UNEDITED REVIEW PANEL NOTES FOR REACHING THE NATIONS

Carter Charles
France


In Reaching the Nations David G. Stewart, Jr. and Matthew Martinich try to map out, country by country, the international expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly referred to as the Mormon or LDS Church. The modest 976 pages – of volume one, mind you! – covers the Americas, Oceania and Europe. This review focuses on the chapters dealing with the Church’s presence in France and some of the Caribbean islands (Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique and St Maarten); Guyana and French Guyana have also been read with as much interest.

Aside from the sheer size of the book, it also differs both in form and in content from Stewart’s earlier Law of the Harvest (2006).

Outwardly, Berthel Thorvaldsen’s Christus is replaced by a photograph (for which no credit is given) showing a church steeple in the first plan, followed by a urbanized area in the second plan, and a bay which opens in the background on to a mist beyond which lies the unknown world the LDS Church has set out to. The church building shown is, in all likelihood, a Catholic one with a cross on top of it. Through this apparent paradox, the authors (unintentionally) hint at the LDS Church’s pretension to become katolikos, universal, from Greek.

Unlike The Law of the Harvest, and probably because of its format, Reaching the Nations is more informative, more fact-gathering than analytical. For every country, the authors engage in a conscientious effort to provide readers with a broad picture, following a rather identical pattern which consists in situating the country, breaking down its demography, providing a brief summary of its history, its economic strengths, its religious and cultural make-up before moving on to LDS specifics.

The quantitative and visible results of their endeavor are really impressive. Even with the best technological equipment for content gathering, it took me countless of hours a couple of years ago to identify Internet forums where Francophone Mormons interacted with others in order to produce a modest monograph. This makes me appreciate even the more the dedication of the authors to not only bring their work to fruition but to keep it updated online (ref Cumorah and blog). It is a fulltime job; and there is work for far more than two people.

A separate paper sent with the Almanac provides extra information on the authors’ methodology and sources. Yet it does not address some of the shortcomings of the almanac, many of them could have been avoided had the authors worked not only with in-field and returned Mormon missionaries and favor social media networks but also with Latter-day Saints locally and with at least one academic specialist of Mormonism in each country. Surely, the effectiveness of the authors would partly have been conditioned on the willingness of local LDS officials, PR people in particular, to give more than just numbers but that, together with a more analytical approach would have deepened the content of the book and avoided a great number of inaccuracies, some of which are highlighted below.

On the background information
It is definitely an excellent idea on the part of the authors to provide background information to help readers contextualize Mormon proselytizing activities. Some of the information straight out of the CIA World Factbook are however useless and in total disconnect with the rest of the Almanac; unless you explain how they connect with missiology in a given country. It is the case of the corruption index. It gives the impression that you are dealing with unsorted intelligence. Does corruption mean the same thing in France and its overseas territories (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Reunion Island, etc.) as it does in Haiti, for instance? Is it so rampant in those places that it hampers the proselytizing efforts of churches, to the point for instance that the LDS Church cannot find trustworthy leaders among local converts to handle its funds? Drugs and youth delinquency in general are a problem to missionary activity in some rare places in France: Marseille, and some pocket areas in Paris. There are pockets areas in Guadeloupe as well. But strangely, that information is not broached upon in the case of the Franco-Dutch island of Saint Martin/St. Maarten, which is a much more notorious illicit drug transshipment point than France. But even there, the traffic is not known to be an obstacle to proselytizing activities.

Many readers familiar with French history and culture will find issue with authors on several points.

To begin with, Corsica is not some distant, semi-autonomous land or colony administered by French authorities as is implied in the phrase “under French administration” (p. 645). Corsica is French and has been that since 1767, just two years prior to the birth of the man who made it possible for Americans to say that they had “the best bargain, ever!” in the Louisiana Purchase. And France does not have “colonial possessions” (p. 646) anymore. Any place that used to be administered by France is either fully French, in the administrative sense of the word, independent or enjoys autonomous status.

Secondly – and this is where things really get messy – it is forbidden by law in France to conduct ethnic surveys. This means that officially, no one knows the exact ethnic make-up of the country. It comes therefore as a surprise to see that the authors provide specific percentages for six major groups of peoples: French (80.9%), North African (9.6%), Sub-Saharan/Black African (4%), German (2.5%), Italian (1.5%) and Other (1.5%). Comments under those percentages specify that the “Other” category “include[s] Basque and immigrant groups from Africa, South East Asia, and the Caribbean” (p. 645). Very confusing! Where else in Africa could immigrants come from if they are not from North Africa and the Sub-Saharan/Black African part of the continent? I doubt the authors meant South Africa.

It is also as much confusing to learn that the 1.5 percentage of “Other” also includes Caribbean peoples. Which ones? Guadeloupeans and Martinicans? Or does it also include – as it should because the Caribbean is made of many more islands than just Guadeloupe and Martinique – immigrants from Haiti (like me) and the Dominican Republic, for instance?

There must be at least as many (if not more) people of Spanish and Portuguese origin in France as there are from Italy but the authors do not say anything about them. My Cortez in-laws will be jealous.

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1 Article 8 of the 1978 French law on privacy, also called “Law on Information and Liberties” states that “It is forbidden to collect or process information of a personal nature which show, directly or indirectly, the racial or ethnic origins, political, philosophical or religious opinions or the Union affiliation of peoples or which relate to their health or sexual lives” (my translation). In that regard, a far right mayor is under investigation for having acknowledged that his city has specific statistics making it possible for him to know how many Muslims attend the public schools.
Thirdly—There is no law that “promote[s] the equalization of wealth” (p. 646) in France. But there is a version of the Mormon “law of consecration” which leads to a redistribution of wealth just like a Mormon Bishop Storehouse does on a lower scale.

The background information provided for Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, French Guyana, suffers minor to major inaccuracies. For example, a statement like “corruption scandals involving the [Haitian] president include kidnappings and an increasing number of murders” (p. 171) definitely needs to be backed by solid sources. Hear-say cannot do in such a case.

True, less and less Haitians practice voodoo but it was already a massive understatement to estimate that at 2%, adding “only” takes us to the abyss of inaccuracies. Voodoo, which can take many forms, structures the life of most Haitians. Some of them find no problem attending a church meeting in the morning and a voodoo ceremony at night - and there are better sources than the CIA Factbook to verify that kind of information. The transition from one practice to another is possible because of historical connections between Voodooism and Christianity and because the Haitians are very open and liberal when it comes to religion. This explains why family ostracization when some people “forsake Voodoo religion and practices to join the [Mormon] Church” must be a very marginal thing but they are right in the case of Muslims in France.

Whites have not arrived in Haiti that recently as the authors maintain (p. 170). A lot of the mulattoes there trace their ancestry to early French slave-owners and to Polish soldiers of the Leclerc expedition who joined the Haitian revolutionaries, and to whites who immigrated to the country in the twentieth century. On this point, it is worthy to note that Alexandre Mourra, the first convert in Haiti, was a White man of Jewish descent.

Contrary to what is written on Wikipedia, which seems to have been the authors’ source, the time is long gone when sugar cane was “the primary agricultural product” (p. 249) of Saint Martin/Sint Maarten.

The “massive strike” that took place in Guadeloupe in 2009 (p. 144) was not limited to “lower-paid workers” and was more about denouncing a colonial-type relationship between mainland France and the island, and the fact that most businesses were in the hands of Whites and descendants of plantation owners whom they saw as continuing the profiteering work of the ancestors. Otherwise, the minimum wage that applies in France also applies in Guadeloupe, to which is added 40% to make up for higher “life expenses” (vie chère) as the locals say.

Guadeloupeans are not just “fluent” in standard French (p. 147). French is the official and language and one of the mother-tongues there. As well, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion operate under the same 1905 law of separation of Church and State as mainland France and Corsica. As such,

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2 A handy source in Mormon circle is Jennifer Huss Basquiat’s “Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Voodoo, and the LDS Faith in Haiti”, Dialogue, 37:3 (Winter 2004). Since the authors’ policy seem to stay as clear as possible of academic sources, one needs only turn to this official LDS one that they cite on page 173 to read: “The difficulty for some members lies in having practiced both voodoo and traditional Christianity before joining the Church…. They did both before, and it’s hard to realize they can’t do both now.”

3 In 1802, Napoleon Bonaparte commissioned his cousin Charles Emmanuel Leclerc to lead a 35,000 soldier expedition, among which a Polish battalion, to sail to the Americas with the mission to quell the slave rebellion in San Domingo and then make route to Louisiana to protect the territory from the land-hungry Americans. Leclerc was never able to make it to Louisiana because his armies were defeated by the revolutionaries and yellow fever. This event actually forced Napoleon to sell Louisiana to Thomas Jefferson.

4 Guadeloupeans wanted among other things to be able to trade more directly with neighboring countries than having to import pretty much everything from mainland France, including gas at expensive prices whereas they could obtain it at much more affordable cost from the U.S. and Venezuela.
religious institutions cannot “receive government subsidies” even when registered as cultural associations (p. 145). The only exceptions to that rule are Alsace/Moselle which operate under concordat law, and French Guyana, which operates under an 1828 royal ordinance. But local leaders in French Guyana have recently been trying to pass under 1905 law because they do not want to pay the Catholic clerics anymore.

On the LDS-centered material

The LDS-related material given by the authors is almost always from church sources. Happily, this self-reported information, which is the main reason for the almanac, is more reliable even when some of them tend to show that the authors do not always take the time to show how certain pieces fit together or to fully develop a very good analysis they start.

Latter-day Saints in Martinique, French Guyana, the Franco-Dutch Island and Guadeloupe are no more assigned to Orlando (p. 148) but to the Dominican Republic. It is strange that the authors overlook such an information whereas they do mention the Dominican Republic temple elsewhere in the volume.

Regarding the Church’s activities in Haiti, they rightly point to the fact that there is a “higher number of convert baptisms during years” when there are foreign missionaries, which results “in less attention and care taken to fellowship and teach new converts (p. 176). You wish they had used that thread further to talk about the cultural and social dynamics at work depending on whether the missionary corps is local or foreign. Among those dynamics is the fact that local missionaries perceive things that foreign ones don’t. Hence, they take more time to prepare potential converts, addressing their concerns, etc. As I have written elsewhere, another reason is that some Haitians see the LDS Church as a purely an American thing. And this goes along Robert Remini’s statement that people often “go for things American.” On the competitive Haitian religious market, some see in Mormonism an opportunity for social achievements, which means that in many cases of conversion, spirituality is a secondary concern. It is that simple in some people’s minds: the White guys are Americans and something more than a religion to offer. They then tend to be more responsive at first but they also tend to leave faster when the immediate expectations – triggered by the White presence – are disappointed. Stewart and Martinich hint at that point writing that “Member activity and convert retention have been affected by the departure of foreign missionaries” (p. 176).

Still, it is less than certain that “The lack of Haitian missionaries in the 1990s likely resulted in the many years of preparation for the first stake to be organized” (Ibid.). The Haiti mission was presided over from 1991 to 1996, an unusually long period, by Fritzner Joseph, a 35 year-old native, CES coordinator and one of the earliest converts to the Church in Haiti. He relied on a purely local and limited force until the later part of his presidency to keep the LDS Church going during the politically unstable and embargo years. Contact with Salt Lake City in those years was rare. He was replaced in 1996 by Harold W. Bodon, Americans of German origin. The first stake was organized shortly thereafter (Sept 1997) by Elder John K. Carmack. President Bodon and the missionary force under him, which was then of almost complete parity of foreign and local missionaries, was very

5 For example, could Alain Andre Petion, called as a regional representative in 1995 (p. 654), be the one and the same person as Alain Andre Jean-Baptiste Petion, called as a mission president in Montreal (Canada) in 2005 (p. 655)?


instrumental in preparing for the stake but he continued on the ground laid by his predecessor and his local missionary force.\(^9\)

Other than the above, Stewart and Martinich centralize accurate dates and figures for the Church in Haiti as they do for France. But the numbers are but the entry door to thorough analysis because missiology is not only about adding up new converts and planting new units every year. The key words and phrases in their fact-finding for the Church in France are “slow progress”, “stagnant”, “decline” and “mediocre”. True, the LDS Church has not been growing as they would have liked but the expansion of a religion is not only made of upward or rapid numerical growth. When you look closer, the numbers they provide show that the numerical growth of the LDS Church in France is on average stable and that it is significantly growing inside. This can be seen glancing over the dates and numbers they have gathered showing that the LDS Church reached a peak of 126 congregations in 2005 and then the shrinking to 111 in 2009, that is, back to what it was fourteen years earlier (110 in 1995).

You also have to take into account the size of some units before they are shut down of consolidated with others and consider whether the decrease in the number of local units means decrease in membership. I remember a particular LDS congregation in a touristic and country area in the South West of France which was composed of two or three families which accounted for about 10 members. Of course, it had not always been so small. Some of the children had followed the classic LDS youth itinerary: some graduated from high school, started college, went on missions, returned home for a while and then left for good to other parts of the country to start families of their own and for work. Other members of the branches had moved elsewhere for professional or personal reasons. Some went inactive leaving the branch with two or three active members. It was already a very small unit; so closing it or consolidating it with a nearby ward does mean that there was a major decline.

Looking closer again at the numbers Stewart and Martinich put together, you realize that although the number of congregations shrinks, more and more branches and districts reach LDS growth standards to become wards and stakes. The 110 local units in 1995 were made of 78 branches and 43 wards within 7 districts and 7 stakes. In 2009, you had about the same total (111) but made out of 54 branches and 57 wards. This means that although numerically the Church grew only by 1 unit within fourteen years, a whopping 23 branches gained enough new members, matured enough to be consolidated into wards.

In the meantime, it is true that the total in the number of larger units (districts and stakes) went down from 14 (7 each) to 11: “In early 2011, there were nine stakes and two districts,” they wrote (p. 650). One would naturally conclude from that that there is a decline. But it is only an apparent decline since more stakes according to Mormonism means more and stronger members who will for instance contribute to special funds after having paid their tithing as noted (p. 655), more lasting implantation, more direct ties with Salt Lake City, etc. In other words, decline on the surface or in the number of units in cases like this does not always mean decline in membership or mediocre growth. It may as well mean quality growth.

It is also important to stress that decline and or stagnation are positive things in missiology, and more so for the LDS Church. Times of decline normally prompt reassessments of prior evangelizing policies and strategies – seen in the various mission policies, unit consolidations, etc. that the authors

\(^9\) A lot of information on the LDS Church in Haiti can be found on this mission alumni site: [http://www.mission.net/haiti/port-au-prince/index.php](http://www.mission.net/haiti/port-au-prince/index.php), available in both French and English and administered by Michael K. Paquette, a Canadian who served in Haiti. It is even possible to contact former missionaries and local members.
have rightly pointed to – in order to come up with new and possibly a durable and efficient approaches, which the LDS Church does not seem to have found yet.

Times of decline or of stagnation are also times to control upward numerical growth and to adapt to it. If you get obsessed in upward growth, you come to a point when the “branches” (a handy word here!) created throughout the world outgrow the roots. One of the main characteristics of the LDS Church is its centralized, hierarchical and uniform nature. It looks the same and operates the same the world over. This is feasible in particular because it masters its growth. Any observer of Mormonism will recall a recent time when two Apostles were sent to the Philippines and to South America because the Church was growing faster in those areas than it had trained leaders. It was a clear sign that although the institution welcomes upward growth – otherwise it would not send out more and more missionaries – it is also concerned about its uniformity and the purity of its doctrine, practices and policies. One of such policies being that everyone should be preached to and be given the opportunity to choose, we are not likely to see any en masse baptisms because one leader decides to join the LDS Church with his whole congregation as has been the case in the early days of Mormonism (the Disciples of Christ, for instance) or as some other religious groups still do.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the authors produce a perfectible book with the means they had and which may indeed serve as a starting point for research on the expansion of the LDS Church. It will save researchers a lot of time because a trove of information scattered on various websites and over the years are centralized in one source. But as with any other source, it will be up to the researchers to make sense of the information aggregated.
Marcello Jun de Oliveira
Brazil


Claiming that the LDS Church is one of the fastest growing religions in the world has become so prevalent among the lay news media and members of the Church, most notably some of its top ranking officials, that it has evolved into those unquestioned tropes that are parroted unthinkingly. Contributing to this dubious cliché is the dearth of academic populational and statistical analyses of concrete data to either corroborate, debunk or qualify such bold assertions.

Therefore, it is not a surprise that anyone with an academic or intellectual interest in Mormonism will cheer the publication of Reaching the Nations - International Church Growth Almanac: 2014 Edition by David Stewart and Matthew Martinich. Ambitiously setting out to "provid[e] the most comprehensive statistics, historical data, and analysis on LDS Church growth available at present", this almanac is unquestionably both an asset and an important tool for Mormon scholars and students of Mormonism, as well as a watershed work for Mormon studies.

Sampling this unique work solely based on one chapter dealing with one country (i.e., Brazil), this review will attempt to highlight its academic strengths and weaknesses and how it fulfills its lofty aspirations.

The chapter on Brazil is refreshingly long and surprisingly detailed. Even though Brazil cannot boast nearly the same deep historical ties to Mormonism as the US, Mexico or Canada, its almanac entry is covered in 26 printed pages as opposed to 16, 12 and 11, respectively. Considering the profound impact one century of historical precedence these three latter countries have had on LDS history, it is neither uncommon nor irrational to relegate the relative newcomer to lesser considerations, even considering it nominally hosts the third largest LDS population in the world today. This attention to detail in the Brazilian case shows itself in the abundance of historical anecdotes and a cogent timeline on the evolution of LDS presence in Brazil annotated in the chapter, possibly comprising the most comprehensive collection of facts and factoids on Brazilian Mormonism in any one publication. Additionally, its discussions of the horribly low retention rates ("25%"), questionable proselyting practices ("reckless") and mismanagement of Church units organization ("low standards") in Brazil are admirably open, candid, and insightful.

Nevertheless, for an academic reference work the quality of the collected data and its analysis leaves much to be desired.

Most of the references (250 out of 258 footnotes) for the chapter refer to one single source (i.e., LDS Church News) or to official LDS Church publications (3 out of 5 sources, viz., LDS Church News, Deseret News Church Almanac and Mormonmissionprep.com), which steals independence and objectivity from the work at a minimum by being overly dependent on self-reports and its attendant inherent bias.

Furthermore, all of the populational data (that is not specifically LDS-related) is sourced to the US State Department (5 out of 258 footnotes) and all of them are both outdated and wrong, some only mildly so, some grotesquely (e.g., dialects speakers totals). Interesting and very relevant data mentioned, such as comparison to membership in other Christian denominations (i.e., Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses) are never sourced. [1][2][3]
Crucial data from the 2000 Brazilian Census are mentioned, very briefly discussed, but never sourced, and the more updated data from the 2010 Brazilian Census is entirely ignored. Published analyses on Mormon populational data from both the 2000 and 2010 Census are also ignored. Important historical trends that inform religious shifts, specifically the sharp decline in Roman Catholicism and the concomitant boom in Protestants and Evangelicals since the 1980s and Nones since the 2000s, from census and statistical data available from 1940 to 2010 relevant to an analysis of LDS growth are also ignored. [4][5][6][16]

Information on social, racial and cultural issues are never sourced and include some demonstrably wrong, obviously Americentric misconceptions. An obvious example that is very relevant to LDS efforts is the assertion that “Brazil is one of the world’s greatest coffee consumers” while it doesn’t figure among the top 30 countries in per capita consumption. [7][8] Another glaring instance is the unsourced, unfounded assertion that “increasing drug-use and gang-related violence poses challenges for LDS proselytism efforts”, which is sustained by 3 anecdotes of violent tragedies against missionaries in the past decade, while ignoring all the studies that demonstrate that per capita illegal drug use and drug-related violence in Brazil are low (much lower than in the US) and that violence and homicides have much more social and economic origins and pose but marginal influence on LDS Church activities. [9][10][11][12][13][14] Even more egregiously, there seems to be a lot of blaming the aforementioned low retention rates on “nominal Catholic[ism]” and some inherent inability to “instilling habits of regular church attendance, daily scripture reading”, etc., because “nominal Catholics... become nominal Latter-day Saints”, which dangerously flirts with outdated imperialistic views of the “lazy natives”. Unfortunately as this (surely coincidental) impression is, it is ironic that the data it particularly ignores (viz., that Roman Catholicism has declined from 95% of the total population in 1940 to 90% in 1970 and 64% in 2010, whereas Evangelicals have soared from 2% to 5% to 22% and Nones from 0.2% to 0.7% to 8%, respectively) contain the precise information that renders the “nominal” argument entirely outdated and irrelevant and directs the debate into a more fruitful and data-driven consideration. [15][16]

Last, but not least, many assertions specifically about the LDS experience in Brazil are neither sourced nor data-based. Where, for instance, would one follow up on, or even confirm, the assertions that the “Perpetual Education Fund has been well utilized in Brazil in addressing poverty” is entirely a mystery. While many specific details about places and people do include reference sources, many more assertions about programs and trends merit either anecdotal evidences or none at all.

Ignoring the odd peppered choices that give off the impression of amateurism, such as categorizing Mexico in Central America as opposed to its conventionally accepted geographical place in North America (or the more academically acceptable even separation between only North and South America) or dating calendar years to “the birth of Christ” as opposed to the historically more sound, academically accepted “Common Era”, a work that purports itself to “provid[e]... comprehensive statistics, historical data, and analysis on [populational] growth...” should not fail to double-check the accuracy of its data, cite multiple sources, or cite sources at all, ignore relevant data and published data analyses, and thoroughly explore other data that properly and more adequately contextualize one’s own set of data and analyses. [17][18][19]

All things considered, ‘Reaching the Nations’ is a great tool for anyone curious or interested in learning about Mormonism in Brazil and an unparalleled stepping stool for academically relevant studies of Brazilian Mormonism. More rigorous attention to the quality of cited data, more knowledgeable grasp of relevant published raw data and data analyses, and better array of sources are needed and, if acquired, will certainly make the next edition of this almanac an absolute academic tour de force.

Taunalyn Rutherford
India


This entry is a fairly accurate picture of the LDS Church in India. However, the omission of the May 2012 formation of the Hyderabad Stake in the “LDS History” section lessens its credibility. The creation of the Stake was an extremely historic and important event for members all over India. The information in the entry seems to reflect Church conditions as of 2009 with a quick update in early 2012. As a result, the numbers for the branches in Delhi are low. Rather than an average of 50, there are now closer to 75 members on average who attend each week.

In the Hyderabad Stake and the rest of the Bangalore Mission average attendance numbers of roughly 100 in congregations is still a good estimate however the number of congregations has grown. Retention rates in India are relatively high particularly for Asia as the article correctly states. India reports 40% activity and this could even be as high as 50% in some areas. One native church leader in the Bangalore Mission explained that in recent years the emphasis on quality rather than quantity in missionary work has yielded, more committed members who have been determined to go on missions and marry in the temple which has lead to retention rates above 50% and some as high as 80%.

The “Cultural Issues” section reads like a returned-missionary report rather than the perspective of a native member and reveals an American bias. This American-centric perspective is also evident in the general information on India stemming from the fact that the main source seems to have been the CIA website referenced in the Bibliography. The article is helpful in giving one view of India and the condition of the LDS Church there, but should be seen as no more than what it is: an encyclopedic reference.
Wilfried Decoo

Belgium and general review


*Reaching the Nations* (RTN) presents a massive amount of data in almanac style for 221 entries (ten world regions and 211 countries and territories). Volume I deals with America (from north to south, including the Carribean), Europe (west and east), and Oceania. It devotes an average of four pages to each entry. Each entry includes general data on geography, demography, history, culture, economy, and religion; next data on Mormon history, growth, activity rates, materials, meeting places, and other relevant topics. In the introduction, RTN announces an analysis of “the interplay of these factors on LDS growth” and the identification of “challenges, opportunities, and prospects for future growth.” The intended audience is “the general public” and Mormon “lay members and leaders” with as main aim “to learn from prior successes and failures around the world and adopt and implement growth strategies that are scripturally based, consistent with church teachings, and promote local self-sustainability in growth and leadership.”

The constructive aims of the authors and their desire to build the church are undeniable. Their work is imposing by its massive accumulation of data. But admiration for the sheer volume of gathered data cannot allow a review to overlook the weaker aspects. Besides making wide-ranging remarks, I will use the entry on Belgium as a test case.

On General Data

For the general data in each entry (geography, population, languages, history, culture, economy, religions...), why fill a book for a large part with information that can be found at once, in frequently updated form, in online “basic sources” such as the CIA World Factbook, Wikipedia, or Everyculture.com? Most Mormon readers—think visitors to a country and prospective missionaries and their family—will be interested in the latest general data, particularly on sensitive and fluctuating issues. In a book format some of these data may quickly become obsolete. Moreover, although RTN mentions the “basic sources” in its bibliography, a few probes show that its general data also come from inaccurate sources or have been muddled in rewriting or in summarizing. For example, in the entry for Belgium (pp. 64-71), the geography reads that “Middle Belgium [is] also known as Wallonia” and that “mountains occupy Ardennes in the southeast of Belgium.” Wallonia is not “Middle Belgium,” but comprises the whole southern half of Belgium; the Ardennes is not a different region from Wallonia, but a natural region situated in the southeast of Wallonia; there are no real “mountains,” but slowly rising hills and plateaus to about 2,200 feet above sea level. Next, the explanation in the entry on “other commonly spoken languages” is inaccurate or at least confusing (while each of the basic sources gives simple and correct information). The entry further mentions that “the Spanish controlled Belgium from 1519 to 1713” (no, from 1556 on); that “Napoleon invaded Belgium in the late eighteenth century” (no, he didn’t); that “Belgium colonized the Congo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (no, only in part of the twentieth century); that “cigarette consumption rates are high” (no, they are among the lower rates in Europe); that

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10 The error is frequent in English online sources, probably copied one from another. The error may have crept in as the year when Charles I decreed the juridical status of new overseas territories or when he became Charles V, Roman-German emperor. The region became only Spanish when it was inherited by Philip II of Spain in 1556.

11 The French revolutionaries of the First Republic invaded the region in 1793 and annexed it to France. It was already well integrated into France when Napoleon took over.

tobacco belongs to “the major crops” (no, only 0.4% of total crops and is to disappear\(^{13}\)). The entry lists a few significant medieval cities, but fails to mention Bruges—the most famous one for tourists around the world. References in footnotes do no always reflect the content of the preceding sentences, so sources are not always clear (e.g. note 93 on page 65). Each of these problematic items may seem trivial, but an accumulation of little errors reveals a lack of rigor and undermines credibility of the whole.

The attention RTN gives to the situation of religious freedom in many of its entries is valuable for Mormons, but such regulations concerning religious freedom are unsteady, in particular in East European countries where concerned legislation is still in transient modes. Also in other countries, requirements for church registration, operation, and proselytism can be prone to rapid changes. So, also in this case, readers would do best to refer to the latest online International Religious Freedom Report or other recent sources, rather than rely on perhaps obsolete information.

**On Mormon Data**

In terms of figures related to Mormon developments in each country, RTN gathers an impressive amount of geographic and numerical data, including dates and locations of church establishment, shifting numbers of missions and congregations over the years, shifting percentages of activity rates, data on consolidations, etc. Figures on church growth and retention are candid, acknowledging a less rosy picture than the church conveys, and giving, for each entry, a reliable impression of the local situation. The authors had to extrapolate the figures on retention from other figures and through various measurements. Those retention rates remain approximations, but RTN is to be commended for its unique contribution to this assessment. It is somewhat painful that the church possesses precise and continuously updated statistics on these activity rates (from counting attendance in sacrament meetings to number of temple recommend holders), but does not make them public, probably to uphold an image of large and coherent membership. Researchers are now compelled to a kind of time-consuming “informed guesswork.”

*Church News* is the main source for data and events. Over the whole volume, RTN refers to 2,123 (!) articles in *Church News*, 236 in *The Ensign*, and 34 in *Liahona*. However, this main reliance on PR-inspired church publications is problematic. First, it results in a choppy presentation of local church history, with possible gaps. Some rubrics in the entries read like a series of erratic snapshots, dictated by the fortuitous availability of a *Church News* or *Ensign* article. Negative events, such as major internal crises or conflicts, which could be revealing for an analysis of hurdles in development, are basically missing. Second, one must wonder how accurate the information is. For example, from a *Church News* article about Belgium, RTN claims that eighty people were baptized in 1888.\(^{14}\) Research has shown this to be implausible.\(^{15}\) The *Church News* article also states that in 1896 “a mob of 500 people threatened to kill Elder Ripplinger and stormed the home [in Liege] where he was staying.”

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\(^{15}\) Ann Burvenich, “Het ontstaan van de Kerk van Jezus Christus van de Heiligen der Laatste Dagen in België, 1861–1914” (M.A. thesis, Department of History, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1999). The story is based on a single sentence in Mischa Markow’s reminiscences, more than forty years after the alleged event, and based on his own hearsay from a single source decades earlier. As far as could be determined, mission records and missionary journals of the time make no mention of these baptisms.
The same research found no proof of such an episode. But RTN even expands this already fictional event by stating for Belgium: “Latter-day Saints experienced persecution at times during the late nineteenth century, with some missionaries receiving death threats” (p. 66). Such a statement leads to a wrong assessment of the very tolerant environment in Belgium at the time. Legends spring from exaggerations, distorted memories, fantasy, hearsay, fed by the appeal to be viewed as martyrs for the faith. Church News reporters are all too eager to accept such heroicized stories in order to glorify the church and galvanize readers. RTN should have approached such sources with great caution. Why not have also turned to the scholarly literature on aspects of the international church? Nearly all documents are a few clicks away. From its start in 1974 till 2012, the Journal of Mormon History published 82 scholarly articles about the Church in foreign countries, many of which deal also with present-day Mormonism. RTN does not cite a single one, nor any from BYU Studies which also carries a fair amount of articles on the international church. Google Scholar turns up many more studies on Mormonism in various countries. RTN does not refuse to turn to scholarly sources for it refers to three articles in Dialogue, one by Marjorie Newton on Australia, one by Tania Rands on Ukraine, and one by van Beek on the Netherlands (though the latter sits in a note with Ukraine and is irrelevant for its reference). In the same vein, when dealing with Mormon membership developments, any serious approach would refer, for example, to Thomas Murphy for Guatemala; to Henri Gooren for Nicaragua; to Mark Grover, David Knowlton, or Raymond Tullis for Latin America in general; to Caroline Plüss for Hong Kong; to John Hoffmann or Jiro Numano for Japan; to Walter van Beek for the Netherlands; to Ian Barber and David Gilgen or Marjorie Newton for New Zealand; to Walter van Beek for Tonga; to Christian Euvrard for France, etc. The scholarly basis for RTN’s announced analysis of “issues that have favored and hampered growth in the past” is therefore extremely weak. By providing mainly numbers of members from period to period, RTN gives no idea of their demographic profiles nor of their social, political, or educational backgrounds, while some of these data are available for certain countries in the scholarly literature or in national surveys.

RTN claims to “have sought to find the most accurate information available, including hundreds of member, returned missionary, and mission president reports” (p. 9). From what I can surmise, these reports have been useful in determining averages of attendance in meetings and participation in programs and events (from which figures of retention can be deduced), but they seem to provide little or no basis for a more systematic analysis of conversion processes or of problems of retention. Moreover, such reports need to be carefully assessed. They can be unrepresentative, defective, one-sided, or embellished.16 They sometimes proceed from a proselytizing, i.e., American perspective, aggrandizing successes, altering stories, or misinterpreting terms (a typical example is the term “church recognition”). At the same time, they tend to blame external causes for challenges and failures, for fear of leaving an impression of criticism of the church.

On Church Growth

A core concern of RTN is church growth, activity, and retention. The authors blame “low societal interest in religion,” “increasing secularism and materialism,” and “liberal social views” as “major obstacles” to missionary work and retention in Western Europe (p. 44-45). Similar reasons are evoked for North America (p. 16, 18, 22, 27), Eastern Europe (p. 220), for Central America and the Caribbean (p. 393), for South America (p. 598), and for Oceania (p. 738). Also in the discussion of individual countries, “secularism” is often pointed at as a major cause of slow church growth. Such simplistic rationale comes from church rhetoric, which shifts the blame for slow progression to external “evil” rather than looking at internal causes. Let’s consider Europe. Low interest in religion? Quite the contrary since the 1990s. The authors seem unaware of academic analyses on religion’s vitality and resurgence, different from country to country, in a multi-dimensional post-secular

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Europe.\(^{17}\) Secularism to blame for slow church growth? Secularism, in the sense of separation of church and state, and secularization in the sense of dwindling participation in traditional churches, have greatly benefited proselytizing religions entering the open market. Compared to the number of Mormon conversions, substantial numbers of Europeans become Muslims, Buddhists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or evangelicals, or they seek alternate spiritualities. The Mormons lag far behind in that market. Liberal social views? These views, on topics like divorce, abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, or surrogacy, can be rather beneficial to conversions by creating the need for new ideological homes for disappointed conservatives who continue to be counted in the tens of millions. Also here, Mormonism fails to reach them.

Then why are there few Mormon conversions? RTN seems to have been unwilling to extend its candid approach to a consideration of potential reasons \textit{internal} to the church. Precisely those reasons differentiate Mormonism from other, more successful proselytizing religions. First, the message itself poses an inevitable problem of credibility, namely the relatively recent (19th century) story of an American farm boy claiming to have seen God, to have been ordained by John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John, and to have translated a book from golden plates handed over by an angel. Former preaching framed the story in a dimension of “rational theology,” lifting it to a higher level, but nowadays only an emotional acceptance of a minimal message, “through the spirit,” is expected. Only a few investigators reach that phase (unless they have other reasons, social or political, to join the church). As Mauss pointed out, such subjective conversions “will not prove durable without some eventual support from the more rationalistic tradition in LDS discourse and teaching.”\(^{18}\) Next, the church carries a problematic legacy of polygamy, racism, and, more recently, of American right-wing political allegiances, which information-seeking investigators will quickly discover. Third, the exigencies of Mormon membership go far beyond what most other religions require. Taking these various hurdles into account, the church must either settle for “the elect few” or be more daring in adapting to new realities without losing its essence. RTN is, of course, fully justified in not wanting to probe that latter path.

Why is there low retention (though one could argue that even 30% is actually high)? Also here, RTN repeats the easy blame often expressed by missionaries and staunch members: “Many Latter-day Saints are less active as a result of failure to gain a solid testimony of the Church and develop daily religious habits and practices” (p. 95). Again, candor requires to look also at internal reasons. First, the profile of people who are willing to be quickly baptized (under missionary pressure) often foretells an equally quick exit (a problem RTN recognizes). This problem also highlights the inability of the missionary program to reach other profiles. Next, minimal teaching of investigators hides what mormonization will entail in terms of commitment to meetings and programs: usually only after baptism, new members discover that the grip of Mormonism on their whole life is not viable for them. Third, a polarized approach to church activity, with suffocating social control, and the fundamentalist bend of quite a few members and leaders—all or nothing—hardly leave room for an acceptable, reduced level of participation or for more leniency when it comes to familial and socializing traditions, for example in relation to the Sabbath or the Word of Wisdom. Also for long-term members, the problem of viability finally catches up, sometimes after decades of loyal membership. A thorough survey may even reveal that some of the most balanced and reasonable...
people become inactive, rather than fundamentalist ones. Fourth, the “dumbing down of music and manuals to the lowest common denominator of musical and doctrinal literacy”\(^\text{19}\) erodes the joy of church attendance. Besides these reasons inherent to the church, various common circumstances can lead people to non-attendance, such as marriage, divorce, health issues, or distance to church. Any serious analysis of retention (or rather of reduced engagement, disengagement, or disaffiliation) needs to look at a wide array of factors, including the social profiles of “inactives,” to discover patterns and causes and to consider solutions. If the church really wants to grow, it seems some more radical changes could turn the tide—without guarantees as it would move church life into new realms.

**Conclusion**

I come back to what RTN states in its introduction:

“The analytical nature of this book is such as to help educate the general public about the distribution of LDS membership and issues that have favored and hampered growth in the past, as well as to suggest useful methods from accumulated experience to achieve the greatest real growth possible in locations around the world.”

In my opinion, Volume I, the one here reviewed, does a phenomenal job in gathering and extrapolating figures from all over the world, but it disappoints in diagnosis. It fails to educate the public about favorable or unfavorable factors for growth, in particular those inherent to the church itself. It does not analyze key issues such as the varied causes of defection, the circumstances that influence quick departure or slow erosion, the room for alternate voices or for limited involvement, the viability in relation to local culture, the handling of collateral damage when conversions break up familial traditions, the dynamics of interfaith families, the consequences of retreatment, and more. RTN also does not convince as to suggestions for useful methods to achieve “the greatest real growth possible.” Proposing solutions like “emphasizing seminary and institute attendance, developing youth-directed mission outreach, and stronger member-missionary participation (p. 99) are all valuable, but have been in use for decades and still are, without triggering notable change. Solutions that only require more of members could even be counterproductive. Of course, then much boils down to a choice between a militant church for a small elite or a church where everyone can feel welcome and uplifted, whatever his or her station on the journey.

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*Reaching the Nations: International LDS Church Growth Almanac* (2014) is an ambitious project. Without the formal cooperation of the LDS church, the gathering of LDS demographic and statistical information is complex.

In particular the New Zealand chapter demonstrates how cautious researchers need to be when dealing with both cultural diversity and national statistics. It is a rule of thumb when writing about national characteristics that authors to ensure that they are speaking to the citizens of that nation, even if only imagining them as an audience. In doing so researchers oblige themselves to become participants in, rather than simply observers of unfamiliar cultures. This volume while impressive in breadth does demonstrate how vital is local knowledge and contextual understanding.

In the first instance New Zealand is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation state that prizes diversity and has done demonstrably through successive laws the require attention to both biculturalism and multiculturalism as national aspirations. To suggest that some of our dependencies are ‘sparsely inhabited’ erases the identities of those who do inhabit these islands – as if their sparseness alone defines them as a people.

It is also important to note that New Zealand might have territorial authorities it is also centrally administered. One of these central administrative entities is Statistics New Zealand who collects national statistics through the six year census and other ongoing data gathering tools. That being said it would have been useful for the authors to put these statistics into context or describe how they arrived at a 7.9% Māori population when the official count is around twice that figure. It does appear that while sourcing population data the authors have attempted to make sense of our data for an American audience who might think more in terms of blood quantum than New Zealand does. This would explain the ‘Mixed’ and ‘Other’ and ‘Unspecified’ ethnic categories they listed.

Additionally it is important to follow local conventions for referring to non-Anglo groups. Māori, is always written with a macron and Tongan, Samoan, Hindu etc. are important cultural groups whose discrete identities are never given the English suffix ‘s’ when referring to them.

Not only do the sources need to be much clearer, statements such as ‘Maori is spoken proficiently by a quarter of the ethnic population’ should be qualified. As a country that his home to diverse ‘ethnic’ groups it is difficult to discern exactly to whom the authors are referring. Notwithstanding, 25% ‘proficiency’ would be highly desirable but is equally highly improbable.

Overall we applaud the authors for such noble aspirations and are impressed with the amount of back-breaking work so clearly put into this almanac. However we would suggest strongly that in following editions the authors enlist local researchers where possible in order to provide a more nuanced and less American-centric perspective on the international growth and development of the LDS church.

Eustache Ilunga
Democratic Republic of the Congo

I read the DR Congo portion of the book “Reaching the Nations”. The information provided is clear, understandable and correct. They've been some change or progress since the book was published and some information seem out of date if the reader is aware of the current situation. Below are a few things that I have noticed for your attention:

**On page 354**

Under “Languages” there is a minor spelling error: It is *Tshiluba* instead of *Tsihiluba*. This should be corrected on several places.

**On page 357**

Major Cities:

Uvira is in bold but it has LDS congregations as of today (2 branches: Uvira and Kalundu).

Just for your information: The Kinagasani branch was recently created.

**LDS History:**

Legal status was granted to the Church on April 12, 1986. On February 12, it was the day Church officials were received by the President of the Country to talk about the legal status.

Elder Marvin J. Ashton dedicated the country for missionary work on August 31, 1987.

Congregational Growth

The book says: In 1987, there were three branches and one district in Kinshasa while the first district were reorganized on September 18, 1988 and the two existing branches were divided to have four branches.

**On page 358**

Kinshasa Mokali stake was not created in 2013. The correct date is Dec 16, 2012

Kakanda Branch was organized nearby a large mine near the city of Fungurume (not Kasangulu).

**Activity and Retention**

Upon purchase (not completion) of the first LDS meetinghouse (a home) in September 1986

**On page 359**

**Meetinghouses**

Just a correction on the spelling on the second line ...existing building (not exiting)

**On page 360**

**Cultural Issues**
The statement “Poverty appears to be the largest obstacle for the church’s progress in the country” can be relative as in some instances it appears that poverty makes most Congolese people to become humble and be receptive to the preaching of the Gospel, which adds up to the rapid growth.

**National Outreach**

Just a correction on the spelling on the fifth line ...Kasumbalesa (not Kasambalesa)

On the second paragraph, 6th line where it says, there is no reported church presence in any of the cities or rural areas between Kananga and Kinshasa?? Lusuku...

**Page 361**

Paragraph 3, there is now church presence in Kisangani. The first branch has just been organized in March 2015.

**Page 362**

Leadership

6th line, it says: Mission leadership visits are infrequent... since 2012 there is a more frequent visit, almost every 6 weeks by the Mission president.

**Page 363**

**Future Prospects**

Paragraph 2, line 3: ... Additional districts will likely be organized in additional cities such as Mwene-Ditu... The Mwene-Ditu District was organized in 2013?