



# The Rise of Mormonism

*By Rodney Stark*

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Will Mormonism be the next world faith, one that will rival Catholicism, Islam, and other major religions in terms of numbers and global appeal? This was the question Rodney Stark addressed in his much-discussed and much-debated article, "The Rise of a New World Faith" (1984), one of several essays on Mormonism included in this new collection. Examining the religion's growing appeal, Rodney Stark concluded that Mormons could number 267 million members by 2080. In what would become known as "the Stark argument," Stark suggested that the Mormon Church offered contemporary sociologists and historians of religion an opportunity to observe a rare event: the birth of a new world religion.

In the years following that article, Stark has become one of the foremost scholars of Mormonism and the sociology of religion. This new work, the first to collect his influential writings on the Mormon Church, includes previously published essays, revised and rewritten for this volume. His work sheds light on both the growth of Mormonism and on how and why certain religions continue to grow while others fade away.

Stark examines the reasons behind the spread of Mormonism, exploring such factors as cultural continuity with the faiths from which it seeks converts, a volunteer missionary force, and birth rates. He explains why a demanding faith like Mormonism has such broad appeal in today's world and considers the importance of social networks in finding new converts. Stark's work also presents groundbreaking perspectives on larger issues in the study of religion, including the nature of revelation and the reasons for religious growth in an age of modernization and secularization.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

a well-written thought-provoking compilation covering nearly three decades of scholarship

(*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*)

It's an excellent summary and a must-read... *The Rise of Mormonism* is a thoughtful and insightful look at the Church.

(Jeffrey Needle *Irreantum*)

Rodney Stark is one of America's pre-eminent sociologists of religions.

(Gerald M. McDermott *Books and Culture*)

An important voice in the sociological study of religion.

(Kathleen Flake *The Journal of Religion*)

I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the social scientific study of Mormonism.

(Henri Gooren *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*)

### Review

Rodney Stark's notorious predictions of Mormonism as an emergent world religion have overshadowed an extensive and much more significant engagement with the LDS religion. Reid L. Neilson's assemblage of these penetrating essays establishes both Stark as a preeminent scholar of Mormonism and the value of Mormon studies as a potent paradigm for the history and sociology of religion and our understanding of successful religious movements.

(Terryl L. Givens, University of Richmond, author of *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*)

In the 1980s, Rodney Stark began creating a comprehensive theory of how religions grow. In *The Churching of America* the theory was applied to Baptists, Methodists, and Catholics, then to *The Rise of Christianity*. Now comes *The Rise of Mormonism*, again illustrating the fertility of his theory in this wonderfully written book. All readers will learn from it.

(Phillip E. Hammond, University of California, Santa Barbara, author of *With Liberty for All: Freedom of Religion in the United States*)

Rodney Stark's Mormon essays will surprise and instruct Latter-day Saints and provoke debate in everyone else. No one takes revelation more seriously than he does. He is that rare sociologist of religion who believes the world's great revelators, including Joseph Smith, were not frauds or crazy. Serious students of Mormonism must know this work.

(Richard Lyman Bushman, Columbia University, author of *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*)

#### About the Author

Rodney Stark is University Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *For the Glory of God* and *Exploring the Religious Life*. Reid L. Neilson is the author and editor of several books on Mormonism. He is currently a doctoral candidate in religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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