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In Dialogue

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In Dialogue

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"My name is Michele. I graduated from St. John Fisher a year ago. Summer 2007 was full of events: I worked at a Christian sports camp in Pennsylvania and in Rochester, was a nanny to two wonderful girls, and traveled to Nova Scotia with my best friend. I am now completing my first year at the University at Buffalo Dental School. By graduation time last May, when I walked across the stage, I knew where I was going to be headed, but it never occurred to me that I still had so much to learn and experience while attending graduate school."

***** In Dialogue**

My name is Michele. I graduated from St. John Fisher a year ago. Summer 2007 was full of events: I worked at a Christian sports camp in Pennsylvania and in Rochester, was a nanny to two wonderful girls, and traveled to Nova Scotia with my best friend. I am now completing my first year at the University at Buffalo Dental School. By graduation time last May, when I walked across the stage, I knew where I was going to be headed, but it never occurred to me that I still had so much to learn and experience while attending graduate school.

What more could I learn, I thought, after four years of college? I failed to realize one of the major differences between the four years spent at Fisher and the four to spend at a Dental School: a large state school versus a small private institution. At a small private school the diversity of people is not as large as at a state university such as Buffalo. Here I have met people who have traveled from America's West coast and others who came to America when they were children. Here I have participated in a talent show in which different cultural dances were performed, and here I have learned about different religious beliefs.

As this past academic year has unfolded, I have had conversations with my lab partner, Creed C., who comes from a different, though somehow similar background to my own. We were able to talk and learn about each other during every lab period. He is a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When I first learned of his religion, I was skeptical and worried about what lab would be like. Some questions crossed my mind: would he try to convince me to convert to his religion? Would he give me the Book of Mormon? To my surprise, he never tried to convert me nor did he force his religion on me; instead we have had many interesting conversations. In this essay, I would like to share some moments of those conversations with the readers of Verbum.

Raised in a Christian/Catholic family, I have grown up believing in Jesus Christ and holding onto his teachings. What makes your religion separate from Christianity?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has many of the same beliefs. We believe in Jesus Christ and his second coming, in God, and in the Holy Ghost. The Bible is one of the basic books we read and follow. Jesus' teachings and His ways are what we base our everyday lives on. We believe that the Church, which Jesus Christ created during His time on earth, has been re-created in our times.

If that is so, why are there no miracles or cures taking place among the modern day prophets of your Church, as one reads about in the Bible? Catholics believe in Saints that have lived according to Christ's word and performed many good deeds as Jesus did. These men and women have been recognized by the Catholic Church as people, called by God to do Christ's work here on earth, who have been the instruments of God's miracles.

Well, indeed you do recognize saints; but did all people written about in the Bible perform miracles, or was it only Jesus who performed them? All the other prophets in the Bible shared their life stories with the people of God as God's witnesses.

Why read the Book of Mormon and the Bible? The Bible is the book of God's interaction with His people and of His Son Jesus' message to the world.

Well, the Book of Mormon is similar to the Bible but tells us of the ancient people in America; it was written by the Ancient prophets. It is just another witness to Christ.

So the ancient prophets are similar to our apostles and prophets of Christ?

Yes, they were prophets here in America who wrote down their stories about the work that was done here in America.

Well then, why America? Why do you have a book that tells you about the prophets only in America?

America is where the angel Moroni told Joseph Smith that he would be able to find the tablets just near his house on a hill. Once the tablets were translated, the Book of Mormon told us that America was a location reserved by God for those who wanted freedom and freedom of religion.

So you also believe in the second coming. What about judgment day? I believe that judgment day is the day when we stand before Christ and our lives get looked over to see if we lived them as Christ showed us and so be able to spend eternity with God. We no longer will occupy our earthly bodies but our souls/spirits will go and be with God.

Yes, we believe in the second coming of Christ and judgment day, but we also believe that Jesus will come and reign here on earth from a location here in the United States. Jesus Christ will be the director of the government, but only those people who are good and honorable will continue to be on earth. This time of peace will last about 1,000 years and then evil and good will have their final confrontation before judgment day.

From my understanding of Christianity, those that will live forever with God in heaven are those who follow the 10 commandments and live out life the way Jesus showed us. Many of us take up different callings such as priests, nuns, preachers, people that support charities and missions, those that do mission work, and leaders of small groups and prayer groups - just to name a few. Not every one has to be a part of these to reach heaven. Are there qualifications for you on earth to serve God reach heaven?

Our Church has a very straight set of rules that qualifies one as good and honorable. As members of the church we live to donate our time, money and talents to the church. For males our mission work is a 2- year requirement at the age of 19; females have the option serve a mission if they are over the age of 21.

We have many volunteers that work at the church to help decorate and offer their talents as band members, singers in choirs, leaders in small groups, and Sunday school teachers for the children that do not receive religion classes in public school.

Our talents are used in a similar way. We are given what the Church describes as "callings" which require many meetings and activities throughout the week. For example, my wife is a youth director and deals with many of the female youth of the church. As in Catholicism, we also are required to attend church regularly on Sundays and to be in good church standing we have some of the same beliefs such as waiting until marriage for sexual intercourse and pro-life policies against abortion; these are two major similarities. We also refrain from alcoholic beverages, coffee, and black tea. Also, how could I forget, we live by the same greatest commandment that Christianity lives by as shown to us in Matt 22:37-40, "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is just like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All other commandments are considered appendages of these great commandments."

To become a Catholic and get married in the Catholic church one has receive some of the sacraments such as baptism, reconciliation, Eucharist and confirmation. We do not discriminate against any newcomers and allow them to participate in all parts of mass, except for the Eucharist if they have not received that sacrament yet.

Our journey to the temple is a bit longer than yours to your church. Not everyone is allowed into the temple. Any one is allowed into the church on any Sunday, but the temple is a sacred place that you have to be worthy to enter into.

How do you become worthy to enter into the temple? Do you have sacraments as the Catholic Church does that, if received, you can then enter the temple?

The only way for you to enter the temple would be to read the Book of Mormon, and if you feel that calling to be a part of the Church you will get baptized by a priest.

Ok, but who is the priest? Do you have just one priest?

No. Males can receive the priesthood in which they receive the authority from God to perform baptisms. The men that receive the priesthood can be given it at 12 or 18 years of age.

Isn't 12 years of age too young for a boy to know he received such an honorable job? I mean, we do not receive our confirmation until we are 16 years of age by which we know we are making the right decision to commit fully to the Church.

Well, if you think about it, how old was Jesus when he was doing all the things he did for people in His time? He was just a boy; however, people knew He was the Son of God. In turn, why can't a 12-year-old boy have the same calling from God to receive the priesthood and do what Jesus did many years ago?

Ok, I can understand that; but it's still a bit odd to think about. So after I get baptized, when can I enter the temple? And from what I understand, temples are not that numerous around the country as churches are. But they surely are large and beautiful buildings. I passed one on my way to Washington D.C. over spring break.

Yes, the temples are large and beautiful and they are not as numerous as the churches. After you have been baptized, you still cannot enter the temple until a year later. After a year you are deemed worthy of entering the temple and you are given a card.

Is the card similar to the students IDs we are given here at school? Do you find it odd that you do not allow anyone into the temple that is not worthy? How do you know that one is worthy after a year? We are human, and we all make mistakes; requiring only a year to be considered worthy seems to be a small amount of time.

The card is similar to a school ID card. It allows you to enter the temple; you just have to show them your card. One does make mistakes, but that is why we pray many times a day and read both the Bible and the Book of Mormon many times a day. If we do follow the rules of the Church which we have accepted during our Baptism, then we believe that a year is sufficient time for a person to be worthy of entering the temple.

Ok, the next question I am seriously interested in and not just asking out of curiosity. I know that your beliefs say that you wear special garments. Is it when you are worthy of entering temple that you can receive these garments?

Ah, this is some people's favorite question and it is not a problem, I can answer it. When we enter the temple the card allows us to be worthy of wearing special garments. These garments do not give us special powers, they just symbolize that we want to live a pure life like Jesus did.

Ok, so they are similar to the white garment/dresses we are baptized in when we are initiated into the Roman Catholic Church?

Yes, very much so. It is just that we choose to wear these garments to remind us of our purpose here on earth and why we are here. There are also stories about them as being protective to people. For example, a man was in a fire but the only place he was not burned was where he was wearing his white garments. And yes, it is true, they do have symbols representing our faith on certain parts of the undershirts and underwear.

Ah, I see. So both male and female can wear them?

Yes, both male and female can become worthy to receive them.

What about marriage? When I was at your house, you and your wife were standing in front of what I now believe to be one of the temples. Marriage is a bind between man and woman under God and is to take place in the Church where God can preside over the

marriage. Not everyone is encouraged or pushed to get married because some women are called to be nuns and some males are called to be priests and they are not allowed to marry. But from what I understand your beliefs are a bit different.

Well, I guess in a way they are. We do get married in the temples but not everyone does. Some people will get married in the church but then might also get married in the temple or not at all. Marriage has a lot of significance to our religion, so everyone who can, is expected to marry.

Why is such a high significance put on marriage? Not everyone is suited for marriage and in this time period many marriages are failing for reasons one may never know. So why encourage marriage so quickly in life when many young people are getting married and divorced just as quickly as they are getting married?

Perhaps one of the major reasons marriage is falling apart these days is that people are forgetting that marriage was a gift from God. Marriage is so important to us because it is ordained by God. It is a prerequisite for obtaining the highest heavenly state after mortality; we maintain marital ties throughout eternity. Unlike other marriage vows, we do not pronounce this marriage "until death do us part," but for eternity.

I hope you have enjoyed this conversation. Although many people criticize this religion, in a way it is not much different from Christianity; but yet it is. The followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints show great dedication to their church and to their faith.

Michele Bonnevie,
2007 Fisher Graduate