

Ministering to mormons

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Reflecting on I Love Mormons: A New Way to Share Christ with Latter-day Saints

Most people associate the Mormon faith with the church that is based in Salt Lake City, Utah. However, Mormonism has its roots in New York State, where Joseph Smith founded the Church of Latter-Day Saints during the nineteenth century, when he was allegedly visited by an angel that he called “ Moroni.”

The principles upon which he based this church underwent many changes as the founders of the faith traveled westward, so many that people might question whether it is the same faith or not. It is not unusual, however, for a young faith to undergo many changes: it can be argued that Christianity experienced many of the same dynamics in its beginnings as it moved from its country and culture of origin and spread across the world. David Rowe’s text suggest that individuals who would preach Christianity to Mormons should approach Mormonism as less of a cult and more of a culture and will less zeal than love,

Section 1: Overview of Mormon Theology

According to its founders, the Mormon faith is based on the teachings of the descendents of ancient holy men and the faithful who came to this continent even before the birth of Christ. The original teachings of the church were supposed to have been translated from golden plates that the angel Moroni, which were given to Joseph Smith. Some of those early teachings have fallen into disuse or have changed completely.

For example, while Smith might have included polygamy and believed in a priesthood open to only a chosen few, polygamy is now discouraged, if not openly condemned by the church and the priesthood has been open to men of all races (Rowe 2005). Other tenets have been added or subtracted from the faith or have altered in some way as the Mormon faith seeks to solidify itself.

While the Mormons consider themselves to be a Christian faith, a number of beliefs and practices set them apart from other Christian denominations.

Some of these beliefs and practices include:

Baptism of the dead

Eternal marriage, known as a “celestial marriage” performed in the temple

The belief in four sacred texts: the Holy Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and The Book of Mormon, and

Teaching that God, the Father and Jesus Christ, the son, are of separate earthly bodies (Rowe, 2005).

The Mormon Church also places a lot of emphasis on the family and on gender roles. The church emphasizes the woman's role in staying home and caring for the children, while men typically take on leadership roles--although these things are not absolute. In addition, church members are intended to follow the law of chastity and to abstain from certain food, drinks, and substances.

Church members are expected to proselytize. All male members of the church are expected to perform a mission, which begins at 19 years of age

and lasts two years. Although women are not forbidden from going on missions, the requirements for women are different in terms of serving during a mission. Finally, the LDS Church tends to believe that the individual can receive revelations from God, particularly in personal matters. There are many precepts of this complex faith that are not covered by this paper; however, the ones that are listed represent some of their more important beliefs.

The Mormon faith does not have a single, monolithic form. Rather, it is comprised of splinter groups. Given the statement in Rowe (2005) that Mormonism “ may stand as an indictment to Protestants because they arose to compensate for some perceived failure in the Christian movement” that encouraged him to start “ a single ‘ true Church’ that he believed would unify all members and spell an end to denominational schism,” this fact is interesting and interesting one (pp. 18-19).

In general, the term “ Mormon” is most accurately applied to the individuals who followed Smith’s teachings and settled in Utah; however, the church elders prefer that it be known by the more accurate name of “ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints” (Rowe, 2005).

Section 2: “ Wisely and Gently”

Kraft (1998) reminds the reader that God apparently wants people to be respectful of other cultures and that He gave such directions through the Holy Bible. In 1 Corinthians 9: 19-22, Kraft states, God’s purpose is indicated through Paul’s words about living like a Jew when among the Jews and living

like a Gentile when among the Gentiles, and so being “ all things to all men, that [he might] save some of them by whatever means are possible” (p. 384).

Kraft discusses the various levels of culture, which is the manner in which people live their lives. People are products of their culture, which determines the manner in which they view the world and the pressure for the individual to conform within that worldview is strong (Kraft, 1998). In addition, Kraft reminds the reader that Jesus worked not by attacking people or their cultures, but by working with people within their cultures to effect change.

Overall, Mormonism has a number of good principles behind it and yet its worshipers have been widely persecuted for their faith. Today’s Mormons tend to be “ thin-skinned, hypersensitive, and virtually expecting to be attacked” for their beliefs (Rowe, 2005, p. 49). Whether or not the individual talking with a Mormon agrees with the positions of that person’s faith, Rowe states that they are deserving of respect.

This position is particularly important, since Mormons typically have a certainty in the truth as preached by their prophet and the awareness of their nature as what Rowe (2005) calls “ an exodus community” (pp. 48-49), both of which cause them to close the doors to communication more readily than individuals in other faiths. Despite the apparent wisdom behind this statement of affairs, however, it appears to contradict the author’s assertion that Utah’s admittance to the Union ended the “ us against them” mentality

that existed between Mormons and the United States government at the time (p. 47).

Section 3: Proselytizing

Rowe (2005) constantly reminds the reader that the Mormons have their own culture. For this reason, Christians are to treat them as they might adherents to Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist cultures, as well as any other non-Christian cultures. Rowe (2005) describes the Mormon Church as being “Christiansesque” in that it is “linked to statements and images from the Bible” (p. 42). However, some of the teachings are not Christian in nature, such as Joseph Smith’s vision of separate beings for God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Because this teaching is so different from that held by other Christians, it is important to be prepared with gentle teachings about its error, as well as other errors held by the Mormon Church. It is doubly important because the worldview of Mormonism is compulsive in its teachings, just as is the case in many Muslim cultures (Duin, 2006, p. 2). Because it is not possible for Mormons to examine their faith for themselves, other Christians should be able to help them do so.

According to Coleman (1993) Jesus was able to start with a small group of disciples because “it did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce (p. 102). It was a strategy that, as stated earlier, depended on assimilation to achieve results. One thing to share, then, would be that Christ died for everyone on

the Cross, not just for a significant few. He accepted and cared for all faiths and races (Coleman, 1993).

Rowe (2005) suggests trying to bring the two value systems into perspectives by working with the person being instructed to put the message of the Gospel into words according to each faith and then using that as a basis for discussion (p. 65). Final, it would seem important to understand the Mormon teaching of two Beings known as God in the Mormon Church, and how it relates to or differs from the traditional Christian teaching of monotheism. By understanding these differences and by being able to speak in a learned and intelligent manner to another individual from a Mormon perspective.

References

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