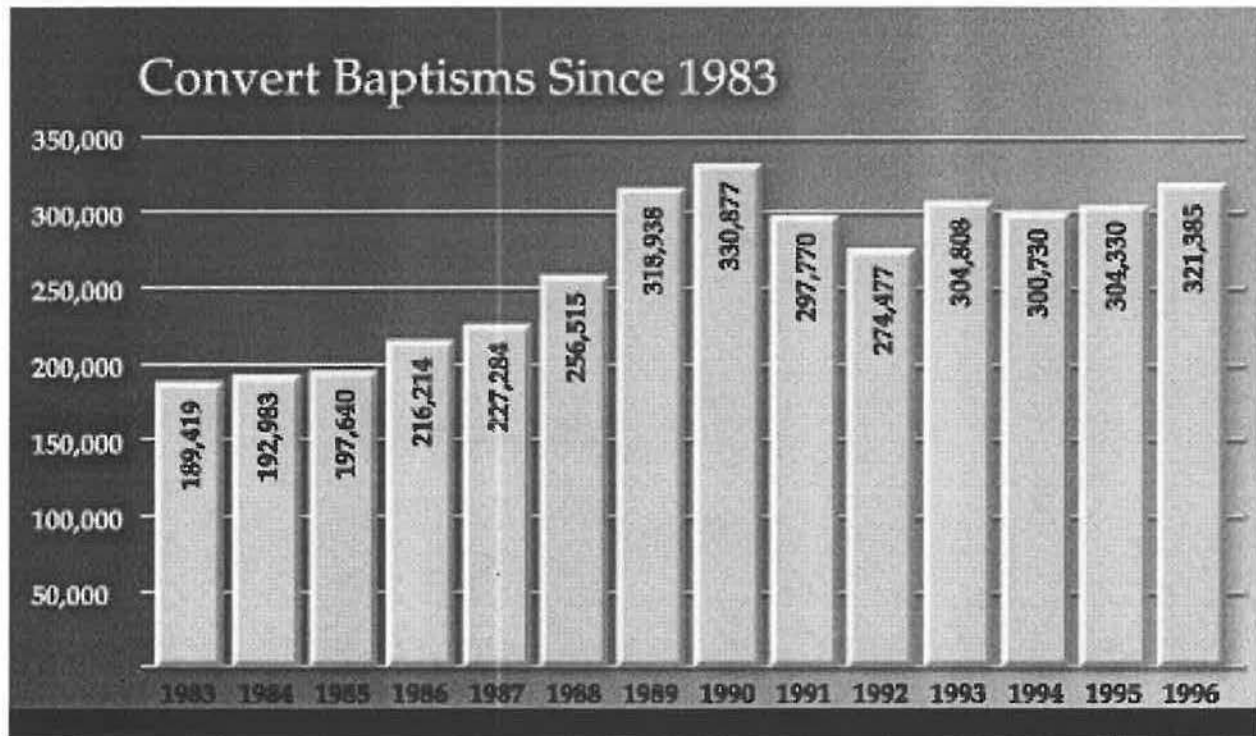


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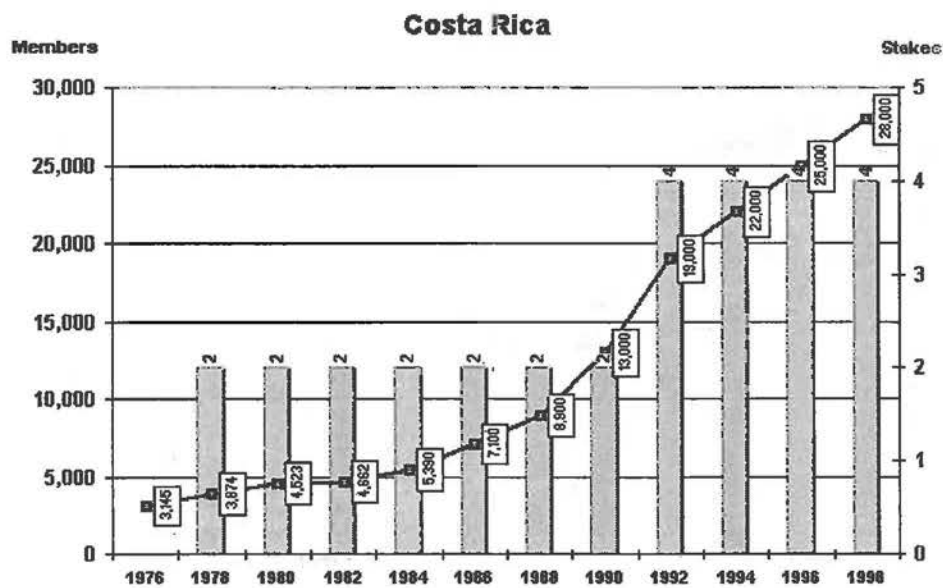


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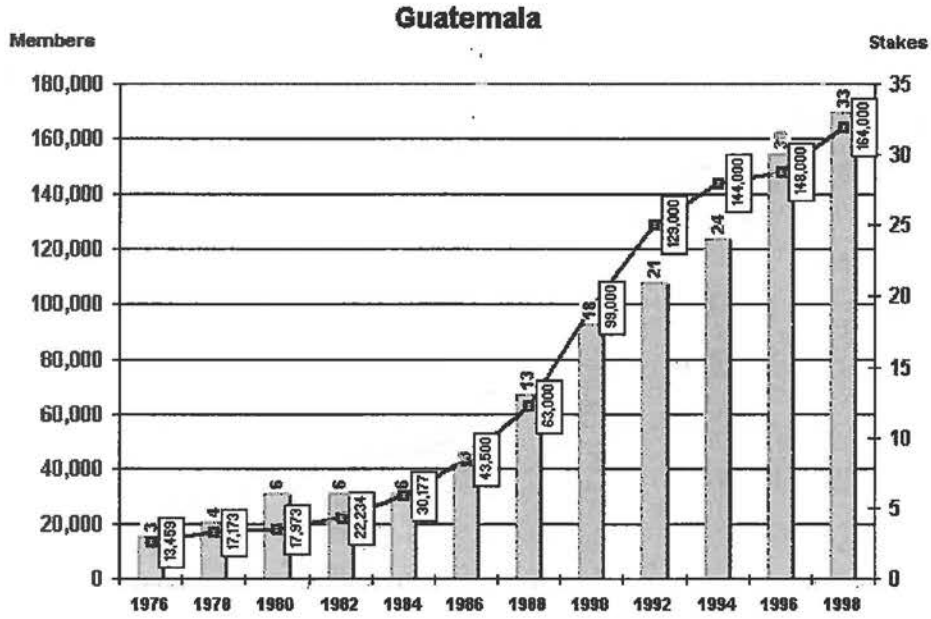


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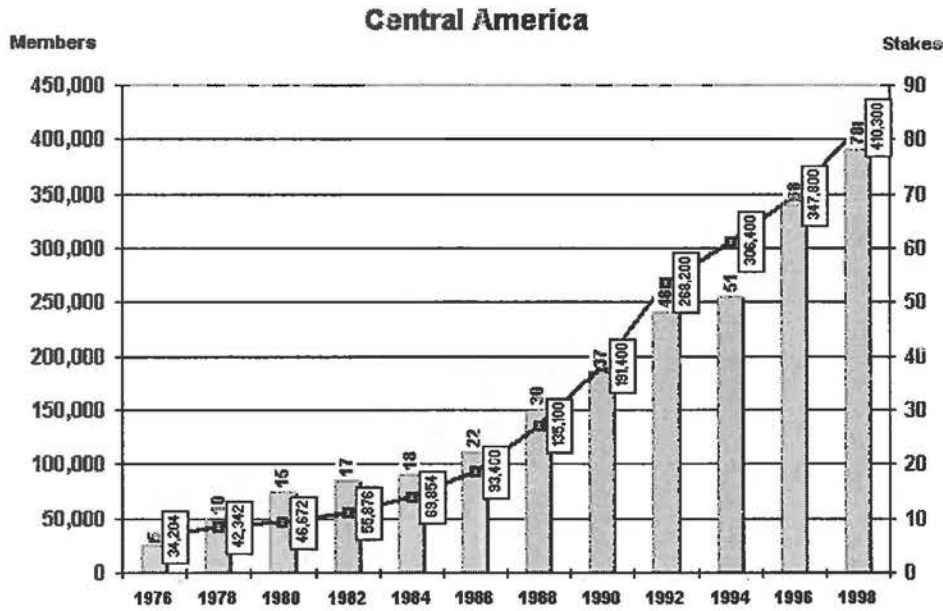


Table 5

Church Growth Since 1830

Year	Members	Missions	Missionaries	Countries
1830	6	0	0	1
1844	26,146	3	586	8
1947	1,016,170	43	2,132	29
1963	2,117,451	77	11,653	43
1971	3,090,953	98	15,205	50
1978	4,166,854	165	27,669	54
1982	5,162,619	180	26,606	86
1986	6,166,983	193	26,265	95
1989	7,308,700	228	39,739	100
1991	8,089,540	267	43,395	130
1994	9,024,569	303	48,708	156
1995	9,340,000	307	48,631	159
1996	9,694,500	309	53,000	160
1997	10,070,524	318	56,531	162

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SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: Matthew A. Jordan

Date: 1/25/99

Major: Theology

Senior Project

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. Ideally, this project will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the student's major field and some other discipline. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation. The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake:

This study will give a brief history and progression of the Mormon Church from its origins to current day. It will focus on their present day growth rates (which are quite high) with a view to finding the reasons people are attracted to it. This study will also examine how the Adventist church might use this attraction to draw people to Christ.

Expected date of completion 3/22 /99

Signature of faculty advisor [Signature]

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when project is completed:

This project has been completed as planned: yes [Signature]

This is an "A" project: yes [Signature]

The project is worth 2-3 hours of credit: yes [Signature]

Advisor's Final Signature _____

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: _____

