

REL 402 - Latter Day Saints - Mormons

Although growing up in a strict Roman Catholic family did not exactly expose me to many other religions, I was always very interested in seeing how other people worshipped and how different another church could be. One of my good friends while growing up was Mormon, and his family was very involved in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I was always very curious about the religion because it was obviously very different to my own. I was interested in the specific differences between where I went on Sunday and where he did.

We were speaking one day, like typical adolescent boys do, about how we couldn't wait to grow up and get out of our parents' home. I told him about how I had it all figured out and how sure I knew my plan of asserting my independence would work. I would go into the military in order to travel the world and see things others did not. He told me that even though he would not be going to college right after high school, he too would be seeing the world like me. I said, "If you are going to travel, but aren't going to college or the military . . . what are you going to do?" He told me he would be going on his mission for church and it would be two years. He began to explain that this would be a time where he was going to dedicate himself to preaching the word of God. He would live somewhere he did not know (it might be overseas or a couple of states away), but he would live there with little contact with his family. This sparked my interest, so I asked questions about the church and one Saturday afternoon they invited me to go to the church with them the following morning.

My parents hesitated to let me go because they are and always have been extremely overprotective and traditional, but after some thought they agreed that it would not hurt. I was so excited to go and see this church that seemed to be such a mystery to me. I did not know what to expect and began to think about all the things there were to consider. Do people dress up there? Do they sing? Do they take communion? Do the kids have church class? Will people be able to tell I am not Mormon?

The day came to go to church with my friend and so I put on my Sunday best and hoped that it would be enough. I asked my friend's parents if I needed to dress up more for the service and they smiled and told me I was dressed fine. We finally arrived at the church and there were many friendly people. B- (my friend) introduced me to many children who were members of the congregation, and I was relieved to see they were dressed up as well. I had a chance to meet adult members of the church and I was pleasantly surprised to see they were cheerful and seemed to be genuinely happy I came to church. B- and I were quickly ushered off to children's Sunday school class. We learned about Noah's Ark. I really liked this portion of church because at the Catholic Church we were not allowed to talk very much during Sunday school; however here the teachers really tried to involve us and get our input. They had activities where we were allowed to get up and re-enact the story we were reading, which for a kid is a great tool for comprehension and memory.

Once the class for children was over we headed to a large room filled with pews and a pulpit at the front. We met B-'s parents and sat down together. I was amazed how similar the church was in comparison to mine, however I did begin to take note of the differences. They did not call their leader Father like Catholics call their priests. They call the leader of their group of people the "Bishop" and they call their congregation or group of people their "ward". There was not a crucifix at the front of the church, nowhere to kneel, and the bishop was not dressed at all like a priest. He had a nice suit and tie; however, unlike the priest, he did not have a robe. The bishop did something I had never seen before; he came down from the pulpit and actually interacted with the people in the congregation. He had the attention of everyone in the large room with his ways of connecting with the people in the church.

It was time for communion and I was ready to get up to go to the front of the church, but was shocked when I saw the communion brought to the people at the pews. I was even more shocked that it was in a basket and it was piece of bread! The body of Jesus was supposed to be represented by a piece of bread? I was so confused, but I decided to wait until later to ask questions. I was in dismay as I saw water being passed around to represent the blood of Jesus. I was used to the standard unleavened bread and wine, however the Mormons believe that the wine that Jesus would have had at the Last Supper is not around anymore. For this reason, the church opts out of using wine or juice and instead uses water. The service was three hours long and I was having a hard time not wishing that I could just go back to my strict, traditional, hour long service at the Catholic Church.

This experience was extremely beneficial and I am so glad I was able to attend that day because I was able to experience something completely different from what I was used to. Although I had many questions for my parents when I arrived home, I was thankful they allowed me to go. They were happy that I had a new experience and also that I had a greater appreciation for the church in which I grew up.