

Religious Statistics of Hawaii, 1825-1972

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Statistics on church membership or religious preference in Hawaii, like those for many other Pacific territories, have long been noted for their inadequacies. Coverage has been sporadic and incomplete. Definitions have varied from church to church and from survey to survey. Tabulations have usually appeared only in abridged form in little-known publications. Although data for individual denominations go back as far as 1825, it was not until 1972 that a comprehensive survey encompassing the full range of religious beliefs and organizations in the Islands was published. In part because of the interest generated by release of the 1972 survey, this brief review of the statistical record has been prepared.

Prior to 1820, the religion of the Hawaiians was essentially a nature worship, involving many gods—Kane, Ku, Lono, Kanaloa, Ku-kailimoku, and Pele, among others.¹ Believers in these gods presumably included the entire indigenous population, numbering some 250,000 at the time of the first European contact in 1778 and an estimated 142,000 forty-five years later.²

Religious statistics were first compiled for Hawaii by the New England Protestant missionaries, soon after their arrival in 1820. Beginning with the total for 1825, the Sandwich Islands Mission published annual data on "members in good standing" (later termed "members in regular standing") in a series maintained until modern times. These yearly compilations were often incomplete; the 1835 total, for example, included figures from only twelve of the seventeen mission stations then in operation, and as late as 1853 four (out of twenty-three) were missing. Trends were moreover affected by liberalization of membership requirements, exceptional proselytizing zeal by one or two individuals, heavy mortality among members in times of epidemic, sporadic attempts to purge the lists of inactive members, and other factors.³ Total membership, however tallied, rose from ten in 1825 to 749 in 1835 and 18,451 in 1840. By 1856, 23,652 Hawaiians—some 32.6 percent of the population—were members. These statistics appeared in a variety of publications, including the annual reports of the Sandwich Islands Mission (1835-

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1853), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1835–1870), the Hawaiian Evangelical Association (1854–1962), and the Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ (1963–1969).⁴ Annual totals for selected dates, 1825 to 1870, are cited in table 1.

TABLE I
PROTESTANT CHURCH MEMBERS IN REGULAR STANDING: 1825 TO 1870

Year	Number	Percent of population	Year	Number	Percent of population
1825	10	0.0	1848	23,102	25.6
1832	577	0.5	1849	22,831	26.7
1835	749	0.7	1850	21,738	25.9
1836	916	0.8	1851	21,054	25.7
1837	1,049	1.0	1852	(NA)	(NA)
1838	3,341	3.2	1853	22,236	29.1
1839	15,915	15.3	1854	22,916	31.4
1840	18,451	17.9	1855	18,479	25.3
1841	16,903	16.6	1856	23,652	32.6
1842	20,280	20.2	1857	21,943	30.4
1843	23,804	24.0	1861	19,767	28.5
1844	22,670	23.2	1863	19,679	29.4
1845	(NA)	(NA)	1865	17,521	27.1
1846	21,058	22.1	1870	14,850	25.1
1847	23,597	25.1			

NA: Not available.

SOURCE: Sheldon Dibble, *A History of the Sandwich Islands* (Honolulu: Thos. G. Thrum, 1909), p. 223; Rufus Anderson, *The Hawaiian Islands: Their Progress and Condition Under Missionary Labors* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), pp. 299–300; *Extracts from the Minutes of the Sandwich Islands Mission for 1835–1853* (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1835–1853); *Revised Minutes of the Delegate Meeting of the Sandwich Islands Mission . . . 1838* (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1839), p. 18; *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions for 1847–1870*; *Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association . . . 1857* (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1857), p. 24; “Religious Statistics,” *The Polynesian*, July 13, 1861. Percentages computed from population estimates in Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778–1965* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), pp. 42 and 223 (1825–1847 by linear interpolation).

Membership data for the Roman Catholic Church are much less readily available. Although the first Catholic missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1827, it was many years before regular estimates of Catholic membership were compiled or made public. In 1846 Jarves wrote of “a total population attending them [the Catholic churches], or supposed to be under their influence, of nearly 14,000.”⁵ Yzendoorn’s otherwise detailed and comprehensive history of the Catholic mission contains only one set of membership totals, a breakdown by race and military status (adding to 109,000) as of June 30, 1926.⁶ More recently, annual estimates of the total Catholic population of Hawaii

(including baptized infants and small children) have been published in *The Official Catholic Directory*. The January 1, 1971, estimate from this source is 210,000.⁷

Mormon missionaries arrived in December 1950, and by October 1853 counted 3,016 members in the Islands.⁸

It was about this time that the Hawaiian Government decided to add a question on religion to its official census schedules. Earlier government censuses, conducted in 1847, 1848, 1849, and 1850, had not touched on this subject. For the fifth such census, taken as of December 26, 1853, the Hawaiian and part Hawaiian populations were asked to classify themselves according to one of three groups: Protestant (reported by 56,840), Catholic (11,401), and Mormon (2,778). Nobody, apparently, answered "other" or "none" or declined to respond. The question did not appear on schedules used for the 2,119 foreign residents of the Kingdom.⁹

Religion was omitted from the 1860, 1866, 1872, and 1878 censuses, and then restored for the 1884 count. Only two denominations were listed on the census form, Protestant (checked by 29,685 Island residents) and Roman Catholic (with 20,072). The accompanying narrative added: "This leaves a balance of 30,821 who do not report themselves as belonging to any religious denomination. Of this number, the Chinese form the largest proportion. Out of the 17,939 of this nationality living in the Kingdom, there are but 300 reported (by Mr. F. W. Damon, the Superintendent of the Chinese Mission on the Islands), as being 'Christians.' . . . A special census taken of the Jews in the Kingdom gives their number at 84. Of the sect known as the Latter Day Saints there are 3,576. . . . All of the Portuguese returned in the Census are set down as Catholics." Protestant and Catholic totals were reported by island, district, and, in the case of Honolulu, by election wards.¹⁰

The last appearance of an item on religion in a Hawaiian census was in 1896. Skipped for the 1890 count, the question this time listed three possibilities: Protestant (chosen by 23,273), Roman Catholic (26,363), and Mormon (4,886). These data were cross-tabulated by sex, race and nationality, but not by geographic area. The census narrative remarked: "In a matter of this kind a large number of people decline to state what their religion is, and with our large Asiatic population there is a large number of Buddhists, followers of Confucius, etc. With these and their many varying sects, the statistics had nothing to do."¹¹

The 1853, 1884, and 1896 census data have been analyzed in an issue of *Social Process in Hawaii* devoted to "Sociology of Religion in Hawaii."¹² Comparative statistics appear in table 2.

"Church statistics" were compiled for the Territory of Hawaii in 1905, 1907, 1908, and 1909, and published in Thrum's *Annual*.¹³ These tabulations showed separate totals on number of churches, pastors or priests, members, Sunday schools, Sunday school scholars, and value of church property for each of ten groups—Buddhists, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, German Lutherans, Latter Day Saints, Methodist Episcopal Church, Protestant Episcopal Church, Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints,

TABLE 2
RELIGION OF THE POPULATION: 1853, 1884, AND 1896

Religion	1853*	1884	1896	Percent distribution		
				1853	1884	1896
Total population	71,019	80,578	109,020	100.0	100.0	100.0
Protestants	56,840	29,685	23,273	80.0	36.8	21.3
Roman Catholics	11,401	20,072	26,363	16.1	24.9	24.2
Mormons	2,778	3,576	4,886	3.9	4.4	4.5
Jews	—	84	—	0	0.1	0
Rest of population	—	27,161	54,498	0	33.7	50.0

* Limited to Hawaiians and part Hawaiians; excludes 2,119 non-Hawaiians.

SOURCE: "Census Table of the Hawaiian Islands for 1853," *The Polynesian*, April 15, 1854; *Census of the Hawaiian Islands Taken December 27th, 1884 Under the Board of Education* (Honolulu, 1885); *Report of the General Superintendent of the Census, 1896* (Honolulu: Department of Public Instruction, 1897), pp. 105 and 107.

Roman Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists. The 1905 data were attributed to the Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, but no such table appears in the Superintendent's reports for this period. The 1907, 1908, and 1909 data were printed in Thrum's *Annual* without source references. Membership totals for 1905 and 1909 are summarized in table 3.

TABLE 3
CHURCH MEMBERSHIP: 1905, 1909, AND 1954-56

Denomination	1905	1909	1954- 1955†	Percent distribution		
				1905	1909	1954- 1955†
Total population	166,400	186,600	522,400	100.0	100.0	100.0
Specified denominations	67,388	89,053	333,700	40.5	47.7	63.9
Protestant	10,255	11,991	32,700	6.2	6.4	6.3
Roman Catholic	12,000	35,000	200,000	7.2	18.8	38.3
Latter Day Saints	5,133	8,162	17,000	3.1	4.4	3.3
Buddhist	40,000	33,900	62,200	24.0	18.2	11.9
Shinto	—	—	21,800	—	—	4.2
Rest of population	99,012	97,547	188,700	59.5	52.3	36.1

† Protestant total limited to adult members; Roman Catholic total includes children; age limits not specified for other groups. Christian Scientists and Seventh-day Adventists included in "Rest of population."

SOURCE: Total population from Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778-1965* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), p. 223, and Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *Intercensal Population Estimates for Hawaii, 1930 to 1970* (Statistical Report 81, July 23, 1971), p. 5 (average of 1954 and 1955). Membership in specified denominations from Thos. G. Thrum, compiler and publisher, *The Hawaiian Almanac and Annual* for 1906, p. 21, and 1910, p. 21 (Honolulu, 1905 and 1909), and Harley H. Zeigler, "Religions," in Moray Epstein, ed., *All About Hawaii*, 81st edition (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Ltd., 1956), pp. 129-160.

The United States Bureau of the Census conducted a *Census of Religious Bodies* in 1926 and again in 1936, but tabulations were limited to the forty-eight States, and the territories and possessions were excluded. None of the decennial population censuses undertaken by the Bureau of the Census has ever included a question on religion, either for States or territories.

The next comprehensive compilation of religious statistics was made by Harley H. Zeigler, who published his 1954–1955 data in the 1956 edition of *All About Hawaii*.¹⁴ Zeigler noted that his figures were based on information supplied by the various denominations, which often used widely differing definitions of “membership” and failed to adjust for duplications and overlap. His tabulation, summarized in table 3, reported 200,000 Roman Catholics, 32,700 Protestants, 17,000 Latter Day Saints, 62,200 Buddhists, and 21,800 Shintoists.

Statistics on religious preference were obtained as part of a sample survey conducted on Oahu in the late summer of 1960. These data were a by-product of a study by a team of sociologists and economists, employed by the University of Hawaii Economic Research Center to conduct research requested by the City and County of Honolulu Liquor Commission. The team (among other things) undertook a sample survey of 1,056 males and 1,050 females of legal drinking age, and studied their drinking habits in relation to their age, race, sex, religion, and other related factors. Results were tabulated separately for males and females and published in a confidential report; later they were reprinted, with permission, in the *Statistical Abstract of Hawaii*.¹⁵ The combined male and female samples—2,106 Oahu residents twenty years of age or more—produced the following results: no religion, 12.1 percent; Roman Catholic, 27.6; Mormon, 2.7; Protestant, 39.0; Buddhist, 15.8; and others (including Confucianist, Jewish, Shinto, and other religion, and no response), 2.8.

Early in 1965, the Honolulu Council of Churches estimated that the population of the State included 220,000 Roman Catholics, 200,000 Protestants or Mormons, 150,000 Buddhists, and 120,000 “unchurched.”¹⁶

The Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development undertook a telephone survey of church officials in August 1970, in an effort to obtain current totals on membership. Eventually published by the Department, these data indicated between 100,000 and 150,000 Buddhists, 210,000 Roman Catholics, and 93,715 in other specified sects.¹⁷

The most recent figures are those compiled by the Department of Religion, University of Hawaii, early in 1972. This tabulation included information on the number of churches and estimated membership for each of 76 groups, as obtained by telephone and correspondence. Membership data were State-wide figures as estimated by church central offices on Oahu. Unlike earlier studies, this one included a wide range of the newer or more atypical religious movements, such as the Dancing Goddess, Church of Scientology, and Hare Krishna. For the first time in any statistical survey, ancient or modern, “indigenous Hawaiian” was listed as a faith—unfortunately followed by “NA” in the data columns. Combined membership for all faiths was reported

as 542,000, or approximately 69 percent of the population of the State. The largest denominations were the Roman Catholic (with 220,000 members), Daijingu Temple (a Shinto sect, with 40,000), the Honpa Hongwanji and Todaiji Mission (both Buddhist, each with 30,000), and Church of the Latter Day Saints (also 30,000). These statistics were initially issued in a limited distribution table and later reprinted in *The State of Hawaii Data Book*.¹⁸ The survey results are summarized in table 4.

TABLE 4
RELIGIOUS MEMBERSHIP: 1972

Category	Groups	Members	Percent of population
Total population (1971)	76	789,225	100.0
Buddhist	16	121,460	15.4
Christian	37	347,692	44.1
Roman Catholic	1	220,000	27.9
Protestant ¹	19	81,102	10.3
Holiness faiths ²	9	4,925	0.6
Metaphysical Christian	3	834	0.1
Other Christian	5	40,831	5.2
Jewish	2	1,072	0.1
Shinto ³	5	43,500	5.5
New religious movements ⁴	7	16,340	2.1
Other religious faiths ⁵	9	11,780	1.5
Rest of population	—	247,381	31.3

¹ Excludes groups with fewer than 500 members.

² Excludes membership in Church of the Latter Day Rain.

³ Excludes membership in Inari Jinjya and Ishizuchi Shrine.

⁴ Primarily of Japanese derivation.

⁵ Excludes membership in International Meditation Society and indigenous Hawaiian cults.

SOURCE: Total population from provisional 1971 estimate in Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *Provisional Estimates of the Population of Hawaii, July 1, 1971* (Statistical Report 86, November 12, 1971), p. 7. Membership from E. M. and M. E. McCrath, Department of Religion, University of Hawaii, "Religions in Hawaii" (unpublished table, 1972).

Comparison of the 1972 data with figures for earlier years is extremely difficult. Incomplete coverage, differing definitions, and gross statistical inaccuracy in some of the historical data has seriously affected their comparability and made it virtually impossible to trace trends with any precision.

Notwithstanding these problems, the major developments in religious belief and membership in Hawaii remain reasonably clear. The indigenous nature worship of the Hawaiians quickly gave way to New England Protestantism soon after its introduction in 1820. The Roman Catholic Mission, established

seven years later, began to rival the Protestants in membership within a generation, and by the end of the 19th century had overtaken them. Immigrants from China, Japan, and Korea brought their Buddhist, Confucianist, and Shinto beliefs to the Islands soon thereafter. Most recently, there has been a rapid increase in membership in the Apostolic, Pentecostal, and other Holiness faiths, the Dancing Goddess and other new movements of Japanese derivation, and such groups as the Hare Krishna and Church of Scientology.

NOTES

- ¹ Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, 1778-1854, Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu, 1938), 7-8.
- ² Robert C. Schmitt, *Demographic Statistics of Hawaii: 1778-1965* (Honolulu, 1968), 18-25.
- ³ Kuykendall, *op. cit.*, 114-115; *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions . . . 1840* (Boston, 1840), 37-39.
- ⁴ *Extracts from the Minutes of the Sandwich Islands Mission* for 1835-1853; *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* for 1835-1870; *Minutes of the Meeting of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association* for 1854-1863; *Ka Moolelo o ka Halawai Makahiki o ka Ahahui Euanelio Hawaii* for 1863-1882; *Annual Report of the Hawaiian Evangelical Association* for 1878-1961; *Annual Report, Hawaiian Evangelical Association of Congregational Christian Churches, 1962*; *Annual Report, Hawaii Conference of the United Church of Christ* for 1963-1970.
- ⁵ James Jackson Jarves, *History of the Hawaiian Islands*, 3rd Ed. (Honolulu, 1847), 209.
- ⁶ Father Reginald Yzendoorn, *History of the Catholic Mission in the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu, 1927), 244.
- ⁷ P. J. Kenedy & Sons, *The Official Catholic Directory, Anno Domini 1971* (New York, 1971), 367.
- ⁸ Kuykendall, *op. cit.*, 344-345.
- ⁹ P, April 15, 1854 and April 22, 1854; Schmitt, *op. cit.*, 76.
- ¹⁰ *Census of the Hawaiian Islands Taken December 27th, 1884 Under the Board of Education* (Honolulu, 1885), N. P.
- ¹¹ Department of Public Instruction, *Report of the General Superintendent of the Census, 1896* (Honolulu, 1897), 105-107.
- ¹² Andrew W. Lind, "Religious Diversity in Hawaii," *Social Process in Hawaii*, Vol. 16 (1952), 11-19.
- ¹³ HAA, 1906 (p. 21), 1908 (p. 21), 1909 (p. 21), and 1910 (p. 21).
- ¹⁴ Harley H. Zeigler, "Religions," in Moray Epstein, ed., *All About Hawaii*, 81st Ed. (Honolulu, 1956), 129-160.
- ¹⁵ University of Hawaii, Economic Research Center, *An Analysis of Alcohol Consumption Patterns on Oahu* (Honolulu, June 1961), Part I, p. 22; Hawaii State Department of Planning and Research, *Statistical Abstract of Hawaii, 1962* (Honolulu, 1962), 16.
- ¹⁶ Seido Ogawa, "How Churches Grew in Isles," HSB, Jan. 16, 1965, A-6.
- ¹⁷ Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *The State of Hawaii Data Book 1971: A Statistical Abstract* (Honolulu, 1971), 13.
- ¹⁸ E. M. and M. E. McCrath, Department of Religion, University of Hawaii, "Religions in Hawaii" (table, 1972); Hawaii State Department of Planning and Economic Development, *The State of Hawaii Data Book 1972: A Statistical Abstract* (Honolulu, 1972), 21-23.