

The Threat of the Cults on the Mission Fields of the World

The threat is real, the threat is growing, and the threat must be met with a greater awareness and strategic action.

by Paul Carden

One of the least perceived and most ignored challenges now facing the Church is that of cults on world mission fields. Aggressive, well-funded, and deceptive cults and aberrant sects pose a present or potential danger in virtually every place the gospel is preached—from the industrialized nations of the west to developing societies with emerging languages.

Award-winning historian Ruth Tucker, author of *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, writes: "I have come to the conclusion that one of the most serious and least recognized problems we face in overseas missions is that of the proliferation of cults...."¹ Given the scarcity of literature on the problem and the lack of sustained, coordinated action to address it, it is evident that Tucker is right: few Christians in the field of missions seem to recognize the multi-faceted threat of the cults around the globe, consistently underestimating their resources, their determination, and the long-term impact they make on evangelism and church-planting. Based on a review of the available data, I have drawn three unwelcome conclusions:

First, *the threat is real*. Despite the fact that astonishingly little attention is paid to the problem, any serious examination of the most basic facts reveals that the cultic missionary thrust is now a serious force to be reckoned with.

Second, *the threat is growing*—in

both size and complexity. Not only are mega-cults like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses expanding rapidly worldwide, but a host of smaller sects is multiplying in number and accelerating their translation work, extending their reach into vulnerable countries and cultures as never before.

Third, *the threat must be met*. To the degree that the Church neglects its responsibility to respond strategically to this situation, the threat increases. Of course, we regard such movements as a danger to the life and outreach of the Church because the New Testament says they are. In apostolic times the Body of Christ was faced with cultists and false teachers, and the epistles give repeated warnings about deadly spiritual impostors. In Jude 3-4 we are bluntly exhorted to "contend earnestly" for "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" because that faith has sworn enemies.

In Acts 20:28-31, the apostle Paul warns the elders of Ephesus that such enemies of the gospel appear from both outside the Church ("savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock") and from within ("from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"). In 2 Corinthians Paul makes it painfully clear how very vulnerable the Church was to error (11:3-4, 13-15), and in his second

epistle Peter spares no words in warning his readers about the threat of false teachers in their midst, calling them to "be on your guard" (2:1-22; 3:15-17).

Today the battleground stretches beyond Judea and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thanks to technology and democratization, a dizzying variety of cults can now propagate their distorted gospels across borders and time zones more cheaply and efficiently than ever. Worse, they frequently change identities and tactics as they cross cultures, making them more difficult to detect and identify. With so few barriers remaining, cults on world mission fields are often doing the greatest harm where the Body of Christ is least equipped to respond effectively.

We are not at liberty to ignore such deceivers and their disciples; the stakes are too high. Instead, they must be refuted and resisted, and we must prepare ourselves to reach out with compassion and truth to those who have been taken captive. To do this we must first face the facts.

Although the scope of the problem is far too wide to address adequately here, in the present article I will briefly review some of the most recent research on the worldwide growth of cult movements, assess the short- and long-term implications of this growth, and offer strategies and solutions.

The Latter-day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormon church, was founded with just six members in 1830.² It has now passed the 10-million member mark and is active in some 162 nations and territories.³ To be sure, this makes it larger than most such cults, but is it a cause for serious concern?

In 1984 Rodney Stark, a widely respected sociologist at the University of Washington, analyzed Mormon growth trends and reached the startling conclusion that Mormonism was poised to become a world religion. To the amazement of skeptics, eleven years later Stark's *highest* projections had fallen short by almost a million members! He now calculates that, if these trends continue (and unless something drastic happens), by the year 2080 we will be facing 260 million Mormons worldwide—Mormons who need to be evangelized, which is no easy task.⁴

Though Mormons are famous for their large families, natural reproduction alone cannot account for such an astonishing increase in membership.⁵ Indeed, many factors contribute to this alarming trend, but one stands out: the Mormon missionary program. Writing in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, sociologists Gordon and Gary Shepherd conclude that “the overall number of converts to Mormonism appears most importantly to be a function of the sheer *number* of missionaries laboring in the field. The single best predictor of the annual Mormon conversion rate is the size of the LDS missionary force”⁶—which now numbers nearly 57,000⁷ laboring in 331 missions worldwide.⁸

Shepherd and Shepherd add: “Today, in fact, there is no other single religious denomination in the world—Catholic, Protestant, or non-Christian—whose full time *proselyting* [i.e., convert-making] force is remotely

close in size to that currently recruited, trained, and supported every year by the LDS church.”⁹ Indeed, the *MARC 1998-2000 Mission Handbook* reports that 825 U.S. and Canadian Protestant agencies combined were fielding only about 42,000 career and short-term (1-4 year) missionaries of all kinds.¹⁰ (The largest Mormon splinter group—the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—had only 123 missionaries as of October 1997.)¹¹

How much does the cult invest in this unparalleled missionary effort? In a 1991 interview with the *Arizona Republic*, mission statistician David Barrett estimated the LDS church's *annual* spending on missionary outreach at a whopping \$550 million.¹² and in 1997 raised his estimate by 40% to \$770 million.¹³ Given that the church has at least \$30 billion in assets and an estimated annual gross income of \$5.9 billion,¹⁴ it seems well prepared to sustain—and dramatically increase—its missionary presence worldwide for years to come. Indeed, given the correspondence between its missionary force and conversions, what should give Christian missions strategists even greater pause is the future outlook. Shepherd and Shepherd write:

Even if only a third of eligible young men accepts LDS missionary assignments, full-time missionary ranks should continue to expand along with the growing membership base. If...the size of the LDS missionary force were to continue to increase at a rate of 50 percent per decade for twenty more years, there would be 110,000 missionaries laboring in about 700 missions by the year 2015. Within fifty years at this same rate the church would be managing a force of over 370,000 missionaries in approximately 2,300 missions. As fantastic as these figures seem, they represent the current potential of Mormon proselyting efforts in the first half of the twenty-first century.¹⁵

The Mormons' missionary force does not work alone; the church

makes very effective use of complementary media (e.g., television spots offering free videos) and tourist attractions (e.g., Hawaii's immensely popular Polynesian Cultural Center) as a first means of gaining contacts for energetic young “elders” and “sisters” to follow up.¹⁶

Whom are the Mormons seeking—and converting? Shepherd and Shepherd observe that “the overwhelming majority of Mormon converts [around the world] are already Christians, who are recruited in [religious] markets already cultivated by other Christian denominations.”¹⁷ Surprisingly, even prominent Mormons have candidly acknowledged their missionary program's parasitic quality and their intention to feed on the labors of missionaries, whether those of generations past or today's Wycliffe translators.

Joe Stringham, an official Mormon church linguist who received training (while an active Mormon) from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, writes in the cult's official monthly magazine that “We Latter-day Saints owe much to Bible translators. Rarely have our missionaries begun proselyting [sic] among a people who did not already have a Bible. Having a Bible is a vital step in preparing people to receive the fulness [sic] of the gospel.”¹⁸ In 1997, Mormon general authority Alexander B. Morrison stated: “We owe a debt of gratitude to other Christians who came to Black Africa before we in [the Mormon church] did so. It is significant that essentially all of our converts in Black Africa are coming to us from other Christian churches.”¹⁹

Mormonism has been especially successful in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania. Its missionary work in sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet Union (and its satellite nations), begun only recently, may yet bear fruit. In Asia the Mormon missionary thrust has yet to make a sig-

nificant impact beyond the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.²⁰

Jehovah's Witnesses

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was founded in 1884, and its followers have been known since 1931 as Jehovah's Witnesses.²¹ Writing in the May 1997 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, scholars Rodney Stark and Laurence Iannaccone describe the Society as "the most rapidly growing religious movement in the western world."²² It may pose an even greater danger than the Mormon church.

Like Mormonism, the Witnesses are a large and growing movement. In 1945 the Watchtower Society had 156,299 members worldwide;²³ a half century later it reported a "peak" active membership of 5.59 million in 232 "lands" (i.e., nations and territories).²⁴ But a realistic estimate of those directly engaged with the cult at any given time (e.g., attending meetings, preparing for baptism) raises the figure to 13 million, based on attendance at its annual "Memorial" observance.²⁵ Whereas the Mormon church includes infant "children of record" and inactive adherents in its membership statistics,²⁶ the Watchtower only counts "publishers"—i.e., baptized Witnesses who go door-to-door.²⁷ In reality, then, the Watchtower Society is the larger of the two movements.

The Watchtower may also pose a much more serious threat to the cause of Christ worldwide—both now and in the future. Stark and Iannaccone write "if social scientists back in 1950 had projected Witness growth for the next 40 years at the rate of 6% per year, their membership prediction for 1990 would have been nearly 500,000 too low."²⁸ The two scholars foresee that, at an annual growth rate

of only 4%, by the year 2090 the Jehovah's Witness movement will reach almost 195 million active members worldwide.²⁹ (As they note in the same article, "Granted that many things can invalidate projections, when a movement has maintained a substantial rate of growth for a long time, it takes a lot to slow it down.") Again, if we double or triple this figure to reflect the actual number of other children and adults directly involved in the life of the movement, we may

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find ourselves facing a cult population of half a billion or more. (Stark and Iannaccone note that "except for the years immediately following the prophetic disappointment of 1975, Witnesses' growth has consistently outpaced Mormon growth. In 1954, there were 7.7 Mormons per Witness *publisher*. By 1994, this had been reduced to 1.9. Given that the Mormons are generally viewed as the world's most successful new religion and had about an 80-year start on the Witnesses, this is an astonishing achievement."³⁰

Such rapid expansion has brought a shortage of meeting places. For example, the August 1997 issue of the internal Witness newsletter *Our Kingdom Ministry* reports that, due to rapid expansion in the Third World, the Watchtower Society simply can't build meeting places fast enough. "

[O]ne country with 568 congregations has just one Kingdom Hall. Another country has one Kingdom Hall for every 129 congregations....Several other countries, with a total of over 1,000 congregations, have not yet been able to construct even one Kingdom Hall." They add: "Many more Kingdom Halls are needed in Russia. The increase in the number of Witnesses there is very rapid, but about 85 percent of the congregations under the Russia branch do not have permanent meeting places..." (The cult's 1996 *Yearbook* relates that a congregation in Murmansk, Russia, had ballooned to 800 publishers but couldn't yet be divided "because there is only one elder."³¹

Another noteworthy aspect of the Witnesses' worldwide growth is their apparent ability to penetrate cultures which have been comparatively resistant to Mormonism. Stark and Iannaccone write that "...the Witnesses have become far more 'globalised' than the Mormons. While nearly half of all Mormons reside in the United States, only 19% of Jehovah's Witnesses do."³²

Humanly speaking, the secret to the Witnesses' success seems mainly to lie in two key areas: literature and lay mobilization.

Tools of Their Trade

The Watchtower Society pumps vast amounts of printed materials to its followers and prospective members. As of September 15, 1998, the average printing of its colorful biweekly *Watchtower* magazine was 22.1 million copies in 129 languages—the largest circulation, they claim, of any religious magazine in the world. In 1997 the Witnesses produced over a billion copies of *The Watchtower* and its sister periodical, *Awake!*³³ The cult has printing facili-

ties around the world, and their capacity is astonishing: the Taunus/Selters' branch in Germany can print and bind an amazing 1.6 million magazines and 80,000 books per day in 42 languages.³⁴

The Society also gives special emphasis to the translation of its peculiar version of the Bible, the *New World Translation*, which is especially useful in denying such historic Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the bodily resurrection of Christ. From 1950 to 1997, over 91 million copies of the *New World Translation* had been printed in dozens of languages ranging from Portuguese and Norwegian to Sesotho and Xhosa.³⁵ (By comparison, in 1997 the Mormons boasted of "flooding the earth" with some 83 million copies of the *Book of Mormon* since 1830.³⁶

Essential to the effectiveness of the Watchtower's literature distribution is its extensive and sophisticated translation work. The Witnesses, determined to reach the whole world with their books and periodicals, have gone to lengths unmatched by any organization—Christian or secular.

According to the cult's official history, by the late 1970s the Watchtower Society found it necessary to develop its own custom computer programs for typesetting and photocomposition to meet its ambitious proselytizing objectives. "There were no commercial programs available for entering and phototypesetting many of the 167 languages in which the...Society was then printing, so the Witnesses had to develop their own. At that time the commercial world saw no money in languages used by smaller populations or by people with very limited income, but Jehovah's Witnesses are interested in lives."³⁷

The cult's leadership "realized that if Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide could study the same material in their meetings week by week and distribute

the same literature in the field ministry, this would have a powerful unifying effect."³⁸ By 1984 the Witnesses had achieved simultaneous publication of the biweekly *Watchtower* magazine in 20 languages, a figure which grew to 66 by 1992³⁹ and nearly doubled—to 113—as of 1996.⁴⁰

By 1992 the Witnesses had over 800 translators at work around the world⁴¹, aided by sophisticated custom computer programs⁴², and "the software was available for processing material in over 200 languages, [while] programs for other languages used by millions of people were still being developed."⁴³ The Watchtower's translation work is expanding steadily. In 1996, "18 new languages were added to the list of those in which the Society publishes Bible literature,"⁴⁴ and in 1997 "the Society approved literature in 25 additional languages..."⁴⁵ (By comparison, the Mormon church's translation work is still getting off the ground; as of December 1996 the cult's official magazine was published in only 23 languages.⁴⁶ Indeed, the Watchtower Society justifiably boasts:

The amount of Bible literature distributed by the Witnesses to publicize the Kingdom, along with the diversity of languages in which it has been made available, finds no equal in any human field of endeavor. The records are incomplete; but the reports that are still available show that in 294 languages, 10,107,565,269 books, booklets, brochures, and magazines, as well as uncounted billions of tracts, were put into the hands of interested people between the years 1920 and 1992.⁴⁷

(The only comparable effort by evangelicals would seem to be the *JESUS* film, which had been translated into 455 languages and dialects as of July 29, 1998, with another 245 in production.⁴⁸ The crucial difference is that, in most cases, the Witnesses' translation work in each language is ongoing [involving monthly or

biweekly periodicals], whereas the *JESUS* Film Project usually dubs or subtitles its principal product into a given language only once.)

What is the result of this ocean of doctrinal poison? Based on my 20 years' experience in this field, I believe that countless numbers of those whom the Witnesses don't convert, they contaminate—convincing them through seemingly scriptural arguments that the Trinity and other core doctrines of the historic Christian faith are pagan lies, and rendering them far more difficult to bring to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Add to these the significant percentage of Witnesses who go inactive⁴⁹ (the majority of whom I suspect are "convinced" by the Watchtower's doctrinal system, even though they become disaffected with the organization), and you have millions of people who must be "unWatchtowerized" if they are to be evangelized.

Lay Mobilization

Stark and Iannaccone make the proposition that "Religious movements will grow to the extent that they can generate a highly motivated, volunteer religious labor force, including many willing to proselytize."⁵⁰ Indeed, to distribute its vast publishing output, the Watchtower Society mobilizes its entire active membership, virtually all of whom must take part in personal outreach in order to remain in good standing.⁵¹ In 1997 the Witnesses logged almost 1.2 billion hours worldwide standing on street-corners and going door-to-door with the Society's substitute gospel.⁵²

To carry out this work, the Witnesses are trained continuously, and their preparation begins early. Stark and Iannaccone write:

It seems instructive that two of the most successful religious movements of modern times—the Mormons and the Witnesses—both achieve very effective socialization by giving

young people important roles to perform. Mormon religious education is predicated on the assumption that it is preparing teenagers to be missionaries, thereby being able to send more than 40,000 young men and women off each year to be full-time missionaries (at their own expense) [sic]. Nothing builds more intense commitment than the act of being a missionary, and for Mormons this experience comes at precisely the age when people are the most susceptible to doubt and defection. The Witnesses do not train their children to spend 2 years as full-time missionaries, but they do train them, from their early teens, to spend a lifetime as a part-time missionary—a publisher. Most Witness children begin to knock on doors by the time they complete high school (and many begin younger). Being thus exposed to rejection, ridicule, and even abuse may cause some young Witnesses to withdraw. However, it appears that rejection binds most of them ever more strongly to the movement...⁵³

And the Witnesses offer more than magazine subscriptions: householders who are interested in having an ongoing “Bible study” in their own homes will find the Witnesses eager to arrange one at a time of their convenience. How many Christians are willing to do the same?

Researcher David Barrett estimates the Watchtower’s annual missions budget at \$280 million—barely more than a third of what the Mormon church spends each year.⁵⁴ On the economic advantages of the Witnesses’ volunteer labor force, Stark and Iannaccone observe:

In addition to missionising, a large volunteer religious labor force contributes to the strength of religious movements in other important ways... For example, labor can often be substituted for capital. Thus, while the Methodists must not only pay their clergy, but also pay for all their clerical, cleaning and maintenance services, and hire contractors to build new churches, the Witnesses rely on volunteer labor to provide all these

things, including the construction of their meeting halls. Indeed the Witnesses rely on volunteer “rapid-building” crews to construct a new Kingdom Hall from the ground up over a single weekend.⁵⁵

Like the Mormon missionary thrust, the Witness proselytizing program has a parasitic quality. Stark and Iannaccone write that “a Christian sect, such as Jehovah’s Wit-

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nesses, will do best where most people are familiar with Christian culture and do least well where most people are familiar with another religious culture.”⁵⁶ Correspondingly, the Witnesses have enjoyed great success in Latin America and Africa, and their growth in the nations of the former Soviet Union has been astonishing.⁵⁷

Other Movements

The foregoing barely scratches the surface; a host of other cults and aggressive, theologically aberrant movements now competes with the Body of Christ in the spiritual marketplace and preys on new and nominal believers. The Baha’i faith now claims over 5 million followers in 235 nations and territories and, unlike the Mormons and Witnesses, has provoked very little apologetic or evangelistic response, even in the west. L. Ron

Hubbard’s Church of Scientology—which claims to be compatible with other religious faiths—is now a global phenomenon. Anti-Trinitarian “Oneness Pentecostal” sects have an estimated 17 million followers worldwide.⁵⁸ The followers of pseudo-Christian spiritist Alan Kardec in Brazil, the *Iglesia ni Cristo* cult of the Philippines, the *Luz del Mundo* cult of Mexico, and other heretical, missionary-minded movements around the world claim millions of adherents who need specialized evangelistic strategies. At the same time, dozens of smaller, less-notorious cults and sects are multiplying and extending their harm into areas where the church is least able to resist and evangelize them.

Even if the major cults stopped growing today, they constitute a significant mission field in themselves. But the likely reality is that the major cults *won’t* stop growing and given their projected membership they will constitute a formidable evangelistic challenge in the 21st century—all the more so if we do not take preventive action *now*. Contextualized strategies are needed for each group and, in many cases, each distinctive culture in which they operate.

Most of the growth of cults and aberrant movements is taking place in the so-called Third World or developing world, where Christians have the fewest resources to identify and resist such groups. The Jehovah’s Witnesses boast of their progress in the “virgin territory” of such places as rural Moldova⁵⁹, and we receive sobering reports from the Muslim-dominated former Soviet republics of Central Asia where tiny, struggling groups of Christians are under persistent assault by the Witnesses. Believe it or not, as of 1997 the Watchtower’s highest growth rate in Latin America

was in communist Cuba.⁶⁰ We must also remember that in some parts of the world, cults are coming close to achieving a sort of dominance. For example, in the island nation of Tonga, one third of the population is Mormon (and a quarter of the population of both American and Western Samoa).⁶¹ In Spain, "There are almost as many active Jehovah's Witnesses as Protestant church members,"⁶² and in Poland the Witnesses outnumber evangelicals outright.⁶³ What of the gradual opening of China to outside religious influences, and the efforts of cults to convert and co-opt the millions of vulnerable Christians there? Such high-risk and newly exposed countries and cultures urgently need special attention.

Strategies and Solutions

Is the situation hopeless? If we ignore the problem, yes; if we act with God's help, no!

Even in the "first world," the average pastor—much less the average Christian layperson—cannot devote himself to monitoring and biblically critiquing the fast-multiplying number of new and heretical religious movements in his own culture. Christian leaders and lay believers in the developing world are especially disadvantaged in this regard. Clearly, the antidote for deception is discernment, but discernment depends on data. To effectively meet this challenge, more apologetically oriented materials (tracts, pamphlets, books, videos, and audiocassettes) are needed in increasing numbers in Third World languages spoken by millions in nations where cults like the Watchtower grow with little or no organized resistance. But as valuable as such materials are, they offer only limited assistance; a five-page chapter on Rev. Moon's Unification Church may not meet a desperate pastor's needs, and a simple

tract on William Branham or the Children of God cult may not suffice in a difficult counseling situation.

Most of the pseudo-Christian cults and aberrant religious movements now spreading internationally are based in the west, and many of these originate in North America, where a handful of specialized evangelical agencies perform valuable ongoing research into their doctrines and tactics, developing biblical critiques and evangelistic strategies.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, almost none of these agencies has either the means or the motivation to translate and adapt their resources for cross-cultural use, much less establish an ongoing physical presence outside their borders.⁶⁵

What can be done? Having played an active role in the operation and/or establishment of such outreaches in the United States, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union, I submit that the ideal solution is to establish what may be called Full-Service Cult-Research and Response Agencies (or FSAs, for short) in the developing world. These FSAs should have the following minimal characteristics:

- * They should be nondenominational/interdenominational Christian in spirit and practice
- * Where possible, they should be registered as nonprofit educational organizations
- * They should have at least some full-time staff, including trained researchers
- * They should have a stable base of financial support
- * They should have a stable office space which is accessible to the public.

FSAs should engage in the following essential activities on an ongoing basis:

- * Monitoring/data-gathering on cultic movements in their countries
- * Monitoring popular (e.g., news-

papers) and scholarly media reports on such movements

- * Maintaining library and research files (which, if possible, are made accessible to qualified outside researchers)

- * Publishing a regular research bulletin directed at pastors and ministry workers

- * Cataloging all existing books and other media on cults and related topics in the local language(s)

- * Maintaining the highest ethical standards in research, publishing, and any other representation of cults and controversial religious movements (in conformity with the 1997 *Manual of Doctrinal & Ethical Standards* published by Evangelical Ministries to New Religions [EMNR], a North American umbrella group for cult and apologetics-oriented ministries)

FSAs should provide the following resources and services to both the Christian public and to the general public (e.g., media representatives, academics, government):

- * Objective, accurate information on cults and new/controversial religious movements (e.g., their history, beliefs, practices, membership and other statistics)
- * Balanced biblical assessments of such movements.

In addition, FSAs should offer:

- * Specialized training/teaching in evangelism and prevention for pastors, church and parachurch ministry workers, and motivated lay believers
- * Organized evangelistic outreaches to public cult events (e.g., to Jehovah's Witness conventions; spiritist festivals)
- * Individual counseling or consultation, whether in person or via telephone or correspondence

Such FSAs can multiply their effectiveness through ongoing or project-based ministry partnerships with

evangelistic agencies like the JESUS Film Project and broadcast outreaches like TransWorld Radio.

Finally, no strategy to resist and evangelize the cults worldwide can prosper apart from a broad-based intercessory campaign. Two North American countercult agencies declared 1997 "the International Year of Prayer for Jehovah's Witnesses," but seemingly few outside their immediate circles of influence ever found out. To succeed, such a campaign requires broad support and a continuing effort to raise Christian awareness through the effective dissemination of strategic research data.

The problem will not go away by itself. Alarmed by the accelerating growth of Jehovah's Witnesses on world mission fields and exasperated by the church's inaction, the late Walter Martin wrote in 1965 that "the gravity of the problem which confronts the Christian Church is apparent to all but the most adamantly obtuse." (66) One generation—and many millions of cultists—later, precious little has been done to address this grave state of affairs.

We cannot wait. As J.K. van Baalen wrote, "The cults are the unpaid bills of the church." If we do not act now to deal with this international explosion of error in the name of Christ, we will needlessly run up debts that will spell untold pain and sorrow for future generations of believers. Will we respond? To paraphrase Edmund Burke's famous dictum, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for God's people to do nothing."

Endnotes

1. Ruth A. Tucker, "Mormon Expansion Overseas," in *Christian Institute for Mormon Studies: Proceedings & Papers*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Utah Institute for Biblical Studies, 1992), p. 19.
2. Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bit-

ton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 16.

3. *Church News*, April 18, 1998, p. 11.
4. Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research*, December 1996, pp. 175-178.
5. Mormon scholars Gordon and Gary Shepherd write that far more important than natural increase (i.e., birth rates exceeding death rates and defections) to "rapid expansion of the modern LDS church in many parts of the world has been a renewed emphasis on international proselytizing since World War II and a willingness to concentrate church resources on the systematic enhancement of missionary programs....By 1960 the proportion of LDS membership growth worldwide due to annual conversions exceeded natural increase for the first time in this century and has continued to do so ever since. Currently, in fact, annual convert baptisms exceed those of Mormon children by approximately four to one." See their "Membership Growth, Church Activity, and Missionary Recruitment" in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, p. 34. (This special theme issue of *Dialogue*, "Mormons and Mormonism in the Twenty-first Century: Prospects and Issues," features a series of articles presenting hard-to-find scholarly data on Mormon growth trends.)
6. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 38.
7. *Church News*, April 18, 1998, p. 11.
8. *Church News*, March 7, 1998, p. 9.
9. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 39. The authors draw a harsh contrast with Protestant missionary efforts: "by mainstream Protestant standards, all full-time LDS missionaries, including mission presidents, are short-termers. Compared to Christian career missionaries, the vast majority of Mormonism's youthful missionary corps lack theological knowledge and ecclesiastical experience. Their relative immaturity, however, is balanced by idealistic enthusiasm and by a willingness to live Spartan lives in a regimented proselytizing program under experienced adult supervision. Most importantly, the full-time LDS missionary force continues to grow, with good reason to believe that its growth will extend well into the twenty-first century, while many

Protestant mission agencies will struggle to maintain previous rates of recruitment in their missionary forces. Continued institutional emphasis on the lay missionary obligations of every member, and especially the intensive religious socialization of young males to accept full-time mission calls before assuming other adult responsibilities, gives the LDS church a decisive missionary recruiting advantage over most evangelical competitors (who typically depend on idiosyncratic personal calls to the ministry in order to staff their missionary ranks)."

10. Telephone conversation with John A. Siewert, October 1997, notes on file. (See John A. Siewert and Edna G. Valdez, eds., *Mission Handbook 1998-2000* [Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1997], pp. 74, 84.) By way of contrast, in 1991 the *Arizona Republic* reported David Barrett's assessment that "The Roman Catholic Church's missionary programs are far larger [than those of the Mormon church], involving about 150,000 missionaries, but are not ranked as high because they are divided among a large number of religious orders and are not under central control..." "Church Thrives on Tithes," *Arizona Republic*, July 1, 1991, p. A6.
11. Telephone conversation with human resources staff, RLDS church headquarters, October 1997, notes on file.
12. "Church Thrives on Tithes," *Arizona Republic*, July 1, 1991, p. A6.
13. Telephone conversation with David Barrett, October 8, 1997, notes on file.
14. David van Biema, "Kingdom Come," *Time*, August 4, 1997, p. 54.
15. Shepherd and Shepherd, pp. 43-44. The authors note that such growth will depend on increasing numbers of members who are willing to socialize their youth to accept missionary assignments and contribute financially to their mission field support. Beyond this, they believe that two changes toward young Mormon women could increase North American missionary enlistments "dramatically": (1) lowering the age for single "sister" missionaries (which is now 21), and (2) emphasizing missionary service as strongly among young women as among young men. (As of 1996 about 20% of Mormon missionaries were young women.)
16. Sociologist Anson Shupe describes the successful media strategy

- (emphasizing health and family-oriented public-service announcements on television) used by the cult in many countries to establish a favorable climate prior to beginning legal missionary work; see his book *The Darker Side of Virtue: Corruption, Scandal and the Mormon Empire* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), pp. 27-29.
17. Shepherd and Shepherd, p. 35.
 18. Joe Stringham, "The Bible," *The Ensign*, January 1990, p. 18, cited in Ruth A. Tucker, "Mormon Expansion Overseas," in *Christian Institute for Mormon Studies: Proceedings & Papers*, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Utah Institute for Biblical Studies, 1992), pp. 19-20.
 19. *Church News*, Nov., 29, 1997, p. 5
 20. Mormon scholars Lowell C. Bennion and Lawrence A. Young write that Latin America has "roughly one-third of the total and nearly two-thirds of the membership outside North America," noting a Brigham Young University geographer's recent projection that "In the year 2020...Latin Americans would account for about 71 percent of all LDS while North America and Europe combined would account for only 11 percent." Bennion and Young write that "only on the Christianized or Westernized edges of the eastern hemisphere has the church established significant beachheads"—for example, in Oceania, the Philippines, and South Korea. See their "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950-2020," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, pp. 8-32.
 21. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 718, 720.
 22. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 133. This article is one of the few such scholarly examinations of the Witnesses in recent decades.
 23. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 501.
 24. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
 25. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
 26. Lowell C. "Ben" Bennion and Lawrence A. Young, "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950-2020," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, p. 9.
 27. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 139.
 28. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 154.
 29. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 154.
 30. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 140.
 31. *1996 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1996), p. 51.
 32. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 140. Mormon sociologist Armand L. Mauss observes that "...the fundamental reality is that we are nowhere near having a 'world church.' We can more accurately be considered a 'hemisphere church,' for 85 percent of all Mormons live in the Western Hemisphere. The church has certainly prospered at certain times in other parts of the world, depending on local circumstances. It appears, however, that success has often depended largely on influences more worldly than spiritual, such as the appeal (usually temporary) of American cultural imports, including religions." Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism in the Twenty-first Century: Marketing for Miracles," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1996, pp. 240-41.
 33. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 17.
 34. *1995 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1995), p. 30. In fact, a year later the Society reported that daily book production at Taunus/Selters had climbed to 100,000. See *1996 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, p. 50.
 35. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 5.
 36. "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," *The Ensign*, March 1998, p. 75.
 37. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 596.
 38. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 587-598.
 39. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 598.
 40. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 7.
 41. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 112.
 42. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), pp. 599, 602
 43. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 597.
 44. *1997 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1997), p. 6.
 45. *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 17.
 46. "Update: International Magazines," *The Ensign*, July 1997, p. 80.
 47. *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1993), p. 520.
 48. Telephone conversation with JESUS Film Project representative, August 24, 1998.
 49. Stark and Iannaccone observe that "the Witnesses do have many defectors. This can be inferred from the contrasts between the average number of publishers and the peak number for any given year....[W]hen the number of baptisms are aggregated across years, the total soon greatly surpasses the reported increase in the number of publishers. For example, the average number of publishers increased by 848,000 between 1990 and 1994. However, there were 1,250,434 baptisms during this same period." Nevertheless, "it would be quite wrong to interpret this as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, by excluding those with less commitment, the Witnesses so maximize their proportion of devoted publishers

— Paul Carden —

- that even substantial rates of defection are offset by far more substantial rates of conversion." "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 147.
50. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 147.
51. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, pp. 136, 137.
52. "1997 Service Year Report of Jehovah's Witnesses Worldwide," *The Watchtower*, January 1, 1998, p. 21.
53. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, May 1997, p. 153.
54. Telephone conversation with David Barrett, October 8, 1997, notes on file.
55. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 2 [May 1997], p. 148.
56. Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why the Jehovah's Witnesses Grow so Rapidly: A Theoretical Application," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (May 1997), p. 142.
57. Paul Carden, "Cults and New Religious Movements in the Former Soviet Union," *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, Summer 1998, pp. 1-5
58. *Charisma*, June 1997, p. 62
59. *1998 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998), p. 12.
60. *1998 Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* (Brooklyn, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1998), p. 32.
61. *Deseret News 1997-98 Church Almanac*, pp. 280, 395, 405.
62. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 500.
63. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 454.

64. These include Watchman Fellowship, Personal Freedom Outreach, Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Gospel Truths Ministries, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, and Comments from the Friends.
65. Indeed, few such agencies exist outside of North America and western Europe. The *1996 Directory of Cult Research Organizations* lists 562 evangelical ministries (or resource individuals) worldwide. Of these, 471 are in North America, 46 are in Europe, and 23 are in Australia and New Zealand. Only 9 are listed for Central and South America, and 13 for Asia, India, and Africa combined. (Sadly, some of these are already defunct.) Two of the only North American agencies to commit themselves to translation or ongoing international outreach are Gospel Truths Ministries (which has a variety of high-quality tracts in foreign languages) and Watchman Fellowship (with outreaches to Romania and Moldova).

The Internet may provide a partial, short-term solution to the present scarcity of resources and distribution, despite the fact that relatively few Christians in the areas of greatest need own computers. For example, David A. Reed of Comments from the Friends is adding foreign-language links from his ministry's web site on Jehovah's Witnesses, and the web site of the Center for Apologetics Research in St. Petersburg offers Russian-language tracts and other studies that can be downloaded and printed even by computers without Russian fonts. (<http://members.tripod.com/~CFAR/index.html>). Christians must prepare to complete effectively in a growing, multilingual Internet environment. According to a recent report by the Worldwatch Institute, use of the Internet is increasing "exponentially," and while most of the estimated 107 million users now online are in industrial countries, 500 million people ("8 percent of humanity") are projected to be online by the year 2001. (Barbara Crossette. "A New Measure of Disparities: Poor Sanitation in Internet Era," *New York Times*, May 12, 1998, p. A11)

66. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985 rev. ed), p. 370.

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Photo here
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