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Missionary Activities of American Mormons

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Missionary Activities of American Mormons

An appropriate and necessary preface to this thesis project is an explanation of who I am and why I did this project. I am majoring in the study of religion, and I have decided to go to graduate school in this field in order to pursue a career in the academic study of religion, focusing on the study of the history of Christianity in America. The requirement that I produce a senior thesis seemed like a good opportunity to get my feet wet and see what the study of American religion was like. The only question which remained was which American religion to focus my study on. After a little thought, I chose Mormonism for three main reasons. First, Mormonism is a very American religion; it began in America, developed in America, and continues to be mainly an American religion. The second reason was that I did not know much about Mormonism other than some very general information. It is not a prominent religion in the areas that I have lived, so it was something that I could learn a lot about. Lastly, the limited knowledge that I did have about Mormonism made me curious: it seemed like a very interesting religion.

I must preface my thesis with the acknowledgment that I am not Mormon; in this study I have played the role of external observer. I mention this because religion is such a personal subject matter that maintaining one's integrity as a detached observer is not always easy. This was definitely the case in much of the outside reading that I could find on Mormonism. It usually took one of two forms: either external criticism by nonbelievers or internal justifications by believers. I should say that I have attempted to be neither a nonbeliever nor a believer, but have tried to remain as objective as I could. I hope that by basing my report on my first-hand observation of Mormonism's internal

activities, specifically the missionary activities, I can faithfully accomplish the goal of my thesis: to demonstrate what Mormonism is in and of itself. However, I realize that the possibility exists that at times I may sound as though I'm either preaching the Mormon faith or being critical of that faith. For these instances, I apologize.

Before I describe what I learned from my observations of Mormon missionary activities, some historical background is necessary in order to place my observations in some context. Mormonism has its beginnings in a man named Joseph Smith, who was born in 1805 and was raised first in New England and later in western New York. At the time, western New York was called the "burned-over district" because the fires of religious revival had burned over it so many times. Various denominations were openly competing for members, and revivals were common. It was in this atmosphere that Joseph Smith spent his childhood and adolescence, and its influence on him cannot be underestimated. His family, like many of the families of this time and place, did not belong to any specific denomination of Protestantism, at least not for very long. Instead, Joseph Smith was an example of the type of Christian who was marked by his search for the truth outside of the framework of any particular denomination, for truth "where ever it might be found". (Schipps, 7) The Bible was of utmost importance in this search, but unorthodox practices were also given various degrees of acceptance. Examples include magic and Masonry, with its own quasi-religious mythology and practices.

The influence of this environment had at least two important results on Joseph Smith. First, although he was devoted to the truth of the words of the Bible and thus Christian, he was left with the question of which Christian denomination contained Jesus' truth. He was a seeker of truth, but was uncertain as to the proper way and where to seek. Typical of the time, he believed that an important element of the "true church" would be that it attempted to return to the practices and beliefs of the early Church of the first century, but exactly what way to return to early church practice was not clear to him.

A second major influence of this environment on Joseph Smith was that he was open to new and novel ideas, ones which would not have been acceptable within existing denominations. As was mentioned above, he felt he should search for truth where ever it might be found. This allowed both Smith and the people of the area to give serious consideration to religious ideas which might have been dismissed in a different religious climate.

The defining moment of Mormonism happened in the spring of 1820, when Joseph Smith was 14. Although various accounts are given, all agree that Joseph Smith knelt down in a grove of trees on the family farm and prayed to God, asking Him which denomination was right. What followed is the event that marked the creation of Mormonism: Smith reports having a "theophany", an actual encounter with God. God appeared in "two personages", as both God the Father and Jesus Christ, and told Smith that he should not join any of the denominations, that all of them were wrong.

In September of 1823, Joseph Smith received a second vision. This time an angel appeared to him, who identified himself as Moroni. He called himself a "messenger sent from the presence of God", and told Smith about records written on golden plates, which were buried near the Smith family farm. These records were written in a language called "Reformed Egyptian", and could be translated into English by using two extraordinary stones, called the Urim and Thummim, which accompanied the plates. Smith periodically made visits to the place where the gold plates and the stones were hidden, where he talked with the angel Moroni. He became convinced that he had been chosen by God as the instrument through which God would restore the true church of Christ, which had been corrupted by human fallibility. Then, in September of 1827 Smith took possession of the gold plates and the Urim and Thummim and began the process of translating them into English.

The process through which this was accomplished is not entirely clear, although it is agreed that Smith believed that he was receiving God's divine guidance through

"ancient seers" or "angels". Smith first began this work in partial seclusion at a friend's house with his wife, but in April of 1829 was joined and assisted by a man named Oliver Cowdery. By early 1830, the translation was complete. The end result of Smith's translation is the text which is known today as the Book of Mormon. It is the record of a lost tribe of Israel, that of Lehi, who left Jerusalem before the Babylonian invasion of 587 B.C. In detailed chronological order, it records that this tribe traveled across the Indian and Pacific Oceans and finally arrived in America. There, they broke into two warring factions called the Nephites and the Lamanites, named after two of Lehi's sons. Generally, the Nephites were on the side of righteousness and the Lamanites were wicked and evil. This war was brought to a temporary end after the resurrection of Christ, when the risen Jesus appeared in America to share the Christian message. After a few hundred years, however, the conflict resumed and eventually the wicked Lamanites all but destroyed the Nephites. The only Nephite to remain was Moroni, who added this account to the sacred records already preserved by his father, Mormon, and proceeded to hide them in the hill where Joseph Smith found them centuries later. As one might expect, the culture of the victorious but wicked Lamanites soon deteriorated and eventually (d)evolved into the Native American culture that was encountered by European settlers.

The Book of Mormon make many prophecies which seem to be fulfilled by Joseph Smith. It predicts that a man named Joseph would find these records and translate them, and further that he would be the man through whom God would restore divine authority on earth by reinstating the lost Aaronic priesthood, which had disappeared from the earth in the early days of Christianity. Smith reports that this prophecy was fulfilled in 1829, when the John the Baptist and the apostles Peter, James, and John appeared to himself and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the powers of the true priesthood, which include the gift of the Holy Spirit and the authority to baptize. Smith also claimed that the restored church had the power of prophecy in the sense that God had told him what he ought to do, and continued to do so.

At this point, Smith had what he felt he needed to reinstate the true religion of Jesus Christ: he had the Bible, he had the further testament of Christ in the Book of Mormon, he had the divinely authorized priesthood, and he had the knowledge of God's will through his own divinely given power of prophecy. Thus, in 1830 he officially organized his restoration of Christ's church under the name of the "church of Christ". In 1838, the name was changed to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in order to distinguish it from the original church of Christ which had been present in the time of Christ and shortly thereafter, but which was believed to have quickly disappeared.

Smith began to gather apostles and preach the gospel. As the church grew, it encountered serious persecution, forcing Smith and his followers to move from place to place. They left New York for Ohio, then Missouri, where Smith continued to receive revelations, one of which called for the building of a temple. In 1836, Smith reported that Jesus, Moses, Elias, and Elijah had appeared in a vision to himself and Oliver Cowdery in the temple and had restored the Melchizedek priesthood of the Old Testament, a revelation which led Smith to institute a patriarchal church order. This was only fitting, as he understood his church to have full Biblical power, and thus grounded it in institutions which were both Old and New Testament in nature: the church had the power of prophecy, but it also called for the establishment of a church closely modeled after the church described in the Book of Acts.

Smith and his followers were driven out of Missouri and settled in Nauvoo, Illinois. However, while their power and influence grew so did the opposition to some of the more radical elements of the faith, such as baptism for the dead and plural marriage for time and eternity. This tension reached its peak in 1844 when a mob formed that killed Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. However, this did not result in the death of Mormonism. Church leadership was not entirely centered on Smith, but was somewhat diversified into other men. Thus, Brigham Young assumed leadership of the Church and led it to what is today Utah, where its headquarters is still located.

This concludes my discussion of Mormon history. This history must be known in order to put my observations into some kind of framework. However, my thesis is not on the history of Mormonism. The history of Mormonism is something that is already well documented both by scholars and by the Mormon church. I had absolutely no problem finding a plethora of information on Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the Mormon trail, and other historical aspects of Mormonism. What I could not find, and what I think is actually more important and interesting, is how the Mormon Church exists in the present time, what its beliefs are and how these beliefs are reflected in day to day activities. So, in order to find this out I decided to go right to the source and see if I couldn't find some local Mormon missionaries and talk to them about what their religion is all about.

After some calling around, I discovered that there were two missionaries who had been assigned to the part of Cedar Falls around our campus, and when I talked to them they sounded very willing to be a part of my study. They introduced themselves as Elder Terry and Elder Franck. Terry and Franck are their last names, but this is the way in which all missionaries identify themselves. They were both dressed very formally, in dark suits and conservative ties. They also wore nametags which identified themselves as representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Elder Terry is 21 years old, and was born and raised in British Columbia. Elder Franck is 19 years old, and is from Idaho. I noticed right away that Elder Terry did most of the talking, and I later learned that this is generally how they operate: always in pairs that they call "companionships" and usually with one senior missionary who is more experienced and takes something of a leadership role among the two.

I learned that missionary work is done this way for two main reasons. The first is this is how the early Church of the first century functioned, with missionaries sent out in groups of "2 by 2", to work in groups of seventy. This return to the ways of the early (true) church is very important in Mormon thought. Secondly, many good practical

reasons exist for working in groups of two. When missionaries are sent out to a strange new place it would obviously be safer to be working with a kind of "buddy system".

Further, as I spent more time observing missionary work I began to understand how working in pairs would be very helpful in maintaining the focus and integrity of one's religious mission. To put it another way, a person is a lot less likely to slack off if they are working with another missionary. What happens is that each pair spends so much time together that they become a kind of monitor of each other's activities. So, even though they are away from home they have someone who sees everything they do, and they are also in the position of seeing everything that their companion does. This relationship serves to keep both missionaries focused on their task. (It is worth mentioning here that companions are never supposed to leave each other alone, unless each is in the company of at least one other missionary. The connection is that strong.)

I think to describe what being a missionary is like, it would be best if I went through the process chronologically, starting out with how most missions start. For most children brought up in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, going on a mission is something that is planned on from their childhood. It is not a requirement of the Church in the strict sense that it is necessary to go on a mission in order to be a member of the Church. However, I definitely got the impression that this was something that was very strongly encouraged by both most Mormon families and by the Church. Going on a mission is something that is regarded in such positive terms by Church members that the youths are strongly encouraged to go.

This encouragement is partly due to the fact that many, if not most, of the adults in the Church have gone on a mission and appreciate it for three main reasons. The first reason was that the mission deepened their faith, it helped them grow within their religion and in their relationship to God, and in the end rooted them solidly in the Church. This solidarity in the church is something they view as very important. Secondly, the spiritual growth takes place in the context of leaving home and living in a new and different place,

meeting new and different people. So, its not only an opportunity for spiritual growth but also a chance to become more culturally sophisticated. One has the opportunity to travel to Europe or Africa, and the excitement associated with this kind of adventure is significant. However, the spiritual aspect cannot be underestimated. The third main motivation that I perceived within the Church is that they sincerely believe that this message that they have to share is true, and so want to share it with as many people as they can.

This is not to say that all Mormons go on a mission; some just can't afford it. The Church does not pay for the missions, they are entirely funded by the missionary and his or her family. Since the mission is usually two years long and is a 24 hour a day commitment, substantial savings have to be available to pay for expenses like rent, food, and other living expenses. The missionaries I met lived in an apartment building, and things like rent and utilities are not cheap, especially when a person is prohibited from earning any money. Thus, a potential missionary needs to have several thousand dollars saved up before he or she can even consider going on a mission.

This proof of financial resources is one of the items that has to be demonstrated on the application form for missionary activity in the Mormon church. As I understand it, an application must be sent out to Salt Lake where it is reviewed and, as Elder Terry put it, "prayed over" by church authorities. An applicant puts down such things as any special abilities and past experiences which would help a person on their mission. Of particular interest is any foreign language ability because of the need to fill spots in overseas missions.

This overseas opportunity is a very sought-after option. Elder Franck mentioned that both of his brothers went to South America for their missions, and he would have liked to have gone there as well. Elder Terry also had applied for missions in South America as well as England and Ireland. Since they both got placed in Iowa, which probably nobody puts as a preference, obviously missionaries don't always get to go

exactly where they would prefer. But they accept this, and accept the location of their missionary activity to be God's will made evident through the church.

There is some training involved: in Utah prospective missionaries spend three to four weeks in training to prepare them for their mission. (If they are assigned to a non-English speaking country they receive an additional two months of language training.) They then proceed to the mission that they are assigned to: in Elder Terry and Frank's case, the Iowa Des Moines mission. Most often a two year commitment is made. At the time I interviewed him, Elder Terry had been doing missionary work for a year and a half and Elder Franck had been out for about four months. However, it is important to mention that not this time is not spent in one town. This had been Elder Franck's first placement, but he has since moved on to another town. Elder Terry had been serving a while longer, so he had started in Mason City for three months, spent seven months serving the rural area of Olwein, moved to Ankeny for seven months, and had been here for four-and-a-half months. Especially interesting is that these transfers happen with very little notice (usually less than 24 hours).

This background on the setting in which a Mormon mission takes place is necessary, but what I am most interested in is what the missionaries do on a daily basis. When I asked Elder Terry and Elder Franck what they did, they responded that they are here to "serve the people", which I found to be a pretty fair description of how they spend their time. Exactly how they set out to do this service is determined partly by Church leaders and partly by themselves. Their time is somewhat structured by Church authorities in that every day they wake up at six in the morning and begin their day with an hour of scripture study with their companion, studying specific passages of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. They are also encouraged spend hours doing volunteer community service work; Elder Terry mentioned specifically that they are involved in Head Start but most often their service work takes the form of walking the streets in order to help anyone in need. Finally, they must attend monthly meetings called "zone

conferences", where missionaries from the surrounding area meet in Cedar Rapids and discuss various missionary concerns.

However, Elder Terry and Elder Franck stressed that they are not strictly supervised in the sense that they don't have someone constantly telling them what to do. They do have local church leaders that they report to and can turn to for advice, but they said that to a large extent how hard they work and what they do is up to them. I would agree that they determine how they spend their time, but it did seem heavily influenced by Church suggestions. I'm pretty sure that if a missionary was not working as hard as the Church would hope or not spending as much time on a specific concern as they should be that the local Church authority would intervene, especially in the setting of the zone conference. In fact, this type of "encouragement" bordering on supervision seemed to be exactly what the zone conference was all about.

I should mention that although the majority of missionaries are male, I did meet some female missionaries. There are fewer because of the emphasis on family and gender roles in the Church; Elder Terry told me that young women often don't become missionaries because of the emphasis on marriage and family responsibilities. Even when they do go on missions, the female missionaries are only sent out for a year and a half. However, the female missionaries that I met at the zone conference (who are referred to as Sister so-and-so instead of Elder so-and-so) seemed to be respected as equals as far as I could see performed the same activities as the Elders. (However, women are not eligible for the priesthood which is so central to the Mormon experience.)

A sizable amount of the missionary's time is spent sharing with people the beliefs of the Mormon Church. Before I describe this, I must emphasize that the missionaries are *not* trying to force their beliefs on others; they are *not* trying to prove that they are right and that others are wrong. It is by no means a confrontational encounter; they are not trying to coerce people into believing what they believe. What they want to do is share what they believe. I hope that my description will make this clear.

First, there are two different ways that missionaries approach people. The first way is that they get somebody's name by media referral. The Mormon Church has a series of very sharp television and radio commercials in which it offers to share its message with anyone who wants to hear it. In general, the commercials tell the viewer that the way to a fulfilling life is found in the words of Jesus Christ, and that these words are found in the Bible and in Jesus's continuing revelation in the Book of Mormon. Often, family values are stressed and a free Bible, the Book of Mormon, or a church video are offered. When an interested person calls the 1-800 number on the screen, they are asked if they would like have a missionary come visit with them. If they say yes, then an appointment is made and missionaries like Elder Franck and Elder Terry deliver the books and video to their homes and have a discussion with them.

The other way missionaries approach people is simply by going door-to-door or approaching people on the street and asking them if they are interested in having a discussion about their faith. Elder Terry and Elder Franck reported varying levels of success with this method, ranging from the typical "I'm not interested, I'm busy" attitude to a more negative "I have my own religion" stand-off response. However, they did say that they often get a positive reaction from people who are willing to listen and genuinely want to talk about religion. It is often just a matter of finding people who have time and inclination to sit down and talk.

At this point I should describe what the discussions are like. There are six discussions, and they are structured to introduce a person step by step to the Mormon faith. Although the missionaries do have a script that they follow and use as a guideline for the conversation, these conversations really are discussions in the sense that the missionaries are free to deviate from the script, and also the script consciously attempts to draw the interested party (which in this case was me) into a discussion of their own faith and their reaction to what the missionaries have to say.

The first discussion is entitled "The plan of our heavenly father." This discussion is a kind of "getting to know you" period in which the missionaries and the subject discuss who they are and some of their most basic beliefs. Basically, this discussion was about building some common ground by establishing that all parties involved believe in God, Jesus Christ as a Savior, and God's will revealed through man (prophecy). In this first discussion, the Book of Mormon is given to the subject and he is told about its divine nature and encouraged to read from it.

The second discussion is entitled, "The gospel of Jesus Christ." This discussion outlines some basic aspects of the Christian worldview such as resurrection, salvation, and baptism and presents the distinctly Mormon notion of each. For example, the missionaries described resurrection as the "reuniting of the spirit with a glorified, immortal body." Also, the Christian notion of salvation from sin is discussed as the "first principles and ordinances" of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Further, the practice of baptism is presented as the necessity to receive the Holy Ghost by the only legitimate means: namely, through the Mormon priesthood.

The third discussion is entitled, "The Restoration." This discussion seemed to me to be the one with the largest amount of actual "Mormon" information in it. It fully develops the notion of the apostasy of the Church, which had already been only briefly mentioned. The apostasy of the Church refers to the Mormon belief that there was a falling away from the truth of Christ in the early church due to deviation from the apostolic tradition. A Biblical passage is cited: "For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first. (2 Thessalonians 2:3)

After the notion of the apostasy is understood, the third discussion explains how the true church was restored by God through Joseph Smith and the gift of the Book of Mormon and the two volumes of "modern-day scripture": the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price, both of which were original documents written by Joseph Smith. The missionaries assert (without being confrontational) that because of the truth

of the apostasy and the restoration, the only true Christian church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Exactly how the Mormon Church conceives of truth was somewhat illuminated by a useful description given to me by one Mormon man. He described the situation of the apostasy and restoration as being analogous to a board which has one nail driven through it. If a person puts one nail in a board, the board is free to move in any direction that you turn it. This is analogous to how God's revealed truth in the Bible has been interpreted in so many ways. With only one nail (the Bible) to hold the truth steady, the truth became something moveable and changeable. But, if a person were to hammer a second nail in the board, then the board would be steady and unmovable. This is in this way that the Book of Mormon functions: it serves to "nail down" the truth of the Bible so that it can't be altered or changed by human hands.

The fourth discussion is entitled, "Eternal Progression." While the third discussion was the most informative, I found this fourth discussion to be the most interesting to me. In this discussion, the most distinctively Mormon beliefs were described in detail. The first example of this was the belief in the pre-existence of the soul. The soul had existed before birth and was at some point in time placed in a human body in order that we should be able to become more like God. This led into the belief that humans progress to higher levels of existence of becoming more like God. (The names of different levels of existence were presented, but very little extra information was available on them).

Of special interest to me were "the words of Wisdom", which is a prescription for the way life should be lived in order to progress. Abstinence seemed to be the key word in the words of Wisdom. Abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and any other "harmful drugs" are a part of this prescription. The reason given for this was that they prevent us from being who we really are and that the use of them is an abuse of the body which is a gift from God to us. (Remember, the body is the very means through which progression

is possible.) Also prohibited was the use of caffeine as present in coffee, tea, and sodas, with the same reasons of personal identity and respect for the body given.

The final prescriptive element of the words of Wisdom was the total abstinence from sex before marriage. The openness with which the missionaries approached this subject was refreshing, as was the simplicity of their view. (During this discussion, we were joined by two female missionaries, which made the discussion of the issue particularly interesting.) They simply asserted that sex before marriage is wrong simply because it is not a part of God's plan. This is evidenced by the serious problems which result from pre-marital sex, such as teenage pregnancy. Pre-marital sex was also viewed as destructive to any potential existing or potential marriage, as unnecessarily complicating issues are introduced into the marriage. These issues range from the introduction of a sexually transmitted disease such as AIDS into the marriage to the personal insecurity of knowing that you are not the only sexual partner that your spouse has ever had.

After this discussion, the next two discussions seemed anti-climatic. The fifth discussion is entitled, "Living a Christ like life." This discussion centered on the two great commandments of "love God" and "love your neighbor." Simply, living life as an imitation of Christ was presented as the way to live an examined life. The strongly Mormon notions of fasting and tithing were introduced. Mormons are expected to fast from food and water for one day a month, and to give one-tenth of their earnings to the Church from cradle to grave.

The sixth and final discussion is entitled, "Membership in the kingdom." In this discussion, three main aspects of the kingdom of God are emphasized. The first is "perfecting the Saints", which is an emphasis of the ongoing struggle to be Christ-like which marks the Mormon experience. It is not merely belief, it is a life lived. The second main point is "proclaiming the gospel", which emphasizes the need for Church members to share their beliefs (in other words, what is true) with other people. The third

main point is "redeeming the dead", which refers to the Mormon practice of researching one's family history back hundreds of years for the purpose of performing baptisms for them so that they might progress. As far as I know, baptism for the dead which is uniquely Mormon.

I achieved three important insights into the Mormon faith through my observations. First, I learned that Mormonism is a Christian faith. It is sometimes thought of as a fringe religious movement somehow outside the boundaries of Christianity, but in my observations I learned that it is centered on God and on the saving power of Jesus Christ. Through the process of writing this paper I might have learned how this misconception is perpetuated. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has so many characteristics which are distinctly and uniquely Mormon that these differences are emphasized to the extent that the Christian nature of the religion is not fully appreciated. I have been guilty of this myself: in trying to describe in this short space what Mormonism is like, I have emphasized what is different about Mormonism. I hope that you put these unique characteristics into the proper context, which is that Mormonism is an expression of Christianity. It is better thought of not as Mormonism, but as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A second thing I learned about Mormonism is how very important their missionary activities are to the strength of their religion. Missionary work is not just a means of recruitment, it is also tremendously important in building the faith of existing members. Think about it. If one spends nearly every minute of two years of their college-age life telling other people about the truth of their religion, answering questions about it and praying on it, they would come to believe more deeply and solidly in that message that they are sharing. I heard repeated to me again and again by missionaries, "I know this to be true", and it would seem that after doing this for two years that this truth would become a part of them, that they would become unshakable in this truth. So, by maintaining the practice of having most of their members spend two years of their lives

spreading their religion, they are not only supplied by a constant stream of converts, but the members of the church become not only members from the cradle to the grave, but active members for that time. This is especially important to Mormonism, because on the local level they do not have any full time paid priesthood. Any male adult member of the Church is a member of the priesthood, and so these two years of religious reflection and activity could almost be thought of as training for the priesthood.

The third thing that my examination of Mormonism revealed was its method of demonstrating the truth of its own religious claims, which was just brilliant. In today's world of religious diversity, so often interaction between different religions takes the form of conflict and argument. Everybody believes that their religion is true, but tries to demonstrate this truth with a proof which is not authoritative to people outside their religion. What we seem to be left with is everybody shouting at each other, "You're wrong!" It would seem that this would especially be a problem for a religion as unique as Mormonism.

However, if you ask a Mormon missionary to prove to you that what they say is true, they will not respond with an argument either for their faith or against your faith. Instead of arguing, they will say something which is very similar to what is found at the end of the Book of Mormon when the exact same issue is raised of, "How can I know that this is true?" In Moroni 10:4, the Book of Mormon reads:

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort your that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost".

So, it is not the missionary's job to prove to anyone that what he or she says is true. All he or she is doing is presenting what they believe to be true, and asking you to pray to God and ask Him whether or not it's true. While studying religion, I have grown tired of confrontational, argumentative discussions about religion which never seem to

accomplish anything. This is why I found the Mormon approach to be such a breath of fresh air: I was very impressed first by this type of interactive sharing of beliefs. I conclude by saying that looking to God to answer the question of what religion is true is such a simple and brilliant idea that all religious traditions would benefit from a better understanding of Mormonism.

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