

# *Commitment to one another, in the Christian Church*

*You may disagree with me in what I have written here. However, if you have not experienced what a close-knit worshipping community is, I suggest you don't dismiss this as garbage. Strong words? Yes, but based upon my experience in the "varsity of life".*

Looking around me, with the eyes of one who had been a "Mormon" for many years, and having therefore experienced their level of mutual support one for another, and the steadfast maintenance of one's life according to what one believed to be the way in which God would like us to conduct our thoughts and actions, I find it very easy to understand why so many who have then become disillusioned with the Latter-Saints' church also reject the Christian system described by some as "churchianity". It isn't that all of these people have wilfully chosen to turn their backs on God. Many have had concerns at some of the practices within Mormonism, and being steeped in the belief that Joseph Smith restored God's only true church, they feel that they have stepped outside the umbrella-covering that God has placed there, and gone on to reject Christianity. This paper is to examine why.

There are some who, like me, knowingly behaved in a manner calculated to cause offence to the LDS church's principles and those of its hierarchy, and although many similarly placed at the time of their inadmissible behaviour, did not find any supporting feelings from God that He was condemning our actions at that time. I know that the others found that as equally puzzling as I did.

Sadly, all those who have left the Latter Day Saints with whom I have spoken, except for a small handful, have found it extremely difficult to integrate into the rest of Christianity. The reasons all seem to fall into an area that appears to us to be that the Christian denominations, by and large, appear to be playing with the following of Jesus Christ's message - that taught by Him, and that taught after His death and resurrection by the apostles. Each of us has found that there have been one or two exceptions to the rule, but only among individuals it appears, it is not widespread.

Our mutual experience among a wide range of denominational church leaders has, by-and-large, been a rejection by them of our need to understand why things aren't organised, or done, in the New Testament manner, even if the details carried forward from our prior Mormon history have been tinged - or even coloured - by Mormon teachings about the biblical pattern of church, which in many cases isn't quite correct, but let me emphasise that Mormon thoughts (as opposed to doctrines) are far closer than those voiced by many denominations. We have, generally speaking, found the absence of a real and evident "Body of Christ" (which incidentally is not a term used by Mormons) a stumbling-block to staying with congregations or even denominations.

One of these concerns is the very obvious lack of an "every-member ministry" made up of males and females, where supportive programmes are run by the leadership (which is essentially lay) to encourage all of the participants in their daily walk, not only with "The Lord" but also within the world at large, thus ensuring that we remain in the world, but not of it. The concept of pastoral care offered by every single church which I have visited has fallen tragically short of the twin schemes operating within Mormonism, where all families with ladies attending are visited a

minimum of once a month by the sisters of the ladies' auxiliary (Relief Society), and all families where there is even only one attender (either male or female) is visited a minimum of once a month by the brethren (Priesthood). While the organisation of their priesthood isn't biblically sound, they do provide ample evidence of an operating priesthood of all believers in this way, and they have done so successfully for the past 160 years which I believe demonstrates that it is a practical possibility - providing that those involved have the commitment. You see, in Mormonism, there's not a "we" and "they" group - they are all one, and all tasks performed are done by those within the local congregation.

Another concern of equal magnitude to those who leave Mormonism is that of evangelism. When people who have believed the Mormon concept of eternal life realise that there is a better biblical choice, the first thing that enters the mind is that those with whom they previously felt a far closer bond than their literal family - particularly if they weren't Mormons - need to be evangelised, or "converted" in Mormon terminology. The problem then is quite simply, convert them to what? The choice is very limited, and frankly to find a group of Christians who love one another to the extent that Mormons expect is not found easily.

You see, it's not just smiling and saying "I'd love to have you over to tea sometime...." It is giving a hand to those who need it, at the drop of a hat, **when they need it**, be it because of financial or medical disaster, or whatever other reason.

It's adults not objecting to their spouses visiting (and always in twos for practical chaperonage reasons) the families assigned to them, nor the men (including all boys over 12 years old) regularly performing property maintenance and other practical tasks for solo mothers who often have children, and widows and those others who also have need.

It is supporting the local leadership in sharing time together outside of church services, where potential converts can be invited to meet a group of people who show that they love one another. It is going to the meetings that have been structured to suit the age-groups that humanity falls into. It is actually enjoying the company of one's brother and one's sister without any need to see an ulterior motive in the expression of that love, and they are often aghast when they discover the jealous outlook of many Christians in this regard.

It is in not bad-mouthing another brother or sister, but rather encouraging them to do the right thing. Equally it's not bad-mouthing a leader either, because he or she is "The Lord's anointed".

While on the topic of evangelism, most of them have that enormous urge to evangelise in the community, and this is evidenced by the fact that so many youngsters go out and serve two years away from home knocking doors with their message. While I deplore the content of the message, since I discovered the foundational problems of their belief system, it doesn't negate their commitment to what they see as God's word as described in the "Great Commission". Missionary costs are borne by parents, by insurance policies maturing at 18, by congregations supporting less well-off youngsters, by all sorts of means. Many of their retired people also go on missions as couples, often to be found in remote places supervising a congregation that may have disintegrated because the town has collapsed financially, leaving only a few isolated families.

I believe that we Christians fail the last part of Matthew's gospel, chapter 28 daily, perhaps because we chose not to do anything about it; is that why we aren't any good at it? Or is it because we know there are things wrong with our lives that we aren't prepared to do anything about, and we would feel self-conscious or even embarrassed about letting others see how badly we stack up?

Those who look for a substitute body-life outside of Mormonism find it very difficult to see any evidence, because the degree of commitment that Mormons have to one another, and to what they perceive as God's true church, just does not appear to them to exist outside their ranks. This is commitment to all of the behavioural challenges placed before us by Christ and the early apostles. This is commitment to helping each other to overcome individual short-comings with a gentle nudge as we say and do things that are inappropriate for someone who is now a new creation from God. This is not using loose or coarse language, following the road rules, not stealing pens and pencils from your employer - the simple things first of all - and then going on to other aspects of life. If you talk to your average Mormon - and the chances are about 80% that he or she will have been a convert to their system - you will find that they regard 'Christians' as being hypocrites who compromise most of their behaviour to fit in with what they want to do.

In most cases it's because they have seen this while attendees in Christian churches prior to conversion to Mormonism, and while this may not necessarily be true across the board, it's a sobering thought that so many of us who claim to be "born from above" can convey such an image to people we would like to see come out of the clutches of a religion which worships an obviously different God from ours.

I was talking to a colleague who had spent many years as a Jehovah's Witness and then become a Christian. A few months ago, he made the surprising statement to me that he had actually considered rejoining the Witnesses because they were at least dinkum in their approach. While I believe he was just making a point, it shook me a bit, because in a dark moment not that long before, I had momentarily considered rejoining the Mormon church. We both discussed this scenario, and we both agreed that there is very little in churchianity that one can point the finger at and say "Thus saith the Lord". In our commitment, or lack of it, some of us actually vote to decide what bits of scripture should be followed, in some groups. I believe that we as a body of people, that is to say English-speaking middle-class people from the English-speaking nations of the world, are going to be in for a rude shock when we inevitably have to give account of our procrastination, compromise, and lack of commitment. "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear".

I am reminded of the words of a worship song composed by a good brother in the Lord, a Melburnian by the name of Danny Burkett, which I believe concisely describes the relationship each of us should cultivate with every single brother and sister in Christ:

### *Submit Yourselves*

- ***Submit yourselves, one to another,  
Submit yourselves, younger to older  
And be clothed in humility, towards your brother.  
Humble yourselves, under God's mighty hand,  
Humble yourselves, He understands,  
Cast all your care on Him,  
Cast all your care on Him, for He cares for you.  
And may the God of grace, after you have suffered,  
Perfect and strengthen you.***

***And may the God of grace who called us to glory  
Establish and settle you.  
To Him be the glory, and dominion, for ever, Amen.***

The theme of this song, of course, comes from the 1st epistle (letter) to the wider church by the apostle Peter, 5th chapter, in which we find written (in the 1611 translation)...

- ***Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.  
Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.  
Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:  
Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.  
Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:  
Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.  
But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.  
To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.***

adapted from a script last edited on February 8, 1997