

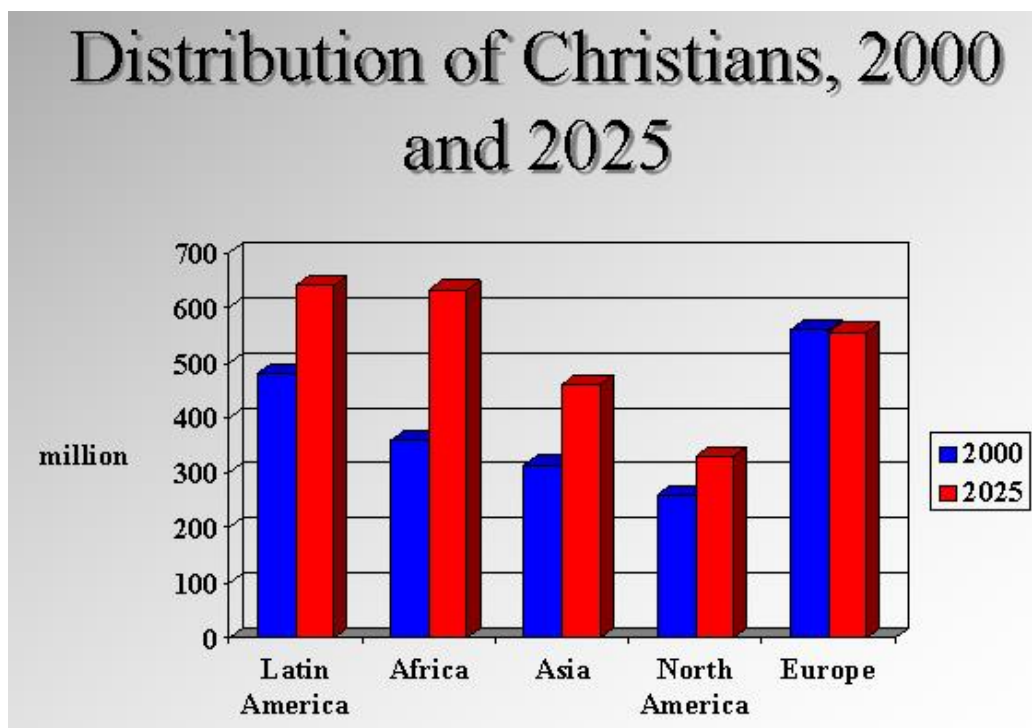
Twenty-First Century Adventism: The Impact of The Decline of The Church in The Developed World and Its Rise in The Developing World

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A paper presented at the University Adventist Church at Loma Linda University at the behest of *Adventist Today*, November 2005.

I will begin by showing you the dramatic changes that have taken place in recent decades in the global distribution of all Christians, and of Adventists in particular. I will then compare and contrast the Adventist statistics with those of the other major religious groups that emerged, as we did, in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. I will then focus on the likely impact of the changing center of gravity within Adventism on our church during the coming decades.

Christianity is experiencing huge growth in the Developing World, and as a result has become predominantly what has been called "Southern".



The blue bars show the distribution of nominal Christians in 2000: 480 million in Latin America, 360 million in Africa, 313 million in Asia—a total of 1.153 billion, or about 57.7% of all Christians – as compared with a mere 260 million in North America and 560 million in Europe [Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, pp 2-3, 223, extrapolated from David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 2001]. Although the largest single bloc of

nominal Christians is still in Europe, in stating this we must emphasize the word "nominal", for church attendance there is extraordinarily low. This highlights another difference: the vitality of the Christianity in the Developing World is, in general, much greater than in the Developed World. Philip Jenkins' estimates that by 2025, 66.7% of Christians will be in Africa, Asia and Latin America, illustrated by the red bars in the figure above. That is, he expects continued rapid growth in the Developing World, and that the center of gravity among Christians will continue to shift dramatically during the coming half century. Since his estimate is based only on expected changes in population and does not count gains or losses through conversions, the actual figures in 2025 could well show an even more dramatic shift.

At the same time, Christianity has been mutating – but in ways that are very different in the Developed and Developing Worlds. With Mainline Protestants (that is, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Lutherans, the United Church of Christ, Northern Baptists, and the Disciples of Christ) leading the way, but with movements pressing for similar changes within Catholicism, churches in the Developed World are pressing forward in a new Reformation which is making them more inclusive and tolerant, as seen for example in changes in gender roles and issues related to sexuality.

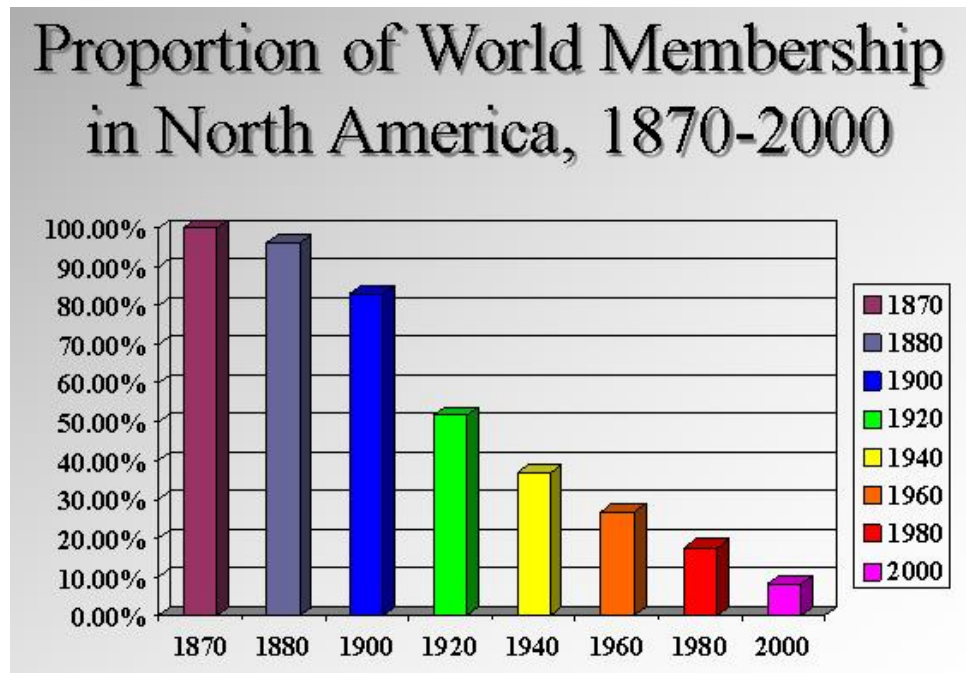
However, a far more significant, and very different kind of change is taking place in the Developing World. Jenkins argues that Christianity in the Developing World is very different from that in the Developed World—it is much more traditional in its norms and conservative in its theology, and is not as inclined towards openness and tolerance, at least in the issues that have been embraced by churches in the Developed World. Indeed,

... Worldwide, Christianity is actually moving toward supernaturalism and neo-orthodoxy, and in many ways toward the ancient world view expressed in the New Testament: a vision of Jesus as the embodiment of divine power, who overcomes the evil forces that inflict calamity and sickness upon the human race. ... There is increasing tension between what one might call a liberal Northern Reformation and the surging Southern religious revolution, which one might equate with the Counter-Reformation... (A)n enormous rift seems inevitable [Jenkins, *Atlantic Monthly*, 2002, p.56].

Jenkins argues that it is the "Southern" version of Christianity, already numerically predominant, that is likely to take over. The rift within the Anglican Communion since the Episcopal Church approved the appointment of Bishop Robinson, its first openly gay bishop, in New Hampshire, in 2003 – that is, after Jenkins published his two pieces – well illustrates the forces he described at work. Such changes are likely to have huge repercussions on the organizational structure, governance, leadership styles and personnel, finances, and what is emphasized in the teaching, values and practices of Christian denominations. Jenkins adds that "few seem to realize the potential political role of ascendant Southern Christianity." He argues that it is this, rather than Islam, in spite of the current attention of the media to the latter, "that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century. The process will not necessarily be a peaceful one... [Jenkins, *Atlantic Monthly*, 2002, p.56].

The Changing Distribution Within Global Adventism

Adventism is part of the process described by Jenkins. Indeed, its growth and membership is more highly concentrated in the Developing World than any other Christian religious group that I can think of.



Adventism originated in the U.S., and until 1870 all its members were in North America, for no missionaries had yet been sent abroad. However, by 1901 Adventists had entered every continent, and almost every major country. During the 1920s the number of members in North America was surpassed by those elsewhere, and thereafter the home continent's proportion of the total membership continued to drop steadily, to only 8.0% in 2000.

Adventist Membership, Developed vs Developing Worlds, 1960-2000

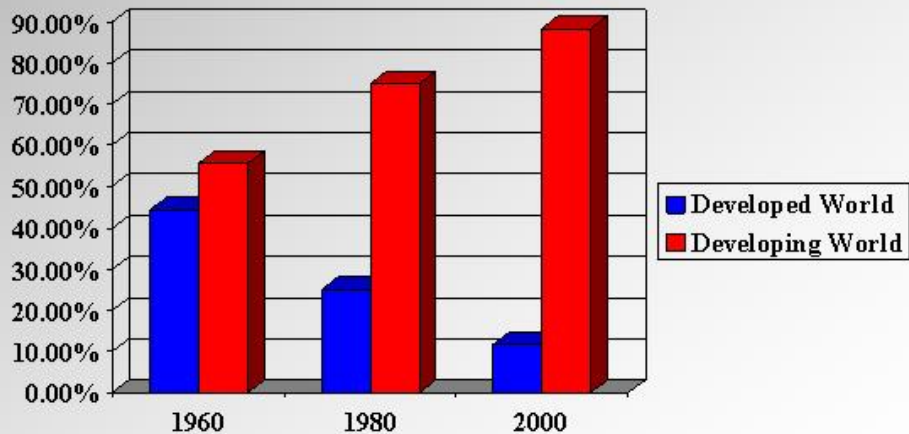


Figure 3 shows the extent to which membership became concentrated in the Developing World between 1960 and 2000: by the year 2000 only 11.6% of the total membership was located in the Developed World.

Membership, Continental Groupings, 1960, 2000

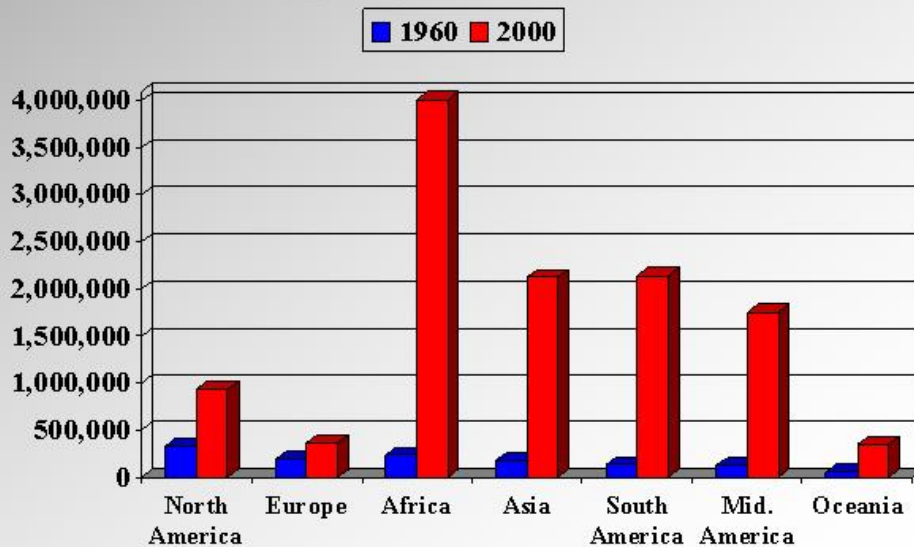


Figure 4 compares the membership by continental groupings in 1960 and 2000: in 1960 North America was still by far the largest, with over one-quarter of the membership; by 2000, more than one-third of Adventists were in Sub-Saharan Africa, and another one-third in South America, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean.

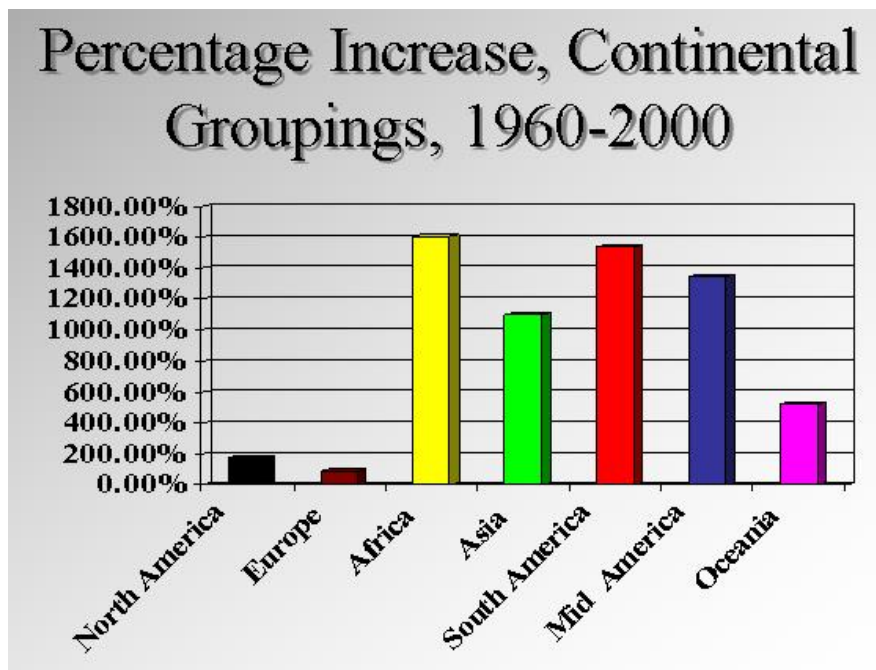


Figure 5 compares the large percentage gains in the Southern continents with the modest gains in Europe and North America in the same period.

Comparing Adventists With Mormons And Jehovah's Witnesses

I teach a course that focuses on four religious groups that were formed in the US in the Nineteenth Century: in chronological order, these are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly known as Mormons), Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. All four are now rapidly growing global churches. Much can be learned by comparing the growth and distribution of Adventists with the other groups. The Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses are, like the Adventists, centralized with carefully collected statistics, so that comparisons between these three groups are relatively easy to make. (Note that while both Mormons and Adventists count baptized members, the Witnesses count only those they call "Publishers" – that is, those actually witnessing. They thus exclude the infirm and baptized members who are not witnessing. However, I have been told that the pressure to witness is so great that those who have the health to witness but who cease to do so often stop attending soon thereafter.)

Distribution of Adventists, Mormons, and Witnesses by Region, 2000

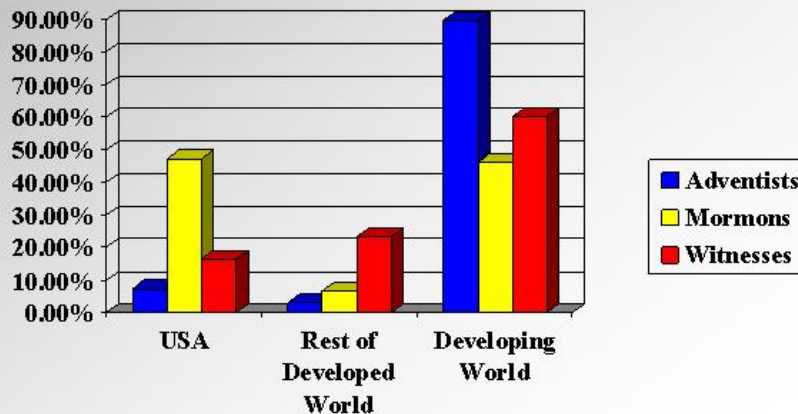


Figure 6 shows the distribution of Adventists, Mormons and Witnesses in 2000. Note that Mormons are by far the largest in the US; they have also excelled in Latin America and Australia and New Zealand, but are still very small in Africa and the Caribbean because their theology treated black people as second-class until the 1970s. The Witnesses are amazingly successful in Europe and the former USSR (partly because of the admiration that came to them following their fortitude when attacked by the Nazis) – and also in Japan; they are also a good deal larger than Adventists in North America. Adventists, in contrast, are much more concentrated in the Developing World, being especially high in Africa, the Caribbean, the South Pacific Islands, and Asia (where earlier strength in the Philippines and Indonesia is now being augmented by rapid growth in China and India, where Adventism was very weak until recently). When the Chinese government insisted that any church that was to be authorized to exist in China join an organization under government control, the Witnesses refused to join, which left them facing persecution for any activity. However, the Adventists joined as ordered, but this did not have the effect of erasing the boundaries between them and other Protestant groups, because Adventists worshiped in the designated churches on the Sabbath, allowing them to retain their identity.

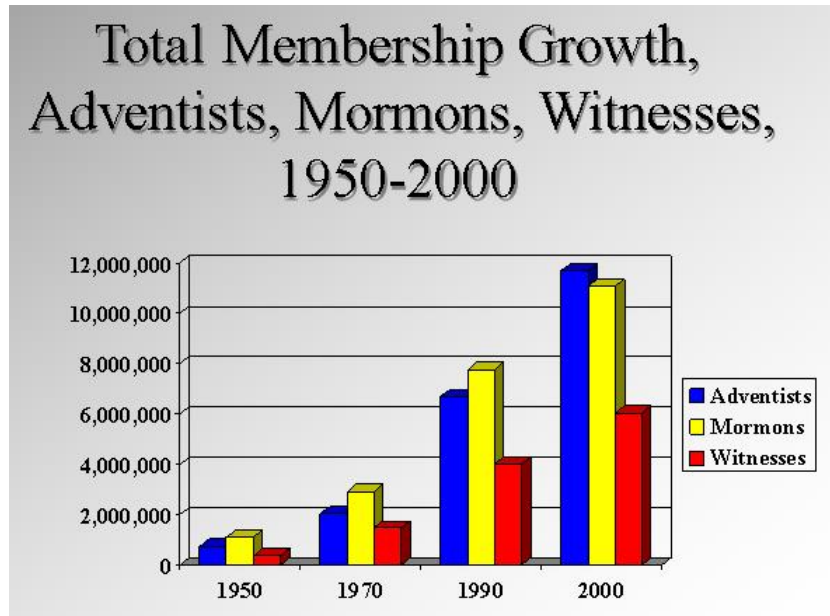


Figure 7 compares the growth of the total membership of these three groups over time, focusing on the years 1950, 1970, 1990 and 2000. The Mormons began in the 1820s, two decades ahead of the Adventist "Great Disappointment" of 1844, and retained their lead in total membership until the 1990s – note that in 1990 their official membership was more than a million larger than the Adventist membership. However, the Adventists then surged ahead, and by 2000 their membership was more than 600,000 larger than that of the Mormons.

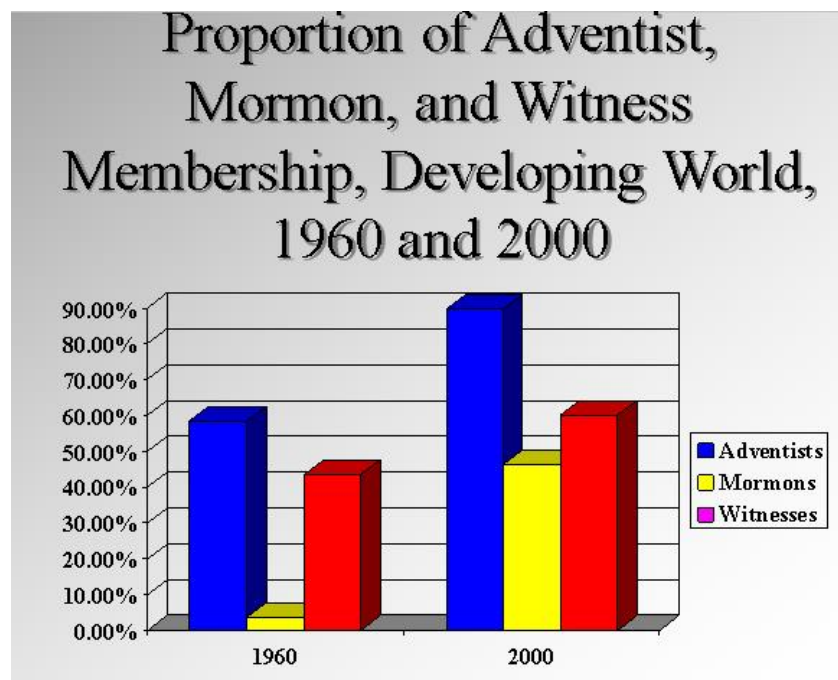


Figure 8 shows how the global distribution of these 3 religious groups has changed since 1960. All have been growing rapidly in the Developing World, but Adventists got a head start there,

while lagging in the Developed World. Note that the rapid Mormon growth in the Developing World started very late – really after 1960 – and that their growth rate there has been extraordinarily high since then, though numerically still much less than among Adventists there.

Adventists And Pentecostals

I mentioned earlier that four sects that were born in the US during the Nineteenth Century are now global churches. How does the growth and distribution of Adventists compare to that of the Pentecostals, who trace their beginnings to the 1890s, and were thus the last of the four groups to form? It is very difficult to get reliable statistics for Pentecostals, for they have fragmented into dozens of separate groups, many of which are congregationally organized. However, it is clear that collectively they have left the other three American-born groups, including Adventists, far behind in total membership. I have heard informed estimates of their total global membership ranging from 250 million to 500 million – Jenkins estimates that they are "at least 400 million strong." Their annual baptisms equal far more than the total Adventist membership – Jenkins states 19 million per year. Their membership is heavily concentrated in the Developing World: Jenkins states that they "stand at the vanguard" of what he calls "the Southern Counter-Reformation." Pentecostals are rapidly catching up on Roman Catholicism, which is globally the largest Christian denomination. Jenkins estimates that "by 2040 or so there could be as many as a billion, at which point Pentecostals alone will far outnumber the world's Buddhists and enjoy rough numerical parity with the world's Hindus." He argues that the Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual healing, miracles, and exorcism fits the needs of the peoples of the Developing World, who are mired in poverty and disease and often have animist roots.

The Reliability of Membership Statistics

How believable are all these memberships statistics? Much depends on how "member" is defined. When Jenkins refers to 260 million Christians in North America, he includes a lot of nominal Christians who rarely, if ever, enter a church. The situation is similar to some extent in the Developing World, especially among Catholics in Latin America. However, there is no doubt that Christian growth is concentrated there.

What about Adventist statistics, and those of the other American-born groups I have been comparing us to? In the Developed World, membership commitment to these groups is greater than it is to the Mainline Churches, and the names of inactive members are more likely to be removed, so that there is less nominalism. However, this is only relatively speaking. While North American Adventist churches used to "clean" their rolls regularly, this is no longer the case, so that today, when the total number in attendance at all churches is tabulated on one Sabbath each year, the number present is always less than half the official membership of the Division – and the count includes visitors and unbaptized children, who are not members. The Mormons also admit to an average attendance of fewer than half of their members in the US. The total for the Witnesses is obviously much more realistic, given that they count only those who have submitted witnessing reports in the previous three months.

What of the statistics from the Developing World? The forms Adventists use for reporting membership gains and losses are complex, having been designed for church clerks with education. The educational level in the Developing World is generally much lower than here, and the reporting must often be left to the pastors, who eagerly report baptisms, but not apostasies, deaths, and transfers, since their promotions and even their continued employment are linked to their success in growing their churches. One mission president in New Guinea commented to me that his field had not reported a death in five years, and that this was certainly not a result of the members being vegetarians; he added that members moving to the cities usually refused to transfer their membership, fearing that this would be interpreted as giving up their rights to land in their villages – and that as a result they often ended up with their names on the rolls of two or more churches. The attitude towards membership in the Developing World is often very different from here. When an American joins a different denomination he usually abandons his former religious identity, and may even send a letter resigning his membership. However, in Africa, for example, being baptized in a new church is often seen as adding an additional insurance policy – and the more insurance policies, the greater the protection. When interviewing there I heard many stories of sick Adventists being taken to see a witch doctor *en route* to an Adventist hospital – if one does not work, hopefully the other will. Similarly, I heard lots of stories of people who had been baptized following a campaign by an Adventist evangelist 6 or 12 months earlier being baptized again by a Pentecostal preacher – but they nevertheless still claimed to be Adventists. A friend who did a close anthropological study of a Mormon church in a barrio in Guatemala City found a lot of circulation among Mormons, Adventists, and Pentecostals. Yet when censuses asking questions about religious identity were held in Kenya and Papua New Guinea, the number claiming to be Adventists far exceeded the official Adventist membership. (Both countries have large concentrations of Adventists, and this seems to encourage a lot of people who are not on Adventist church rolls to think of themselves as Adventists.) I would argue, then, that there is no doubt that rapid growth is occurring among Adventists in the Developing World; however, if we were to adopt a strict definition of membership and then use it to check the rolls carefully, we would undoubtedly find that totals are considerably exaggerated.

Internal Mutations

How has the transformation in the numerical distribution of Adventists impacted the Church thus far? What will be its impact in the future? We noted earlier that Jenkins argues that the Christian Church as a whole is mutating, but in different directions in the Developed and Developing Worlds; he expects this to cause considerable tension, but because of the concentration of growth in the Developing World, he expects the church there to become dominant. Since the Adventist membership is now so heavily concentrated in the Developing World, we would perhaps expect that this process is more pronounced among us. I will consider six topics: changes in leadership personnel and styles, in the polity of the denomination, in its finances, in its organizational structure, and in the unity of its message, and the impact of immigrants from the Developing World on the church in the Developed World.

1. *Changes in Leadership Personnel and Styles:* Since many of the Catholic and Mainline Protestant missions were established as part of the broad face of colonization, it was no surprise that leadership positions were held by Caucasians. Even though Adventist missions were not an outgrowth of colonization, the Adventist administrative structure has, for most of its history, been dominated by people from the Developed World, especially Americans, who filled leadership posts from the General Conference to local missions in the Developing World. As the Adventist work became established in the countries of the Developing World, indigenous members gradually took over leadership posts first at the local mission level and then, later, at the union level.

However, it was not until the period between the 1960s and 1980s, during the change of mind-sets that followed decolonization, that the leadership of the Divisions – that is, at the level of subcontinents or continents – was indigenized. The new mind-set led in turn to a realization that these divisions deserved representation among the hierarchy of the General Conference. The first leader from the Developing World to be elected as one of the six Vice-presidents of the General Conference was Elder Enoch Oliveira, the former president of the South American Division. This occurred at the General Conference Session in 1980. At the next Session, in 1985, African students at the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, who had been named as delegates in order to save their Divisions the cost of additional fares from Africa, noted during debate that the Pope had appointed African Cardinals, and demanded that Adventists follow suit. This led to a last-minute decision to bring a Ghanaian to the General Conference as a Field Secretary, a vaguely defined post. This man, Matthew Bediako, thus became the first African to hold a position at the General Conference. He became a Vice-president in 1990, and in 2000 he was elected to the second place in the Adventist hierarchy, the Secretary of the General Conference. Three of the seven General Vice-presidents elected in 2000 were also drawn from the Developing World – from South America, Mexico, and China. However, the representation of the Developing World at the General Conference is not yet proportional to its membership. Only two of the other seven members of the Secretariat and one of the seven treasurers were drawn from the Developing World in 2000, and two of these three had long before migrated to the US from the Caribbean. Leaders or associates in four departments were also from the Developing World—three of four in Education, two of three in Youth Ministries, one of two in Women's Ministries, and both the leaders of the Publishing Department; however, the other nine departments had no elected leaders from there. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that an increasing number of the General Conference leaders and staff will be drawn from the Developing World because the system in place for choosing leaders gives a greater voice to those regions where members are concentrated.

Although all Presidents of the General Conference have to date been Caucasians, it is only a matter of time – maybe as little time as until the next General Conference Session in 2005 – before a leader from the Developing World fills that position. A frequent fear I

have heard expressed by Americans at the General Conference is that such a president would prove to be authoritarian, "a village chief", rather than a consensus builder used to Western-style democratic leadership. Time will test to what extent such fears are justified.

These changes in personnel at the General Conference present a huge contrast to the situation at the headquarters of both the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, neither of which has anyone from the Developing World on its governing body.

2. *Changes in the Adventist Polity:* I mentioned earlier that the Mainline Protestants in North America have been leading a movement that has focused on social issues, pressing towards greater tolerance and inclusivity. Although North American Adventists initially lagged behind, we too have become part of this Reformation, as we have embraced major changes in the roles of women clergy, greater acceptance of members who have divorced and remarried, etc. However, in the General Conference Sessions of 1990, 1995, and 2000 we discovered that the world church thought differently from us in these matters.

Now that almost all of the leadership of the Adventist Church at the conference, union, and division levels has been indigenized, the composition of delegates to General Conference Sessions has also inevitably changed. Whereas large proportion of the delegates from the "mission fields" were formerly missionaries who had been sent there from the Developed World, now almost all are indigenous. Because of the size of their delegations, which are based on membership, delegates from the Developing World can now control the outcomes of votes if they vote together. This was demonstrated dramatically during the Sessions in 1990 and 1995, when the delegates soundly defeated items sponsored by the North American Division that would have allowed the ordination of women here. In 2000 an attempt to bring the rules in the Church Manual concerning divorce and remarriage into line with what had become widespread practice in the US was truncated when the committee preparing the recommended changes, whose membership was drawn from all world divisions of the church, found agreement difficult. When the few recommendations for change were brought up for consideration at the Session, they were defeated on the initial vote with widespread opposition from delegates from the Developing World. They were only passed as a result of a parliamentary maneuver that most of those delegates missed, so that the recommendations were brought back for a vote when most of them were out sightseeing. These debates demonstrated that Adventists are deeply divided geographically on both social issues and their understanding of the Scriptures, just as Jenkins has described the divisions within global Christianity.

However, the dynamic involved in these clashing views is not as simple as it sounds. Although Adventists in North America have been gradually embracing liberal social stances, as the Mainline Protestant churches here did earlier, we have a strong conservative minority who are adamantly opposed. Just as the conservative minority

within the Episcopal Church has sought alliances with African and Asian bishops against the decision by the majority to endorse the election of an openly gay bishop, and conservatives within the United Methodist Church here were able, as a result of an alliance with delegates from Africa, to block an initiative at their General Conference session earlier this year that sought to permit the ordination of openly gay clergy, so also Adventist conservatives here were instrumental in fomenting opposition to the ordination of women among the church administrators in the Developing World. That is, the conservative Adventists have learned to cultivate and use the conservative bent of the church leaders in the Developing World, while liberal spokespersons are often timid and politically ineffective.

3. *Changes in Adventist Finances:* Since the Adventist members in the Developing World are much poorer than those in the Developed World, and their numbers are growing so much faster, the income per capita has plummeted in recent years.

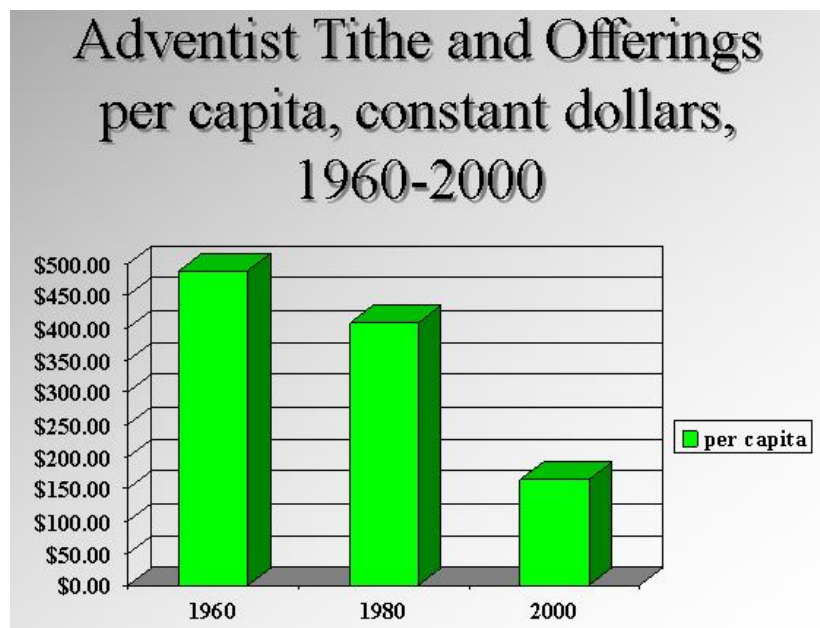


Figure 9 shows World tithes and offerings per capita for the years 1960, 1980 and 2000, holding the value of the dollar constant at its value in 2000.

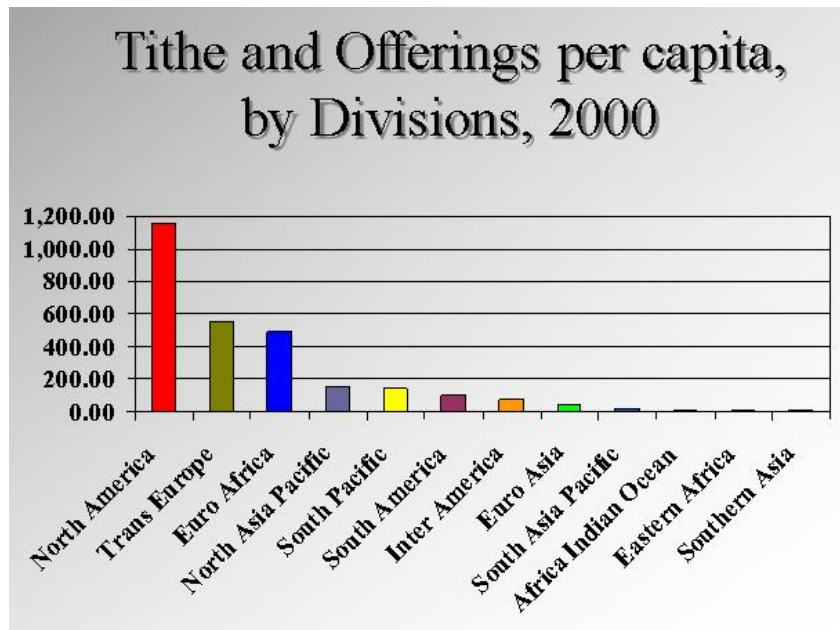


Figure 10 shows the huge differences in per capita income (to the denomination) among the divisions. The North American Division continued to have great financial leverage even after it lost the numerical dominance in the 1920s because American tithes and mission offerings continued to fund most of the mission work and mission churches. However, this leverage is now much weaker, for the income is being spread thinner and thinner. The per capita income has fallen so low that the Church no longer has the funds to build and operate sufficient schools in the Developing World to keep up with the burgeoning membership there, nor is it able to maintain many of the hospitals it had built in earlier decades.

Two other ingredients of the sharp decline in per capita giving deserve mention. First, mission offerings among North Americans have fallen steadily as attendance at Sabbath School has dropped and interest in missions has diminished; second, a growing proportion of the members here are diverting their giving away from the category of tithes, which are passed up the church structure according to an agreed upon formula and are then allocated to projects and institutions in divisions where the need is greater, to categories that fund projects in their local churches or specific projects elsewhere. The decline of interest in missions among American Adventists mirrors that in the Mainline Churches, which truncated their mission budgets after missions became suspect following decolonization and accusations from African church leaders that missions stunted local initiatives.

The most significant source of new funds that are spent by Adventists in the Developing World are those used to support the projects of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). However, the bulk of these funds are obtained from government agencies in the Developed World, especially USAID. Such funds must be devoted to approved

projects, which do not usually include expenditures on items that normally appear on church budgets such as funding the costs of church buildings, running church institutions, or evangelistic activities.

4. *Changes in Adventist Organizational Structure:* The General Conference is committed to Adventism remaining a unified global organization. Is this possible, given the diversity of the global church and the shift in its center of gravity?

We have just seen that Adventism's extremely successful financing system, where funds contributed at the relatively wealthy churches in the Developed World were used to finance missions, schools, colleges, clinics, and hospitals in the Developing World, is breaking down. Consequently, the church organizations and institutions in the Developing World are being forced to become self-supporting. This has "loosened the tithes that bind" and released previously suppressed resentments about the domination of America and the churches in former colonial powers that accompanied the funding. These resentments were brought sharply into focus in the sentiments expressed after Developing World delegates voted against the North American request to allow the ordination of women at the General Conference Sessions in 1990 and 1995. It seems likely that the loosening of the financial ties will result in greater independence at division and union levels.

Jan Paulson, the current President of the General Conference, will be 69 years old when the next General Conference Session is held in 2005. One Caucasian General Conference Vice-president has donned a strongly conservative garb and is clearly trying to use conservative supporters in North America to make him the standard-bearer of conservatives in the Developing World. However, there remains a strong possibility that a new President will be from the Developing World. There is already considerable unease in the US about such a prospect. There is a movement at the General Conference to support Paulson for another term, during which he would resign, so that his replacement could be chosen by the General Conference Committee, rather than by the Nominating Committee at a Session, where places on the Committee are allocated according to the size of each division. However, such a strategy could only, at most, delay the inevitable. It is feared that any Developing World president would be more conservative and perhaps also more authoritarian than his Caucasian predecessors. (Jenkins argues that if the Catholic Cardinals elect a Latin American or African Pope they will find their church facing a similar situation.) Many American Adventists also suggest that the election of such a president would result in a further decline in the flow of tithes, for they expect that the American church would then become increasingly inward-looking.

While the election of a President from the Developing World would certainly be momentous, it is my hunch that it could well have positive results. I would expect that it would increase the pace of decentralization in the Adventist structure, so that national or regional churches would gain greater independence and the power of the General

Conference would diminish further. If I am correct in this, the President of the General Conference would become more of a symbol of both unity and diversity rather than a locus of power, more of a preacher and a source of spiritual encouragement than an administrator. If the person chosen were good in that role, he (I do not dare yet to suggest "she") could bring a sense of excitement to his position, and become a breath of fresh air.

I am hoping that the ultimate result is decentralized management with a confederation that helps retain a sense of unity. However, other possible outcomes are schism, resulting in two or more international associations, and extensive Balkanization, rather like the Pentecostal model, with the focus shifting to independent local organizations. Time will reveal which model is closest to the result.

5. *Changes in the Unity of the Adventist Message:* The General Conference is committed to Adventism preaching a unified message. Is this possible, given the diversity of cultures within the global church?

Jenkins notes that the "Southern" churches are far more conservative in their beliefs and moral teachings than are their "Northern" counterparts. Nevertheless, with his eye perhaps especially on the Pentecostals, he refers to their "supernatural orientation," with a focus on prophecy, visions, ecstatic utterances, and healing, and the restructuring of worship and rules to respond to different cultures (Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, pp 7, 107-9). The General Conference Session debates on divorce in 2000 and on women's ordination in 1990 and 1995 showed how tightly delegates from the Developing World clung to the details of what they had been taught and to their understandings as shaped by their cultures. That is, they were conservative in their beliefs and moral teachings. However, Adventism has been less flexible than the Pentecostals in shaping its teachings and worship to resonate with the needs of different cultures.

The Adventist creed, as revised in 1980, contains 27 "fundamental beliefs." The number of such beliefs has increased sharply each time the document has been revised. That is, the Adventist message is complex. I learned from my interviews around the world that many of these "fundamentals" are paid only lip service where the converts are typically poorly educated and where the earlier practice of keeping converts in classes for long periods before baptism (usually two years in Africa) has, in the last 25 years, been replaced by baptism at the conclusion of a three-week series of evangelistic meetings. How can such a new Christian convert have a good understanding of the Sanctuary doctrine or grasp the intricacies of the 2,300 Days prophecy? The focus groups I conducted among Adventist students at both church colleges and secular universities—that is, among some of the best-educated members—found that what was said to be "the core of Adventism" varied starkly from one continent to another. For example, the students in Western Europe emphasized the core Christian beliefs—Christ, grace, faith, and salvation—rather than the peculiarly Adventist doctrines, while those in Africa emphasized baptism (which they seemed to see as almost a magical rite), stewardship,

the Sabbath, and various rules, and almost never mentioned Christ. That is, what is found to be most relevant from within the Adventist doctrinal corpus varies with culture.

The Adventist belief system is, then, not nearly as unified as church leaders wish. Indeed, to the extent that the traditional teachings are emphasized, it is then often less relevant to the members in their differing cultures. For example, before I traveled to animist cultures such as much of Africa and Papua-New Guinea, I had been under the impression, from my reading of Adventist missionary books and stories in the *Adventist Review* and other church magazines, that spirit-possession was relatively rare and that it was most likely to appear at baptisms, when invoking the name of Jesus would certainly cause the evil spirit to flee. However, when I arrived at Solusi College in Zimbabwe, my first African college, I was told that two students had been possessed for three weeks and that no amount of praying and invoking the name of Jesus seemed able to drive the spirits out. Interviewees then revealed, over and over again as I traveled first in Africa and then in New Guinea, that many of them lived in fear of the spirits of the ancestors, and also used those spirits for their own purposes. Such interviewees included pastors, students, and laity. I was amazed to find, however, that the pastors told me that they did not address such issues in their sermons, but instead focused on the great prophecies concerning "Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome." When I was in New Guinea I specifically raised this issue with an indigenous Bible teacher at the college that then produced most of the pastors, and I discovered that he too ignored the spirits and focused his attention on the prophecies. Babylon and Medo-Persia are far from New Guinea and the concerns of its people!

Adventists blazed a path that differed greatly from that chosen by Pentecostals. We preferred hospitals and clinics to faith-healing, and our beliefs and actions do not resonate as clearly with animists, for whom the spirits of the ancestors are as real as their neighbors. Adventists have also been slow to adapt worship to local cultures: missionaries banned drums from church services in Africa, labeling them "devilish", and the hymns typically sung are still translations of those sung in America. When the youth in Lagos, Nigeria, requested that drums be allowed, a shift of policy was quickly reversed when older members became too uncomfortable with the change in what they had been taught was an important issue. Many of the Adventist students at the University of Lagos told me they had been attracted to Pentecostal services by the music, which used indigenous rhythms. Consequently, Adventists are not growing nearly as fast as Pentecostals in the Developing World.

Those whom Adventists attract are often drawn by the hope of upward mobility, of improving themselves. For example, in the New Guinea Highlands it is widely believed that "God blesses Adventists – they get rich"—and some of them have. Before missionaries came their wealth was counted in the number of pigs owned – but it was difficult to retain such wealth, because once someone had a few pigs he was expected to

throw a big party for his extended kin. The Adventist missionaries insisted on "no pigs and no parties," for they regarded pigs as unclean, and parties as occasions to eat pork, drink alcohol, and honor the spirits. In this way Adventists, perhaps unwittingly, prepared their converts to take advantage of the new money-based economy – and they did.

Another important means through which Adventists offered upward mobility was through their school system. However, Adventism is growing so rapidly in the Developing World, and funds are so limited, that they can no longer provide schools to educate all their converts. Nevertheless, it does seem that their focus on the Bible drives many illiterate members to somehow learn to read so that they can read the Scriptures for themselves, and that the emphasis on stewardship, on tithes and offerings, encourages members to shepherd their resources so that many end up a little better off than their neighbors and are aware of this. The programs of ADRA are also practical, helping people to better their lives. Some Adventists continue to be educated in church schools, for the church needs pastors and teachers, and the standards have been raised. Many other Adventist youth attend government universities, but these are not opportunities offered by the church, although church-sponsored societies are often active among such students.

One area in which early Adventist missionaries to Africa showed sensitivity to different practices was polygamy. When Adventists arrived in Africa, other missions had already established policies where polygamously married men were refused baptism until they had sent away all but one of their wives. Several Adventist missionaries concluded that the policy of breaking up families was inhumane, creating tragedies, for abandoned wives were typically separated from their children, left without support, and some were forced into prostitution in order to survive. They therefore allowed the baptism of complete polygamous families, insisting only that no more wives be added. However, when other denominations criticized Adventists for lowering standards, the General Conference in 1941 insisted that Adventist missionaries adopt the standard policy. All attempts to reverse this decision have failed since that time, even as it has become clear that such policies towards polygamy have been significant in fostering the establishment of thriving indigenous African churches which accept polygamous families as members. A major attempt to change the Adventist policy towards baptizing polygamous families, which had the support of then General Conference President Neal Wilson as well as many of the younger, better educated African pastors, was sent to a special General Conference committee in the 1980s. It was rejected primarily because of fears that admitting that the Adventist Church had been wrong on one issue might in turn lead members to question other rules and beliefs.

The aftermath of the votes rejecting ordination for women suggests to me that Adventism can find itself sufficiently flexible to seek solutions to issues that involve cultural differences. The solutions adopted for women were not perfect, but in obliterating most

of the differences between ordained and licensed pastors and by promoting many women to positions of responsibility within the church structure, it greatly reduced the significance of ordination. The creation of a Department of Women's Ministries has had the result of opening many avenues for women to participate and to take initiatives within the churches in the Developing World. Such changes are already helping to alter the position of women there.

However, two very recent events here in North America make me fear that the conservatives who would return us to our earlier sectarian rigidity have been emboldened by the hope of gaining support from those in power in the Developing World. These events remind me more of the decision to put long-held rules ahead of human needs in the case of the continuing refusal to baptize polygamously married families. The events I have in mind are the outcome and dynamics of the recent series of conferences on Creation and Evolution, and the current issue of Liberty, which focuses solely on same-sex marriage.

6. *The Impact of Immigrants from the Developing World on the Church in the Developed World:* People from the often-impooverished Developing World have, during recent decades, been migrating in increasing numbers to many parts of the economically dominant Developed World. The US Immigration law of 1965 greatly increased the numbers of such people admitted here, and the flow to parts of Europe and to Canada began even earlier. Given their growing concentration in the Developing World, Adventists were inevitably included among these migrations. Moreover, the immigrant membership has in turn been swelled as immigrants have proved to be much more evangelistic than are Americans, Canadians, and Europeans, and as new immigrants have proved to be far more receptive to the Adventist outreach.

Today the Adventist membership in England is mostly drawn from West Indian and other African immigrant groups, and the presidents of the British Union and both the conferences in England are from the Caribbean. Paris and the North France Conference have a solid immigrant majority, again drawn predominantly from the Caribbean, and half the membership in the Netherlands is immigrant – once again mostly drawn from the former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean region. In Canada, the churches in both Toronto and Montreal are heavily immigrant, creating solid immigrant majorities – once again mostly from the Caribbean – in both the Ontario and Quebec conferences. Indeed, the president of the Canadian Union for most of the last decade was born in Jamaica.

Several US cities – New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami—have acted as special magnets to immigrants. I explored the transformation of the Adventist membership in metropolitan New York in detail in 1996.

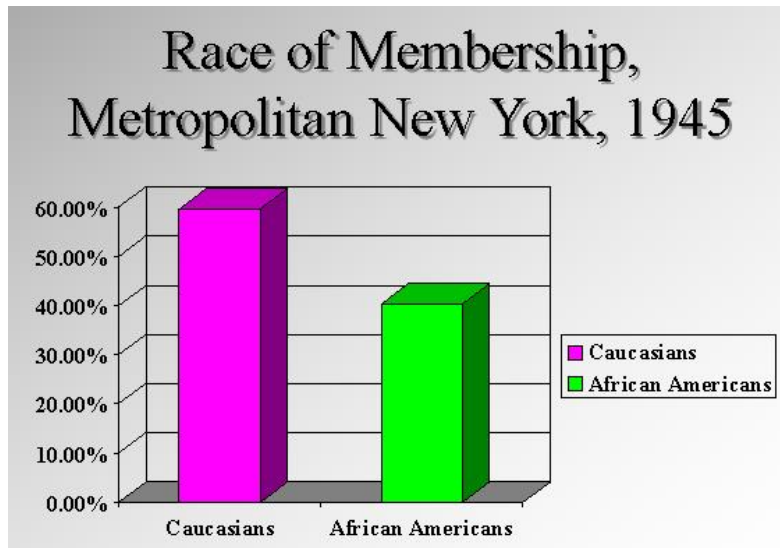


Figure 11 shows the racial breakdown of the membership at the beginning of 1945, when the totally black Northeastern Conference was separated from the Greater New York Conference, which became almost totally Caucasian—its first Spanish-speaking company had just been formed. So we know that the 4,499 members were almost 60% Caucasian and 40% black. Almost all of the latter would have been Afro-Americans.

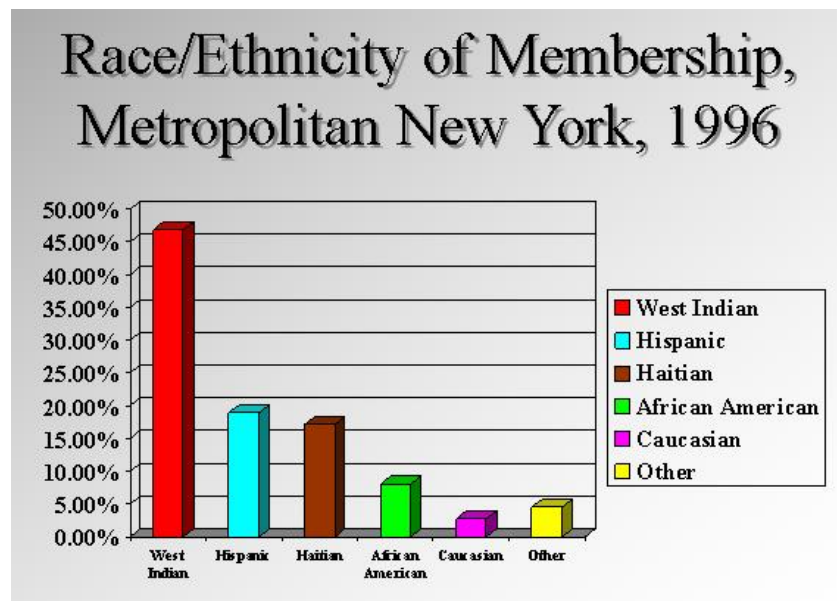


Figure 12 shows that by 1996 a dramatic change had occurred. Although the total membership within the New York metropolitan area had climbed to 34,480, the Caucasians comprised only 2.7% of these and the African-Americans only 8.0%. That is, almost 90% of the members were drawn from "new immigrant" stock from the Developing World. Both conferences experienced considerable conflict as the leadership switched from a succession of white Americans to a Dominican in the GNYC and from a line of black Americans to a new line of West Indians in the NEC. One consequence is that

both conferences are socially and doctrinally more conservative than average in the North American Division, and certainly out of step with many in this liberal city: for example, neither conference had yet, at that time, appointed a woman pastor.

Although immigrant Adventists are initially poor and bring with them their traditional understanding of Adventist beliefs and practices, over time their economic standing usually improves and their children are socialized into the norms of the new societies. The impact of the immigrants on the finances and beliefs of the church in the Developed World is therefore likely to depend, on the one hand, on the continued flow of new immigrants and, on the other hand, on the extent to which second and third generation children of immigrants remain involved in the church.

Conclusion

I have argued that:

- Adventism has, like the rest of the Christian Church, been growing very rapidly in the Developing World and much more slowly in the Developed World, so that the majority of its members are now in the "South." Indeed, this process began earlier within Adventism and has proceeded more rapidly, and is therefore much more advanced than within Christendom as a whole.
- These changes have altered, and are continuing to change the balance of power, within the world church as seen in the composition of delegates to General Conference Session and in the makeup of the important Nominating Committee, which nominates, and thus usually chooses, the members of the hierarchy of the General Conference. The result has been a growing presence of leaders from the Developing World within that hierarchy, which has, in turn, created the likelihood that one of these will become President of the General Conference in the near future.
- Adventism in the Developed World has followed the path taken by the Mainline Protestant denominations there, becoming more inclusive and tolerant concerning such social issues as gender roles and divorce and remarriage. However, the churches in the Developing World, and therefore, because of the new balance of power, the world church, have not embraced such reforms. This dynamic resulted in the defeat of North American initiatives to allow the ordination of women and the truncation of its attempts to update the rules concerning divorce and remarriage at recent Sessions of the General Conference.
- Adventists in the Developing World are thus more conservative in their beliefs and practices, clinging to their understanding of what they were taught initially by missionaries, an attitude which is being cultivated politically by the activist conservative minority within the North American church. Adventism in the Developing World suffers, in comparison with, for example, Pentecostalism, from its failure to shape beliefs, worship styles, and practices in ways that were directly relevant to local cultures. Nevertheless,

because cultural differences inevitably effect understandings, there is much less uniformity of belief than the General Conference leadership hopes.

- The huge growth of membership among the poor and a decline of interest in missions among members in the Developed World has undermined the long successful Adventist financial system where funds from wealthy areas were redistributed to support missions and institutions in the Developing World. This is forcing the churches in the countries in that region to become self-supporting, which is likely to result in a decentralization of the structure of the denomination.
- Meanwhile, an influx of members from the Developing World to churches in the Developed World is changing the composition and leadership, and, at least in the short-term, the finances and beliefs, of the church in many parts of the latter regions.

The paths chosen by Adventists in the Developing World – paths that encourage upward mobility and greater flexibility – lead me to wonder whether Adventism will experience the full conflict that Jenkins predicts will result from the conservative Counter Reformation that he expects Southern Christianity to champion. The Adventist Church in the Developed World built institutions and pursued education which resulted in upward mobility, and has shown signs that it can learn to handle its own enormous diversity with flexibility. Sociologists see this as part of moving from a sect towards becoming a denomination. It may well be that Adventists in many parts of the Developing World will learn to travel a similar path more quickly than we did in the Developed World.

However, I would expect that the paths will not be completely parallel because of the cultural differences. The Christian message in its Adventist garb will be relevant in different ways to the various cultures.

It seems to me that if Adventists are to remain united it must be through evolving a more decentralized structure headed by symbolic spiritual leaders rather than powerful administrators, and embracing a shared corpus of beliefs where churches with different issues and cultures can emphasize what they find is most relevant to them. However, unity can only be the outcome if what evolves results in Adventists loving and appreciating one another as fellow Christians amid our diversity.