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PROCLAIMING THE MESSAGE: A COMPARISON OF MORMON MISSIONARY STRATEGY WITH OTHER MAINSTREAM CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

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Introduction

On May 4, 2001, an article appeared in the *Las Vegas Sun* under the title “Mormon Church is funding its future.” The reporter Stacy J. Willis described a young man with a light grip on the English language and a nametag that identified him as a Mormon missionary. This young 21-year-old man grew up in Mongolia. His old friends back home were Buddhists, beer drinkers, farmers and store clerks. Now he spent the time carrying the Book of Mormon through suburban Las Vegas, USA, wearing a necktie telling the story of the prophet Joseph Smith and divine revelation – the story of an American church. This young man had been converted to Mormonism in Mongolia when he was 18 years old. A young missionary from Utah had visited him and showed him a video about Jesus Christ.

Las Vegas West Mission Church President Walter Hill told the reporter that by the year 2060 the Utah-based Mormon Church would be a major world religion. According to him the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often referred to as the LDS Church or Mormon Church) claimed 11 million followers worldwide and 2 percent of the U.S. population. Hill pointed out that through the assimilation of young men such as this young Mongolian Mormonism that was younger than the United States, would wrap its arms around the world. This young man from abroad, together with others, was serving a two-year mission in Las Vegas before returning home and becoming leaders of the LDS Church in their respective countries. They would be the ones to bring this church into maturity. (Willis 2001).

The LDS Church has always given high priority to its missionary endeavors. Shortly after the founding of the church in 1830 at

Fayette, Seneca County, New York, missionaries were sent westward. (Stark 1984:19). During the later part of the 1830s Mormon missionary work was expanded to Europe (Allen & Leonard 1976:117). In 1993 the number of full-time Mormon missionaries was almost 50,000. (Mauss 1994:134). In the year 2000 the number had risen to around 60,000 (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, January 15, 2000). LDS Statistical Report 2002 (issued April 5, 2003) by the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reports the number of full-time missionaries to be 61,638. In 1999 the LDS mission work was extended to approximately 125 nations in the world (Oaks & Wickman 1999:263). David, I took this sentence out since it didn't seem to distinguish between nations ministered in, and how missions are divided. I think the point was made the by first sentence, and the second contributed to an inaccurate description of LDS mission layout.

Before we proceed any further it is important to be aware of the following: Many mainstream Christian Churches do not consider the Mormons as belonging to their "fold" due to their specific history and doctrines. Such doctrines include the LDS doctrines of God, Christ, the Mormon plan of eternal progression, etc. Mainstream Christians claim that the LDS Church deviated radically from the creeds originating from the early Christian Church Councils. These creeds constitute an important part of the theological foundation of the Christian Church (Jenkins 2002:66, 86). However, it is right at this point the problem occurs. The Mormons claim that these very same creeds held by the mainstream Christian Churches constitute grave heresy. They are an indication as to why God withdrew his truth from the church in the post-apostolic age. With this in mind it seems paradoxical that the LDS Church accepts the designation Christian while at the same time "asserting its own distinctive status as a Restoration movement." (Davies 2000:247).

Wilfried Decoo, a prominent LDS member in Belgium, addresses this problem under the heading *The Boundary Issue*. He poses the question as to how Mormons should define and communicate LDS distinctiveness. On the one hand, the LDS Church launches a strong

public relations campaign to emphasize the common Christian heritage the Mormons shared with other denominations. On the other hand, the Mormon heritage from the beginning has emphasized “*the state of apostasy in which the rest of Christianity now wallows.*” (Decoo 1996:114). According to Joseph Smith, all other creeds were “an abomination” in the eyes of the Lord. Decoo asked the question how far the Mormons could go in both directions simultaneously. In the final analysis, there was a big difference between being a Christian church and the one true Christian church. Only the latter posture was consistent with the extensive proselytizing effort of the LDS Church. Decoo criticized the Mormons for watering down their doctrinal distinctiveness for the sake of good public relations. Instead they preferred to emphasize social and moral conservatism such as obedience, life-style conformity, sexual chastity, anti-abortion, etc. All of these things were important as products of conversion, but they did not make the Mormons distinctive by comparison with either Roman Catholicism or conservative Protestantism. Decoo believed that most LDS converts preferred to deny any connection with traditional Christianity, which they rejected as an apostate remnant. The church ran the risk of losing these converts if conference sermons, lesson manuals and press releases became too generically Christian (Decoo 1996:114).

Long before the Mormons appeared on the stage many people and various Christian Churches had already heeded the call to go out into the world and preach the Gospel. Missionary work has always followed in the footsteps of the Christian Church. It has been the heartbeat of the Church without which the Church would slowly succumb and die.

Although the LDS Church and mainstream Christian Churches stand far apart in regard to doctrine and much of the religious way of life they have one thing in common, namely, engaging themselves around the world in active missionary service and endeavors. In this article we will make an attempt to put the spotlight on the respective strategies and methods used in undertaking these tasks. Do the

LDS Church and mainstream Christian Churches use the same kind of strategies and methods or do they differ?

The Mormon Missionary System

Missionary work is one of Mormonism's ground pillars. Missionaries must be properly called and set apart for their service. Full-time missionary service is considered a privilege, not a right. The missionaries are called by the President of the LDS Church. The priesthood leaders in the wards or stakes (ward is equivalent to parish/congregation and stake to diocese/synod/district in Catholic/Protestant churches) have an important role to help identify and prepare worthy and qualified members for full-time missionary service. They are to teach the prospective missionaries in regard to the joys and blessings of this service. The leaders are also supposed to inspire the recruits spiritually, financially, emotionally, and physically. Such preparations include being worthy and living an exemplary life as well as studying the gospel. Those worthy and able young men who seem uncertain to serve full-time missions should be given special attention. The leaders of the wards or stakes should encourage youth leaders who love missionary work to help young people get experiences that promote faith and cultivate a desire to serve the Lord. Prospective missionaries should be given opportunities to serve in the church. They should also be given the opportunity to work with full-time missionaries and to make friends with non-members and relatives (*LDS Church Handbook of Instruction* 1998:93-95).

Church leaders should encourage all worthy, able and single men between 19 and 25 years of age to serve as full-time missionaries. They are usually called to serve for 24 months. In some situations deviations in the age pattern may include men 26 and older. (*LDS Church Handbook of Instruction* 1998:95).

Able, single women who are worthy and between 21 and 39 years of age may also be recommended for full-time missionary service. The reason why the age for women is set at 21 and not 19 as for men is not quite clear. It has been suggested that the reasons "stem from pa-

triarchal traditions that favor a longer period of parental guidance and protection for young women and an expectation that they should first be given a chance for an early marriage in place of a mission.” (Mauss 1994:131). The young women constitute approximately 10% of the missionary corps. Their term of service is usually put to 18 months. No pressure should be exercised upon the women to serve full-time missions. Bishops should not recommend them for missionary service if this should interfere with pending marriage plans. Women of 40 years and older may also be recommended for full-time missionary service. The length is usually stipulated to 12 months. In special instances where their respective skills are needed they may serve for 18 months. Bishops and stake presidents should make sure that women are in good health to serve effectively for the agreed period. (Mauss 1994:131, *LDS Church Handbook of Instruction* 1998:95).

Also couples can be called as full-time missionaries. Their term of service may include 12, 18, or 24 months. A six-month term of service can be considered only for those who are engaged in special type of works such as agricultural. Couples who are serving outside their native land are called for at least a period of 18 months. They must no longer be engaged in full-time employment. If such couples will be serving away from home, they must not have any dependent children living at home. Bishops and stake presidents should make sure that the couples are in good health so they can serve effectively as full-time missionaries. (*LDS Church Handbook of Instruction* 1998:95–96).

Some members are not eligible for full-time missions, such as:

1. Those who are not considered worthy by not complying with LDS standards.
2. Those who would have to leave dependent children in the care of someone else.
3. Young couples who are capable of bearing children.
4. Those who have been members of the Church for less than one year.

5. Those who are in debt and have not made definite arrangements to meet their obligations.
6. Those who are on legal probation, parole, or other unresolved legal status.
7. Those who have unresolved marital problems.
8. Those who are HIV positive.

In addition, the following categories of members are not normally recommended to serve full-time missions:

1. Men ages 19 through 25 and women ages 21 through 39 who have been divorced.
2. Women who have submitted to abortion, or men or women who have performed, encouraged, paid for or arranged for an abortion. This policy does not apply if the abortion took place before the people involved were baptized.
3. Men who have fathered or women who have given birth to a child out of wedlock, regardless of whether they have any current legal or financial responsibility for the child.
4. Members who are not physically, mentally, or emotionally able to withstand the strain of full-time missionary service. (LDS *Handbook of Instruction* 1998:96).

The aspect of worthiness for a missionary is of utmost importance. The Mormon Bishop (corresponding to Protestant or Catholic pastor/priest) and Stake President are responsible to make sure that every full-time missionary meets the specified criteria. If they are not able to recommend a person without reservation the recommendation papers should be withheld. Those who have engaged in serious transgressions, such as adultery, fornication, homosexual activity, other sexual perversions, drug misuse, serious violation of civil law, etc., are not recommended for missionary service. The person involved must also be worthy to enter the temple before being recommended. The Bishop and Stake President should make sure that the prospective missionary has had sufficient time to manifest a genuine repentance. The

time period could stretch over a period of three years but not less than one year from the most serious transgression. Mere confession does not constitute repentance. Evidence of a broken heart and a contrite spirit as well as a lasting change of behavior must be seen in the life of the person involved. (*LDS Handbook of Instruction* 1998:96-97).

Missionaries and their families are expected to provide financial support for a mission. The church pays for the travel to and from the mission field. However, no prospective missionary should be prevented from serving a mission because of lack of funds from the immediate family. In such situations the church would find other ways to provide the means necessary. (*LDS Handbook of Instruction* 1998:98, 102).

After a full-time missionary has been called the missionary will be under the watchful care of his or her Ward Bishop. The bishop is to assure himself that the person involved remains worthy of his or her sacred calling. Bishops and the stake presidents have an obligation to instruct prospective missionaries in regard to the seriousness and consequences of immorality after a missionary has received a call. The bishop should make sure that the newly called missionary complies with all the instructions from the Church headquarters, such as securing passports, applying for visas, and getting hold of appropriate clothing for the mission assignment. The newly called missionary should also read or reread the Book of Mormon before his or her mission. (*LDS Handbook of Instruction* 1998:100).

The stake president is to set apart all full-time missionaries before they leave for a missionary training center (MTC). The usual procedure is that the young male missionary should have the Melchizedek Priesthood (higher rank within the Mormon priesthood) conferred upon him and be ordained an elder before he is set apart as a missionary. (*LDS Handbook of Instruction* 1998:101). In earlier days the Missionary Training Center was called Language Training Mission (LTM). Upon the arrival at the mission all missionaries received a short haircut and were required to wear two-piece suits with white shirts and ties. They were cut off almost entirely from the outside world and from

their past experiences. Excepting Sunday services and Thursday mornings they were required to arise at 5:45 A.M. and retire at 10:30 in the evening. There was one hour of physical exercise, seven hours of classroom lessons, and five hours of intensive memorization. Language training consisted largely of memorizing a script, called a "lesson plan," which was to be delivered verbatim to every potential recruit, called an "investigator." The training gave the recruit a new type of identity. One participant of this program summed up his experience this way:

We are not allowed to telephone friends or leave the LTM grounds without express permission ... And we are urged constantly to put all thoughts of 'worldly things' out of our minds... I was the creature of the LTM. It had created me. Outside it, my existence had no context, no purpose, and no meaning. My family, friends, society, all seemed to have vanished from my existence. (Gottlieb & Wiley 1986:130).

In the earlier days of the LDS Church no special training was required nor given for prospective missionaries apart from a few days of orientation that was given in Salt Lake City, Utah. Some of the missionaries were often sent to their native countries and as such were thoroughly familiar with the language. However, those who did not know the language were expected to learn the respective language as soon as possible after their arrival. During the few days of orientation in Salt Lake City the missionary was given a cram course in Bible references out of context that could be useful in order to substantiate his claim or message. In addition words of advice were given in regard to getting along with one's missionary partner or partners. Charismatic church leaders gave inspirational talks, and tracts and scriptures were distributed among them. They received no teaching plans or other aids, but were told to teach by the Spirit. The mission presidents were called for indefinite time periods that could last for many years. They were imbued with great autonomy as well as authority over both missionaries and church members within their jurisdictions. (Mauss 1994:90-91).

The Mormon missionary system is in many ways very effective. The male missionary members who are ordained into the Mormon priesthood and as such empowered with pastoral duties are at the complete disposal of their church. Due to the specific missionary system of the LDS Church, as referred to above, the Mormons are able to put many more full-time missionaries into their mission fields than many Christian denominations combined are able to do. (Bromley & Hammond 1987:17–18).

Basing the primary missionary effort on young voluntary people is an effective method to proclaim their message. Many of the church's best and brightest young people in each generation give one year and a half to two years of their lives to serve their church. This often has a double effect. Through this service many young people grow and mature in their faith. Secondly, in trying to convert others it becomes more difficult to defect and leave the church and thus betray the trust the converts might have had in them. (Bromley & Hammond 1987:25).

Mormon Missionaries at Work

During the 1960s the church started to revise and reorganize the structure of missionary work. Mission presidents were now called to specified terms of office, usually for a period of three years. Often the men called to these positions were retired people or full-time church employees. They were given standardized training and leadership manuals and were expected to follow these very carefully. Now their work was supervised and directed considerably more from church headquarters than their predecessors in earlier days had experienced. In addition, their jurisdiction over church members was reduced due to the establishment of regular wards and stakes in the various missions that now took over the supervision of church members. (Mauss 1994:91).

The prospective missionaries receive their training at the missionary training centers (MTC) referred to above. There are a number of these training centers around the world. The largest and most extensive is located in Provo, Utah, adjacent to the campus of Brigham Young University (BYU), the flagship institution of higher learning of

the LDS Church, from which thirty thousand young men and women go forth each year to proclaim the LDS message around the globe. Those who are attending the missionary training centers are expected to memorize a series of lessons in a foreign language. Those who will be serving in foreign missions are given a two-month course in the appropriate language. Intensive instruction and training is given in regard to the use of proselytizing materials. There can be no doubt that many attending these centers experience great stress due to the regimentation and strict rules enforced in addition to peer pressure and the necessity of learning the proselytizing program in a foreign language. (Maus 1994:91-92. Krakauer 2003:79).

After having arrived in the mission field the missionaries are supervised by the mission president who presides over the specific district to which the missionaries have been assigned. Each missionary is assigned a companion with whom one is to remain with at all times. They are never to be alone. Working two by two can protect the other and oneself from temptation and false accusers. If one's companion should have difficulties with the work or in personal matters, one should be sensitive to those problems and seek advice from the mission president. Even though one should be loyal to one's companion one should realize that any indiscretion or violation of missionary standards might threaten the other person's effectiveness and salvation. That is why the mission president ought to be contacted. The two missionary companions should seek to be one in spirit and purpose and help each other succeed. They should always address one another by the appropriated title Elder or Sister. They should sleep in the same bedroom, but not in the same bed. They were to arise and retire together each day. They were not to stay up late to be alone. Together they were to study frequently the guidelines in the *Missionary Guide*. (Oaks & Wickman 1999:263-264. *LDS Missionary Handbook* 1990:23-25).

A missionary is never to be alone with or associate inappropriately with anyone of the opposite sex. Flirting or dating is not tolerated. The missionary is not to telephone, write to, or accept calls or letters from anyone of the opposite sex living within or near mission

boundaries. The missionary team is permitted to visit single members or investigators of the opposite sex, including divorced persons only if they are accompanied by a couple or another member of one's own sex. Single investigators can be taught in the home of a member, or be taught by missionaries of the same sex. (*LDS Missionary Handbook* 1990:25–26).

The missionaries follow a rigid daily schedule:

6:30	Arise	
7:00	Study time with companion	
8:00	Breakfast	
8:30	Personal Study	
9:30	Proselytizing	
12:00	Lunch	
1:00	Proselytizing	
5:00	Dinner	
6:00	Proselytizing	
9:30	End proselytizing; plan next day's activities	
10:30	Retire	(<i>LDS Missionary Handbook</i> 1990:16).

How a missionary appears is important. He or she should remember that they are representatives of the Lord. How one looks helps strengthen what one says. Appropriate dress and grooming is important. The guidelines are as follows:

1. Dress conservatively. Elders are to wear white shirts and conservative ties. They are to wear business suits in conservative colors when they proselytize as well as to all meetings, unless directed otherwise by the mission president. The sisters (female missionaries) are to wear conservative colors. Skirts and dresses should cover their knees. Pantsuits and floor-length skirts and dresses are not appropriate.

2. The missionaries are to get their hair cut regularly. The hair is to be clean and neatly combed at all times. Moustaches and beards are not accepted. The women must choose conservative hairstyles that are easily maintained.
3. The missionaries have to be neat and clean, bathe frequently, and use deodorant. They have to polish their shoes, and keep their clothes clean, mended and wrinkle-free. (*LDS Missionary Handbook* 1990:14-15).

As we have seen, the young Mormon missionaries are kept under strict surveillance and supervision by the authorities of the church. The schedule of the day from the time they arise in the morning till they retire at night is planned minutely in detail. They are not only to arise and retire together each day, but they are even warned not to stay up late to be alone! Further more, the one missionary should make the mission president aware of possible problems or difficulties his companion may have. This system brings to mind less favorable characterizations such as brainwashing and squealing that effectively controls the lives of the missionaries under the church's supervision. Even though the missionaries are young and inexperienced there ought to be some other ways to implement supervision.

The *Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* is an approved set of six missionary discussions for teaching investigators. (*Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* 1986). The discussions cover the following topics:

1. *The Plan of Our Heavenly Father* – Discussion 1.
2. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* – Discussion 2.
3. *The Restoration* – Discussion 3.
4. *Eternal Progression* – Discussion 4.
5. *Living a Christ-Like Life* – Discussion 5.
6. *Membership in the Kingdom* – Discussion 6.

The discussions are arranged in two columns. The left column presents what the missionary is to teach. The column to the right indi-

cates how the missionary may teach effectively. What is amazing and rather unusual in this plan is how early the subject of baptism is introduced to the investigator. It seems as if one can hardly wait until baptism has been performed. Already in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ - Discussion 2* the investigator is encouraged to make a commitment in regard to getting baptized on a specific date. (*The Gospel of Jesus Christ - Discussion 2:21*). The little pocket size *Missionary Handbook* that is to be read daily by all missionaries points out: "Commit investigators to baptism during the first or second discussion, and renew that commitment at each subsequent discussion." (*LDS Missionary Handbook* 1990:8). In his article "LDS Church Growth Today" the author refers to this problem as "quick-baptize" approach and gives the blame for this not only to missionaries and mission presidents, but also to the instruction that is given in the official missionary training materials issued by the Missionary Department of the LDS Church. According to the author, no allowance is made for those who may not be ready to accept the baptismal commitment on the first or second visit of the missionaries. Because of this practice many LDS members have been skeptical to having their friends and neighbors taught by full-time missionaries, who regardless of the level of preparation and understanding the investigators had were all too anxious to perform these quick-baptisms. (David Stewart 2002:41).

The Problem of Retaining Members

In spite of impressive statistical figures in regard to the growth and expansion of the LDS Church the true picture has not always corresponded to the facts as they appear at the grass root level. A few examples will illuminate this problem.

In 1969 the twenty-two year old Mormon convert Wilfried Decoo was called to preside over a small branch of the church in Belgium. He was shocked to discover the names of some 200 members who had been baptized since the opening of the mission in 1948 while the sacrament meeting attendance had been averaging only twenty. After twenty-six years the small branch had now become two wards in a local

stake. However, in spite of this growth the constant turnover from active to inactive members remained with them. For every active member they lost another dozen over the years into inactivity. According to Decoo, the church had for many decades suffered from massive defections in the hundreds of thousands. The church faced the awesome responsibility for bringing back their lost members and thus reducing further losses. (Decoo 1996:97-98, 117-118).

In the 1990s the active membership of the LDS Church in Japan was only a fraction of the official membership. In 1992, after forty-five years of post-war missionary work only 20,000 members could be counted as active out of a total membership of more than 87,000. In other words, only approximately 23 percent were active members while three-fourths were inactive. (Numano 1996:224).

In Chile close to 80 percent of LDS converts are lost within two months of baptism. 30-40 percent of those baptized in some of the areas there do not return to church again after baptism. Chile is a country where the rate of baptisms is the highest in the world, but where the retention of members is the lowest. The average church unit in Chile has 528 members - one of the highest in the world. However, according to returned missionaries and others the actual attendance at most of the wards in that country amounts to only a fraction of that number. ("Church added to Chilean Census." *LDS Church News. Cumorah News Service* 2001). This problem has been a concern for Mormon mission presidents not only in Chile, but in Latin America as a whole. Their prime concern has been to slow down growth in order to absorb new members rather than to encourage large numbers of conversions. (Stark 1996:205)

The examples from Belgium, Japan and Chile should suffice to indicate that the LDS Church has some real problems in retaining their members. What causes this so-called "revolving door" membership? That people at times leave their churches because of disagreements or for other reasons is not unusual. The reasons may be many and vary from person to person. However, in our study there seems to be a common denominator that is linked to the strategy and methods of

Mormon missionary work not only in one country, but generally in the work related to proselytism.

During an effort to accelerate the proselytizing program in Japan unusual high baptismal goals were set while at the same time relaxing the conditions required for baptism. Many new members were brought into the church. However, the negative result of this strategy was an extremely low retention rate. It was not uncommon that new converts stopped attending church within the first month. Many did not even bother to show up the first Sunday after baptism. (Numano 1996:225).

The Mormon missionaries are extremely interested in baptizing as many new converts as possible. The number of baptisms is often looked upon as a measurement of their own success. At the Missionary Training Centers the prospective missionaries have been taught to thirst for baptisms. As a result of these so-called quick baptisms the important preparation period before a person is baptized has been pushed aside and neglected. According to Wilfried Decoo:

For many new members, and for the church units which they have joined, our experience in Europe and elsewhere has shown us the drawbacks of this proselyting philosophy. It has produced the opposite of the desired result. Instead of saving souls, it has placed in spiritual jeopardy at least half of those baptized by persuading them to make sacred covenants which they were not ready or able to fulfill. (Decoo 1996:112).

Decoo asks why prospective church members could not be asked to attend church meetings and keep the commandments for a year before baptism. Some might fall away by this procedure, but those who prevail during that period would have a better chance to endure for a lifetime. (Decoo 1996:112).

Quick-baptism approaches do not appeal to sincere people who before making a commitment prefer to get a thorough introduction to the teachings and requirements of the church under consideration. Time to contemplate and ponder without being pressured and rushed

unprepared into an early baptism is important as well as pedagogical. Up to three discussions a week as well as daily contacts with the missionaries cannot be interpreted in any other way than rushing things. To conduct a 15-minute “doorstep discussion,” or a 14-day contact-to-baptism goal, or monthly baptism goals are definitely not of the good. They are rather destructive. (Stewart 2002:41).

In Latin America conversions were taking place at such a rate that when the missionaries moved on to other areas the people they had baptized were left without a support system. The local LDS members were overloaded trying to minister to all the new converts, but fell far short of the help they could give. The missionaries were of the opinion that if people were not willing to commit themselves to baptism in two weeks, they would just be dropped, while they themselves would keep moving on. A lot of young people were baptized without family support. (Moore 2002).

There seems to be a lack of consistency and co-ordination between the missionaries and the local branches or wards. The missionaries are under the supervision of the mission president of the district to which they are assigned. Although they attend the local branch or ward in the area in which they live they are nevertheless under the jurisdiction of the mission president. This organizational pattern does not appear conducive to an effective strategy.

In 1995 Gordon B. Hinckley became the President of the LDS Church. Being aware of the problems referred to above Hinckley chose to focus on family conversion and the support for existing members, rather than to emphasize on baptism and the boosting of membership figures. This created some significant changes. For instance, in a mission in Brazil in 1996 missionaries were baptizing about 200 members a month. This number was now cut in half when the emphasis was placed on families and the working with complete families. With this change in strategy the church hoped to have a better chance of retaining those who were baptized, rather than baptizing a considerably larger amount of people, but not being able to retain them. (Moore 2002).

The Missionary System of Mainstream Christian Churches

The mainstream Protestant Churches as well as the Catholic Church trace the origin of Christian missions back to the early apostolic church. Mission has been properly understood as being dispatched or commissioned to propagate the Gospel where it has not been significantly done. From the beginning the Christian missionaries considered their work as a commission to continue the assignment of the apostles to bring the message of the Gospel to all the nations of the world. As members of the holy catholic church the Christian missionaries considered their role as a vital part in this chain going all the way back to the early church. (Skarsaune 1994:89-101). It is right at this point that the LDS Church deviates radically from the Christian Church. Mormon historian B. H. Roberts refers to this with the following statements:

Saddening as the thought may seem, the Church founded by the labors of Jesus and His Apostles was destroyed from the earth; the Gospel was perverted; its ordinances were changed; its laws were transgressed; its covenant was, on the part of man, broken; and the world was left to flounder in the darkness of a long period of apostasy from God. ...a universal apostasy from the Christian doctrine and the Christian Church took place. (Smith 1978, 1:39, 41).

Long before the Protestants arrived on the scene the Catholic Church had for years been engaged in propagating the gospel around the world. The missionary concept was definitely emphasized by the Jesuits during the 1500s. The intention of the church was to expand and reach as many people as possible with the saving Word and sacraments. The Protestants entered into the field of missions particularly after the Reformation. The revivals during the 17th & 18th centuries resulted in greater understanding and responsibility for Christian missions. This was largely due to the movement called Pietism. The Methodist revival in England created a strong interest in missions which resulted in the establishment of several missionary societies in the 1790s. (Skarsaune 1994:89-101, 101-109; Berentsen 1994:110-118; Neill 1982:222-240, 251-252; Eskilt 1994:346).

Before the entry of the Protestants on the mission scene the missionaries consisted mostly of persons who were unmarried, such as priests, monks and nuns. This was changed to a great extent with the arrival of Protestant missionaries. Several of the pioneer missionaries had large families. In the beginning of the 19th century the first single Protestant women missionaries left for the mission fields. At the end of the century several support groups were established in Europe and America to send out women to the mission fields. (Eskilt 1994:346).

In 1990 the number of Protestant missionaries globally was approximately 137,000. Sixty-five percent of these (88,000) came from western countries. However, the recruitment of missionaries from Latin America, Africa and Asia is today far greater than from the West. As a result of this it has been estimated that in a not too distant future the majority of world missionaries will come from these continents. (Eskilt 1994:346). With this in mind it is interesting to see the comments of John Stewart:

Protestant groups have been more successful than Latter-day Saints in mobilizing missionaries outside of the United States, especially in Asia. There are over 44,000 Protestant missionaries from India, with 60% serving domestically and 40% serving abroad. Within the next few years, India is expected to surpass the United States as the leading sender of Protestant and Evangelical missionaries! There are only 52 LDS missionaries serving in all of India, with only a fraction being native missionaries. (Stewart 2002:16).

Stewart seems concerned that areas with large LDS membership like Brazil, the Philippines, Chile, Mexico, etc., are heavily dependent on foreign missionaries. He is also concerned in regard to the low rates of LDS mission mobilization in nations like India and South Korea. These countries have been some of the highest senders of Protestant missionaries in the world. Although foreign missionaries will always play an important role in the LDS missionary work, one must not forget the important fact that native missionaries have an advantage that cannot be ignored, namely the cultural understanding and linguistic ability. (Stewart 2002:16). From this viewpoint we may ask if

Protestant missions have not been more cognizant and visionary in this respect than the LDS Church. The examples from India and South Korea seem to testify to that effect.

The Protestant Missionary

In what has been the traditional Protestant understanding, Christian mission is based on the commission to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. As a member of this church every person is responsible for taking part in this gigantic enterprise. However, when the term missionary call is used within this context the meaning relates primarily to the call an individual person receives from God to a specific service in Christian missions. The basis for this interpretation is found in Ephesians 4:11 where St. Paul points out that God calls people to different types of services in his church and gives various members different functions. Within this realm it is therefore appropriate to speak of a special call to serve as a missionary.

In Protestant missions it is customary that the missionaries acquire a solid education before leaving for their respective mission fields. Many years ago the well-known Scottish theologian and churchman John Baillie pointed out that it was important to give those who were to serve as clergymen at home or abroad as missionaries in foreign countries the same theological education. With the development of indigenous churches where native pastors more and more acquired higher education it was important that the missionaries who were to serve in these churches had full theological accreditation at the university level. (Myklebust 1967:112-113).

Protestant missions consist also of many other professions than a theological-trained missionary is called to do. Such professions include medical doctors, nurses, teachers, educators, specialists in various fields like agriculture, economics, etc. Much of the mission work today is indebted to the pioneer missionaries who were engaged in linguistics, building hospitals, schools, churches, etc. Their intention was to help, educate and train the people they had come to serve.

Today the role of the missionary has in many places and instances been changed. Missionaries are now invited by the indigenous churches to work under the leadership of these churches and on their terms. The missionary may then serve as an advisor, consultant, specialist, etc., but his or her service remains under the supervision of the indigenous church, even though the missionary's salary may come from "back home". (Eskilt 1994:347).

The strategy and methods used in Mormon missionary work differ considerably from that of Protestant missions. Both Mormons and Protestants need missionaries to carry out their work. However, the question is how this missionary system is organized and implemented in these two respective churches. By putting the focus on this point one will perhaps be able to better understand why the differences are that great.

The most obvious difference that comes to one's attention is the age of the missionaries. Most of the Mormon missionaries are young people of college age from 19 through 25 years. They are inexperienced and have not started or completed their college education. Because of their young age and inexperience they are kept under the strict supervision and surveillance of the mission president in the country or area to which they are assigned. They are day and night obligated to submit to strict rules and regulations much more so than they are likely to do later on in life. Their way of life while on a mission has been compared to that of young monks in the Southern Buddhist traditions. Although these young men and women also in a normal setting are expected to live in an ethically controlled way, the degree of control is not quite so great as that while being on a mission. (Davies 2000: 195-196).

In contrast most Protestant missionaries are of mature age. They represent a wide range of professions as referred to above. Some have vocational training. They leave for their mission assignments after many years of study including the practice of their profession at home. Many are highly qualified and specialized in their fields. They are not youngsters who need a tight supervision and control as the case may be

for the young Mormon missionaries. Maturity, a solid education and life experience are important elements for a person who is to serve as a missionary abroad in strange and unfamiliar circumstances as well as in more familiar surroundings at home. Perhaps it is for this reason that Belgian LDS member Wilfried Decoo called for more education and maturity among the Mormon missionaries by pointing to: "A second kind of innovation in our proselyting, besides the employment of both new and traditional media, might be the recruitment of missionaries with somewhat more education and maturity." (Decoo 1996:111). Decoo had in mind "the usual young men and women who accept mission calls. At present they tend to consist of youths on either side of age twenty with little or no college education." (Decoo 1996:111). It is probably because of the young age of their missionaries that the leadership of the LDS Church has felt the need to supervise and direct the missionaries in regard to the implementation of their missionary endeavors.

Putting the Message into a Cultural Context

European missionaries to Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought with them western culture as an integral part of the Christian religion. Because of this, the Christian message was often presented in terms of western culture that frequently required African Christians to adhere to western cultural norms. Christianity was looked upon as an imported religion and not as real to life as African religion, resulting in that people were bound to lead two lives, namely, that which was demanded by the church and that which they had been brought up in through their culture for centuries. (Creary 1999).

The Roman Catholic priest, Father Vincent Donovan who had been a missionary for 17 years among the Masai in northern Tanzania decided to try something new. Instead of operating within the traditional constructs of the mission compound he went to Masai villages where he preached the gospel to people without the usual western cultural regalia of the Catholic Church. Donovan criticized the continued dependence of African missions on the Western church for financial

support and personnel, including priests and nuns. According to Donovan it was important to peel away western, white, European and American culture from the Gospel “and incarnate itself within the culture of the people whom it evangelizes.” The mission of the church was to bring “the message of Christ to the nations of the world in cultural idioms appropriate to each group.” In this way, the message that was rooted in fundamental Catholic theology would be transformed into an authentic form of religious expression of a given people. Donovan celebrated Mass and the Eucharist among the Masai without the traditional Roman Catholic priestly vestments and incense. Only the words of Christ from the Last Supper and the offering of bread and wine were included. This opened up to a variety in liturgical celebrations in different Masai groups and gave groups the freedom to include local symbols that had greater meaning for them than those of the western Catholic mass. (Creary 1999).

The mass and other liturgies began to be translated into other tribal languages. Music, an important part of the liturgy, was particularly open to local variations. Africans were not supposed to be Europeans in their religious beliefs and practices. Rather they were to incorporate the Christian faith into their own culture. This became more prevalent as Africans entered into religious orders like clergy, monks, and nuns, and thus were able to put their imprint on the development. With this in mind one may truly speak of a decolonization of the Church making it more authentically African. (Creary 1999).

In spite of a tremendous growth and expansion the LDS Church seems to have problems in regard to placing themselves and their message within a contextual setting. Perhaps this is the reason why the LDS Church has experienced difficulties in retaining members. Lawrence A. Young, a BYU professor, points to Mormonism’s inability to find indigenous expressions of its community that would allow new members to accommodate to both the LDS Church and the host society. In Utah and other parts of the United States the situation is different. Here Mormonism is not just a shared creed but an ethnic identity and a family heritage supplemented with frontier nostalgia.

This, however, is not the situation in other countries in the world where Mormonism is a system of belief seeking to create a community. (Ostling & Ostling 2000:378-379).

Compared to other world religions Mormonism contains strong ties to America and as such carries a heavy nationalistic baggage. According to Martin E. Marty, Mormonism is the only religion with scripture set partly in America. It is an American book ready to go. God commissioned a prophet in the United States to restore the scriptures and the priesthood. Jesus will return to Missouri and establish the millennial kingdom. The American constitutional system is the product of divine inspiration. The Mormons selected Pioneer Day celebrating Brigham Young's arrival at the Salt Lake Basin in 1847 as their special holy day. They did not select the anniversary of their prophet's birth, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, or the establishment of the church and its priesthood. (Ostling & Ostling 2000:379).

In proclaiming the message much of the nationalistic baggage must be left behind if we want our message to be understood and accepted. In the book *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* Richard and Jane Ostling pose some thought-provoking questions to the LDS Church:

Why do missionaries wear the required LDS uniform of white shirts and dark suits when that marks them as outsiders? Why impose generic architectural plans from Salt Lake for meetinghouses in far-off places? Why must each and every women's auxiliary lesson be the same for every nation, written and vetted in Salt Lake? Why celebrate Pioneer Day in Bolivia? Why must African wards sing American hymns to the accompaniment of pianos while drums and dancing are forbidden? (Ostling & Ostling 2000:380).

It is interesting to notice that referral is made to the Evangelical Protestant rivals of the Mormons that allow indigenous expression to emerge causing the Evangelical Protestants to succeed so well in Latin America. Mention was also made of the "inculturation" of Catholic

worship in Africa, a subject referred to earlier in this article. (Ostling & Ostling 2000:380).

The early model for global mission can be labeled as a one-way street. Christian churches in the Northern Hemisphere (Europe and North America) sent missionaries and money to proclaim the gospel and establish churches in the Southern Hemisphere (Latin America, Africa, Asia and the South Pacific). Now these mission churches had become of age resuming responsibility for mission and evangelism in their own areas. No longer could the “mother-church” decide how things were to be done because it had the financial resources. A completely new concept came into being. The indigenous churches had become not only partners but also companions walking and working together for the sake of the gospel. This meant that the indigenous churches set the priorities for the ministry and work in their respective areas. The role of the “mother-church” back home was now to support them with personnel and funding if needed. (*The Lutheran* 2004:43).

Today new ways and methods of engaging in missionary work have been implemented. Although clergies are still needed the percentage of lay missionaries outnumber the ordained personnel. For instance, 70 percent of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s (ELCA) supported missionaries today are lay people. Among these are people with different professions, such as medical doctors, nurses, teachers, craftsmen, etc. A typical example is the case of Mamy Ranaivoson, a physician from Madagascar and a member of the Malagasy Lutheran Church. He is an ELCA consultant on HIV/AIDS. He is a typical archetype of what may be labeled as a South-South missionary. He works in Nairobi, Kenya. Prior to that he served a 100-bed hospital in Papua New Guinea. Other doctors from Madagascar serve in Cameroon and Bangladesh with the help and support of the ELCA. For cultural reasons this South-South method is often much to be preferred by people in that region rather than if the missionaries came from the Northern Hemisphere. (*The Lutheran* 2004:43–44).

Conclusion

Both the Mormon Church and mainstream Christian Churches believe they have a divine message to proclaim to the world. In that respect they have a common starting point even though the theological contents of their message may vary considerably. However, the differences between these churches appear not only in doctrine but also in the strategies and methods used in order to proclaim the message.

In this article we have tried to put the spotlight on how the Mormon missionary system is organized and how the missionaries work. In spite of being one of the fastest growing churches in the world today the LDS Church is at the same time having problems retaining members. This may be due to the Mormon missionary system.

The article also points out how the strategy and methods of missionary work within the Christian Church deviate from those of the Mormons and how important it is to put the message into a cultural context.

After his resurrection Jesus gave his disciples a divine commission to go into the world and make disciples of all nations proclaiming the message of salvation. However, the audience to which this message is to be proclaimed is not homogeneous, depending upon where people live in this world, their cultural background, their customs and the way they think. This constitutes or creates a great challenge to those churches whose primary task they believe is to proclaim the message. If the church is able to discover new contextual forms to impart the gospel two important things may take place, namely the preservation of the gospel as a message from the outside, from God, as well as a message spoken in people's own language and incarnated in their own culture. In this way the message is proclaimed within the cultural context of the listener so that he may understand what is being presented and consequently make his choice. (Engelsviken 1994:239-242).

To proclaim the message into a cultural context is no easy task for the church. The church involved must create its own symbols and customs that are rooted in its confessions and in the local culture.

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