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The Mormon Missionary Companionship

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Mormons in North America expect their single young men to serve a full-time, two-year proselyting mission, and close to a third will meet that expectation (Thomas, 1986:103). Having done so, they will be well set to marry as Mormons should—in a temple, for time and eternity—and to embark on a career of church service. A growing number of young and unmarried Mormon women are also serving missions. More clearly for the young man, however, a worthy mission is the proper and usual prerequisite to full adult participation in the LDS Church and the Mormon community.

In this essay, I examine the full-time mission as it prepares young Mormons for adult roles in the church and the family. Specifically, I consider the socializing potential of the missionary companionship for the Mormon youth by drawing on a set of written statements I elicited from a dozen returned missionaries, one of them female, all of them youthful. Together, in a university course I offered, we studied the missionary experience from an anthropological standpoint, as a socialization process having the form of a rite of passage.[1] My student informants and I devoted a week of the course to an examination of the missionary companionship, beginning with an assessment of the parameters of our dialogue and ending with a discussion of their autobiographical submissions. In response to an analytical prompting grounded in my own enduring interest in the topic, these returned missionaries presented material that was anecdotally rich and insightful. Having given them pseudonyms, I use that material with their permission.

My data were collected during the fall semester of 1986 from students who had completed their missions within the preceding three years and who were enrolled at the University of Lethbridge, in southern Alberta, Canada. Five had served foreign language missions, three of them in East Asia, one in the Pacific, and one in Quebec. The other seven had served in the United States, one of them in Utah. Beyond the predominance of males among these informants, my returned missionary sample was clearly biased in consisting solely of university students. Moreover, all in the sample had completed their missions successfully—though several spoke of companions who were "problem elders," only one admitted to having seen himself as close to failure, and he said he had then mended his ways. Of course, I cannot gauge the degree to which my students shaped their written submissions to avoid discomfort in their relations with me and with each other. I sought to cope with reticence by telling them that, for my guidance, they might bracket those parts of their submissions they wished to exclude from classroom discussion. I found, however, that they were less circumspect than I in their treatment of sensitive matters, whether in writing or in the seminar. Perhaps they were encouraged by a milieu that often had the flavor of a missionary reunion.

The Immediate Experience

"Like Another Part of My Body"

Young, full-time LDS missionaries are always encountered in pairs. This commonplace points to the essence of the companionship. As my student Paul puts it, "The idea of having a companion, at first, is pretty traumatic. You grow up in a society that stresses individuality and privacy for nineteen years and then for eighteen months or two years that all changes. You are constantly with someone else and this someone else is not of your choosing. In some cases, he is definitely not of your choosing." Bob elaborates, "From the first moment, companions eat, work, study, and pray together. . . . Their beds are to be in the same room. One companion was not allowed to leave the other one alone, not even to go for a walk or to go to the store. From day one, my companions were like another part of my body, although at times I thought that amputation might be in order."

Clearly, the companionship is a fundamental and pervasive ingredient of the missionary experience—a demanding, mutually administered element in the more comprehensive rite of passage that is missionary service. Not surprisingly, in Kevin's judgment, "The strongest relationships that I developed as a missionary were not with my investigators, the people that I baptized, nor the members of the wards and branches that I served in.[2] The strongest relationships developed between [me and] the missionaries that I worked with and, more specifically, those that were my companions."

"Twenty-four-hour-a-day" Role Models

When the companionship is examined from the standpoint of socialization, one dimension is obvious, given that the Mormon missionary pair usually consists of junior and senior partners. Though novice missionaries will already have undergone a period of intensive instruction at a missionary training center before their arrival in the field, they will have much to learn about performing the missionary task and coping with the practicalities of missionary life. The significance of the first senior companions and their successors as role models for their juniors hardly needs to be argued. Says Bob, "I learned how to be a missionary from my first two companions. They were both hard workers who taught me that hard work would produce results. Although I didn't get along as well with Elder Bryant as I did with Elder Josephson, I did watch Elder Bryant very closely and learned from his influence and approach.[3] I took from him many of the teaching techniques that I would use throughout my mission." For Kevin, "The greatest socialization takes place with the first few companions but the process . . . never stops. All of my companions had some effect on me and helped to shape me into the missionary that I was."

Confronted by such practicalities as shopping, cooking, and caring for clothing, novices often draw on the experience of their senior companions, especially in a foreign mission. Gary notes that "greenies not only learn to teach and be missionaries from their senior companions, they learn how to live in a new country and culture." Joanne agrees: "As a new missionary in a foreign country, I found it quite comforting to have someone always there who could tell me what was going on. I think this more than anything helped break me in to having a twenty-four-hour-a-day companion."

The companionship is a potent agency of socialization precisely because it is the most comprehensive and immediate relationship in a mission system that excludes any contact not contributing to missionary goals. The focused, highly insulated nature of this system is variously symbolized—for example, the missionary's "age" is reckoned by time served in the mission field, and, on leaving the field, he or she is said to have "died" with the last companion. Beyond Mormon gender distinctions, the missionary's standing rests essentially on the missionary system's own criteria: office, seniority, and recognized commitment and competence.[4] As a missionary, Joanne says, "it was hard to feel equal to a companion. There were always certain feelings of superiority or inferiority." Still, she continues:

> A strong bond developed between companions who worked together as well as between missionaries who got to know each other. Elders talked about the missionary that trained them as their father, greenies were often referred to as sons, two missionaries with the same trainer were brothers, etc. We had quite a few activities with the whole mission and we got together on P-days . . . like one big happy family.[5] The mission president was father to us all and his wife was like our mother.[6] The mission was our family and our life. It was home.

Within that family context, Ken was molded as a missionary by the companionship: "It took me a lot of time to get used to being with a companion. . . . At the beginning of my mission it seemed as though I was being 'pushed' all the time. My companion would always tell me that I was late and to hurry up. Towards the end of my mission I felt like I was always having to 'pull' my companion with me everywhere I went. At times I felt that I could do more work if I did not have a companion to wait for and drag around with me all day."

Ideally, in striving to master essential techniques and life skills, the missionary hastens the passage from learner to teacher. Writes Gary, "As a greenie I was to watch my trainer and learn everything that I needed to know to eventually become a senior myself, and it was my senior's responsibility to teach me these things." Alex elaborates, taking first the standpoint of the novice and then that of the senior: "Coming into the mission field I had no knowledge of the field, a blank sheet ready to be drawn upon." Less than five months later, "I was called to train. . . . I had to cook, do dishes, drive, etc. I knew how much my new comp [companion] depended on me and was able to do things that I would have hesitated at before. . . . New responsibilities gave me more of a desire to put forth a good impression. I wanted 'my' missionary to . . . do what he is supposed to and still be himself. All in all—the productive missionary."

Personal Growth and Interpersonal Skills

Turning the novice into a productive missionary and a trainer of productive missionaries, the successful companionship is a moment in a repetitive process through which missionaries produce their own successors. Yet the potential of the relationship for socialization is by no means merely a reflex of the missionary pair's most pressing externalities, as my informants certainly recognize. They say relatively little about the companionship as the principal context in which they learned and taught missionary methods and the routines of everyday life in the mission field. Rather, when they discuss the heuristic value of the relationship, they speak of personal growth and the development of interpersonal skills, considering both in terms of the companionship's demands, their own failures and successes in coping with those demands, and the immediate and lasting benefits that could accrue from the experience of companionship. Says Kevin:

> I learned a great deal of patience from my companions. Patience is something that I needed then and will always need in any future relationships. I also learned how to work closely with another person to accomplish a task. . . . My mission was my first experience with planning and working as a team. I learned when to put my two bits in and when to just listen. It has been said that a mission is more for the development of the missionary than for the spreading of the gospel. Whether this is true or not I am not sure, but there is no doubt that a lot of personal growth takes place, and I feel that the majority of that growth arises from the relationship between companions as they live and work together.

Paradoxically, personal growth can occur in the companionship precisely because that relationship's viability, while always crucial to the achievement of missionary goals, is often problematic. Explaining this, Kevin argues that since "there are essentially two kinds of missionaries—those that do and those that don't—it was necessary [for the mission president] to pair the 'dos' with the 'don'ts.'" The more sanguine Gary attests that "just about every missionary gets at least one companion that he finds hard to get along with." Then again, Wayne notes, "It took me . . . my first two companionships to realize that sticking two strangers together [as missionaries] . . . does not [automatically] work. . . . [We being] there for the same reason, I foresaw nothing to keep us from doing the missionary work with great success. It took me those two companionships to realize that there were differences and that an effort was needed to . . . overcome those differences."

In a particular case, Alex portrays the "differences" and his "effort" to surmount them:

> My next companion was the dreaded "worst." We had nothing in common at all. He had a very negative attitude. He was doing time on his mission just to please his parents, and spent more time on his bed reading Stephen King nov-

> els than anything else. He had not yet passed off his discussions[7] and I was asked to help him get through them. . . . [He] couldn't speak any French and was like a shadow. It seemed that all I had learned about getting along with people had to be intensified. I had to be patient, calm, and had to compromise a lot. The usual P-day activity of basketball had to be altered as he hated basketball.

According to Ken, efforts to compromise were essential because "your relationship with your companion affected everything you did. Your investigators could really see contention in a companionship. . . . If we were going to teach of brotherly kindness, then we would have to show . . . first that we (my companion and I) were united. To do this without 'really' being united was virtually impossible. . . . Being at odds with your companion seemed to do nothing but waste everybody's time." Recalling "companions that I grew to admire and respect, others that I did not care for at all," Kevin concludes that "even if I despised my companion I still had to work with him, therefore there had to be a degree of harmony present." Not one of my informants would dispute Gary's statement that "learning to live with a companion was one of the most important parts of doing missionary work." Personal growth takes root in immediate necessity. As Joanne cogently puts it, "Because we couldn't choose our companions, we had to make the best of the ones we got. This often forced us to learn patience, tolerance, cooperation, and understanding. All of these qualities are of lasting value."

Gary illustrates how tension between companions could arise over things that

> were seemingly insignificant. . . . In many cases the problems stemmed from the two not being willing to change their own ways to accommodate the companion. Sacrifice had to be part of every good companionship or problems were inevitable. I really had to learn to overlook what I thought were faults that my companions had and concentrate on my own faults. I remember being bothered by the way my first companion ate his food. He seemed to have no manners at all. It wasn't long, however, till I found myself doing the same things he was as that was the way everyone in Korea ate. A little thing like how the companion left the bathroom or kitchen after using it could turn out to be a big deal if it didn't agree with the other. I lived in a small apartment with my companion and another set of missionaries and it was always a challenge to

> make everything work. For example, we only had enough clothesline for one of us to hang his laundry at a time. If you left your clothes hanging too long after they were dry, there could be problems.

Kevin observes that another factor involved in "tension between missionaries is the problem of privacy. . . . It was almost impossible to be alone for any appreciable length of time" even when "your companion was getting on your nerves," though in some contexts a missionary might "get a break" from a tense situation by briefly switching partners. For Kevin, "There were times that I had to bite my tongue to keep from lashing back at my companion." He holds that "conflicts would arise mainly because of personality differences or differences of opinion regarding how the work should be done. Usually these conflicts could be solved by one . . . missionary just giving a little bit to appease the other." In such cases, and in some which were more difficult, says Paul, "the one thing that eventually binds you together into a companionship is your desire to do missionary work and serve the Lord."

Still, in the worst case, a companionship might rupture irretrievably. Though Kevin always chose to "stick it out," he knew that "some missionaries would request transfers if they were stuck with a companion that they didn't like." Kevin's stoic acceptance of an uncomfortable companionship might be interpreted as a sign of personal growth. In this vein, Bob observes, "I was learning to be more and more patient with my new companions. . . . I spent almost six months with Elder Hunt, and if he taught me anything it was that pain and punishment of any kind was something that would only last a certain amount of time and then it would end and things would get better." While LeRoy's experience with one companion seemed to be no less burdensome, it yielded something more positive: "We were at each other's throats in our minds, but outwardly didn't show hostility. It turned out to be a total waste of a month and we didn't get a lot of anything done. It was something that bothered me my whole mission, and I vowed after that transfer to try to be more accepting."

Other missionaries acted decisively to repair a defective relationship, as is evident from Wayne's account of his quarrel and reconciliation with a Ponapean companion:

> Communication started to erode and we both seemed to "crawl into our shells." Eventually things just blew up! . . . In my journal[8] I wrote about an episode where communication was clouded by jealousy and selfishness caused by us being

two individuals rather than a companionship. . . . This is what happened!

Elder Melata . . . threw a tantrum at me. He thought we had a youth fireside[9] at eight a.m. and I knew we did not, so I made a commitment to sing in a ward with Elder Schaffer. Elder Melata did not believe me, so I said he was being stubborn and stupid. That offended him in a big way. I was lying on my bed and he came over and grabbed me by my robe and said, "I can beat you up! I can beat you up!" I looked him in the eyes and said, "You can hit me once and I will turn the other cheek like I am supposed to, but if you hit me again I will beat the living puss out of you!!" He stared at me and then went over to his bed and started to cry. I left the room. At eight thirty, I went to sing and Elder Schaffer's companion stayed with mine.

As I look back now, I can see what a great impact that experience had on me! I remember wondering why, since coming into the mission, I had been on the bottom of the mission stat sheet (baptisms, discussions, tracting hours [spent making door-to-door visits], etc.) every month.[10] Of course, I was blaming it on the things I had seen my first companion blame it on. I was very unhappy, even to the extent of considering going home. I was a failure! Deep down I knew I was to blame for my problems but I just could not face that fact. I turned to the Lord for help. I prayed often for the answer to achieving more success. I found my answer in the Book of Mormon: "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away" (3 Nephi 11:29–30).

This passage hit me hard. At once I knew that if we would both put forth the effort to do away with the contention in our companionship, the blessings that we both had been desiring could easier be achieved. I started by discussing the problem with my companion and we strived together to work things out. We grew together! A bond formed between us that is still strong today. We respected each other for admitting and wanting to correct fault. Throughout the rest of my mission probably seventy-five percent of my efforts . . . were

> spent working hard to have good companionships because I knew . . . that if the companionship was in tune, then we had more of a chance to receive blessings in our lives. We could not do it alone, that we knew!

In reaching such a reconciliation as these two did, missionaries might employ the "CI," an evaluation procedure proffered by mission leaders as a medium for dispassionate and productive exchanges between companions. Joanne describes: "Each week we had to have a companion inventory. This was the time we sat down together and evaluated the past week as well as set goals for the coming week. We discussed what we needed to improve on, and any problems that we had were to be brought out then. This didn't always work. Sometimes we called inventory sessions between doors while tracting or wherever we were when a problem had to be resolved. Just discussing the problem helped resolve it most of the time." To illustrate her point, Joanne continues:

> I had two companions (out of sixteen) that I had to struggle to get along with at first. One was a thirty-three-year-old city girl from Utah. I was in a country area when she was assigned to be my senior companion. Because of her age and the fact that she was a "welfare missionary"[11] and the area was supposedly the welfare center of the mission, she was senior. . . . The first thing she did was to say that she hated the area and had wanted to stay in the city. . . . I knew and loved the area. When we rode our bikes, she liked to ride in front all the time instead of beside me. Unfortunately for her, she had a lousy sense of direction and was always going the wrong way after I'd suggested we go the right way. I had lots of chances to say "I told you so!" to her, and even when I didn't say it she knew I was thinking it. . . . On the surface everything seemed fine, but there was an underlying tension, a silent battle. . . . We made life miserable for each other for over a week, then one day we took a break during tracting and let out all the words we had been keeping inside. After that we both made an effort to cooperate and things went smoothly right up until the next transfer, when she moved back into the city.

Rick offers a second example of the companion inventory's utility. His English companion was generally held to be a problem elder.

Judged by Rick to be stubborn, irritating, and competitive, Elder Houghton also

> had a thing about putting down America and Americans. . . . Unfortunately, all these little characteristics didn't make him very popular with the other missionaries. I had never seen an elder so disliked. We had been companions for about a month when I finally felt that I had to talk to him about it. I had always tried to brush it off before but it built up to a point where something had to be said. We finally sat down and had a CI. When I said there was a problem he couldn't believe it, he had thought we were getting along great. He asked what the problem was. It was hard for me to be blunt, but it finally came out and I told him what he had been doing and how others thought about him. He began to cry, which made me feel like a real jerk. He told me all about his personal problems and his home life. He also tried to explain how alone he felt being the only elder from England (he felt he had to defend himself from these Americans). Once he had confided these things in me, my point of view of him changed. I was able to understand why he had acted the way he did. After this experience I never had a problem with him again, in fact we became very close friends, especially after we were split up.

Rick thinks it unfortunate that the talk about Elder Houghton continued, though their own relationship had been secured.

Handling Personal and Cultural Differences

Clearly, variety in the companionship is one of the norms of the missionary experience. Lloyd notes that missionaries can expect to be paired with partners drawn "from all walks of life. It is this variety that makes mission life a blessing and a challenge. No two missionaries are alike." Yet Lloyd understates the case, for there are identifiable "varieties of variety" to be considered—differences of culture, temperament, experience, commitment, and ability, to name a few.

As for differences of culture, by the end of his mission Rick had worked with companions from Samoa, the United States, Tonga, New Zealand, England, and Micronesia—fourteen in all. In Taiwan, Joanne had been partnered by "a mixture of Chinese and American companions and a Filipina too." When there were problems, she believes, "it was not the cultural differences that affected our ability to work together, it was personality differences." Still, Wayne shows that cultural factors might also play a part. For Elder Melata, his companion from Ponape, "many things in Utah were foreign . . . and consequently he would constantly ask, 'What is that?,' 'What does this do?,' 'Why did you do that?,' etc. At first it was quite funny and I would patiently explain things to him. However, after a while it got really tiring." Wayne concludes that, in the face of this intercultural irritant, he did not provide adequate support and guidance until the companionship had passed the point of rupture, at which time he dedicated himself to its renewal.

Rick illustrates the significance of fundamental cultural orientations. He had always thought of himself as "a fairly easy-going person." Assigned to train junior missionaries after less than a month in the field, he was paired for his first seven months with problem elders from diverse cultural backgrounds. He observes:

> Native companions were quite different from American or "white" companions. [With some,] there was a kind of culture barrier that seemed to get in the way. . . . Every once in a while, tensions would arise between the "white" elders and the "native" elders all because . . . of misunderstanding each other.
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> One of the most negative experiences on my mission happened to me with a native elder as my companion. Looking back, it was all a matter of . . . different cultural backgrounds. . . . Elder Houghton [the unpopular English missionary] and his companion, Sila, and my companion, Koata, and I opened up a new island. Koata had been Houghton's companion before and, like everyone else, he didn't like him too much. . . . I attempted to straighten things out only to have my companion, Koata, get upset with me for sticking up for Houghton. The tensions got to the point where my companion wouldn't teach me the language or translate for me. In Kiribati, people don't try to solve problems by talking things out, they just hold a grudge until the whole thing blows over and is forgotten (if it is forgotten). We were very isolated where we were (2000 miles from the mission president) and Houghton and I were the only whites on the island and we didn't speak the language very well. The tensions got worse and worse and stopped the work we were doing. In my journal I wrote that it felt like some kind of evil force was trying to separate us

> so that we couldn't continue our missionary work (the old divide and conquer trick). Finally, I exploded at my companion because he wouldn't do anything with me, he had even said that he hated me and would often run off on his own for hours. I had never lost my temper with anyone before like I did with him. I think now that I was experiencing some major culture shock. I tried to reconcile with him, but it didn't make any difference. I was in his country and I didn't know the customs or the proper way to do things so in his view I was the one who was wrong. It was about a month before things got back to normal.

Yet, after a transfer, Koata wrote to say how happy he had been with Rick as his companion and how much he had learned from the companionship. For his part, Rick had "learned the hard way about respecting someone's culture and trying to be flexible enough to understand it and live it."

Against an American backdrop, Maurice points to less radical cultural differences and to an array of noncultural attributes that also impinge on the companionship: "I had comps from six states and I had eight comps of varying ages and backgrounds so I really ran the gamut. I had hard workers and bums, stone faces and people." Adjusting to this variety, Maurice "learned to look hard at people and be pragmatic enough to use them and incorporate the skills they exemplify," whatever his personal feelings for them. Paul had to cope with a different kind of variety. As a zone leader in the last eight months of his mission, he was assigned to work with problem elders. In one of them, he recognized a problem of ability:

> Elder Sanchez was . . . a special missionary in that he was a little slower than most other people—as a kid he had attended special schools. Sanchez had the desire to be a good missionary but found learning discussions and meeting people very difficult. His speech was extremely slow and it seemed as if he had to think about each word before he'd say it. . . . This made tracting very difficult. Teaching was another problem. I didn't have faith in his abilities because he didn't know all his discussions. We'd sometimes come out of a discussion and he'd ask me why I didn't let him teach a concept. I was eager to impress the people so I sometimes stepped on his feelings and would teach a whole discussion by myself. This created a few hard feelings between us. While tracting I

> would constantly take more doors than was my share in the hope that I could get us in because we had goals to reach and I didn't want all the other companionships in the zone to beat us. . . . I worked with Elder Sanchez for four months but, when he was transferred, we left as friends.

While Elder Sanchez "wasn't the typical problem elder," another of Paul's companions was. Paul recognized Elder Ryan's lack of commitment as posing a problem for the companionship: "he'd been out eight months and still hadn't finished his certification [of competence in discussions]." Financed by his home ward, Elder Ryan

> was constantly writing to his bishop at home asking for more money. . . [to] spend on new suits or other things he didn't need. The two things that Ryan did best were visit members and write letters home—he was constantly writing letters home. He had difficulties obeying mission rules, he'd sleep in a lot and was always watching TV at the members' (his big hang-up was MTV). After working together for two months, I felt like I was starting to make progress with him when the ward mission leader phoned me one Sunday night to tell me that Elder Ryan had been writing notes to a member girl and calling her on the phone. . . . I was shocked because I didn't have a clue that anything was going on. This news got all around the ward, which didn't help our image any. At times I felt more like a baby sitter than a missionary.
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> The only fight I ever got in on my mission was with Ryan. We had just bought something for the apartment, which he had paid for, and we were driving from Mandan to Bismarck when Ryan started complaining that he wanted his money back right then. We were going to work with the elders in Bismarck, and it meant going back to Mandan to my bank so I could pay him. I refused. He started whining and complaining so I said if you're so upset about it, why don't you just hit me; which he did, right in the face. I was driving the car at the time on the interstate, but I was mad so I reached over and started whaling on him. After a few minutes I calmed down and we went back to Mandan and to our apartment. Ryan wanted to call the president, to which I said go right ahead. He never called and we never made it that day to work with the Bismarck elders. We split off with the Bismarck elders the next day for a few days, which gave us some time apart.[12] Things were tense the rest of our time together.

It may have been Elder Ryan who moved Paul to conclude, "I've often heard it said by returned missionaries that, after living with some of the companions that they lived with in the mission field, they could live with anyone (in reference to women). I'm one of those."

In his first companionship, Paul had recognized the significance of his own rural upbringing and his lack of experience in the mission field. His first companion was "a zone leader in Rapid City who'd been out 21 months. He was an excellent missionary but felt that a greenie . . . was only going to slow him down. Mallory was raised in Salt Lake City whereas I was raised in the country of southern Alberta, we had nothing in common. We both found it really hard to get to know one another and things were pretty rough for a while until I had proved [myself] to him." Paul's second companion "was a different story" in that "we hit it off right away. We came from very similar backgrounds and had a lot of the same interests." His best companion was the third: "we were a real team. He'd been out only one month less than me so instead of being senior and junior companions we were equal. We were both dedicated to the work and really put our all into it. Time flew by and the work was easy. We each knew how the other thought and so when teaching we could always back each other up and help when necessary without fear of hurting the other one's feelings."

At its best, the companionship leaves no room for dissension. Rather, in providing reciprocal support, a successful companionship elicits sustained and productive effort from its members. At first, for Paul and his second companion, "things in our area weren't too great, contacts dropped us and nobody would let us in while tracting; but because we got along and had faith in each other's abilities, we soon overcame these setbacks and had a great deal of success." For Lloyd, "opposition . . . was easier to take when we had good comp relations." Joanne agrees: "It really was great to have someone else to back you up. From the mouths of two or more witnesses shall the truth be established." She also notes that "missionary work could seem thankless at times and it was good to have a companion who could understand what you were going through and help give encouragement and an example." Kevin observes that companions share "successes and failures on a daily basis. You talk about them together, pray about them together, and witness them together. The result is an emotional bond strengthened by this cycle of success and failure." Companions can also respond to the stresses of missionary life by "letting off steam" with each other, as witness a fund of accounts of horseplay and practical jokes (see Wilson, 1988:272–75).

Personal Styles in the Making

Whether for better or worse, says Lloyd, "companions have the power to influence you socially, psychologically, and spiritually." More specifically, he notes that "as a greenie you are influenced by your first companion and in many cases, if you don't have a strong desire to serve, you may be influenced down the wrong path." Even senior companions who truly wish to serve may be adversely affected by partners who drag their feet. Paul remarks, "Being with Ryan the last few months of my mission made things really hard, we didn't get near the amount of work done as we should have, partly because of him but partly because I'd lost some of the desire while working with him."

Still, the companionship's variety recurrently redeems both the novice and the mature missionary from sterile and negative relationships, enabling him or her to profit from such relationships rather than be wasted by them. In this way, variety in the companionship allows the missionary to discover and develop an effective personal style in interpersonal relations. Wayne reports:

> The experiences that I had with my first companion really hindered my progression in learning to overcome differences and to compromise. He was a dictator and what he said we did. The problem was that he never wanted to do anything. Often times he would tell me to study my discussions and then he would lock himself in his room for hours. When we were together he would rarely talk to me. . . . Living with this routine for three months really hurt me and my progression. I started to close myself into my own little shell. My views of missionary work were being falsely distorted and changed. . . . In fact I was becoming just like him! I can look back now and see that.

After his quarrel with the Ponapean companion, Wayne changed his style, having realized that "all successful missionary work starts with the companionship." Wayne also came to recognize he was "most successful as a missionary" in a companionship that balanced work and play.

Alex profiles a sequence of companionships through which he discovered a congenial approach to missionary work, then transmitted it to his junior. He notes that the first experience of companionship is commonly "that of the 'clone'. . . . My trainer was all that could be copied. There was no means of comparison. I did all that my first comp asked of me and thought that it was normal. I didn't know where to classify him until I had had other comps." That first companion had been a "'straight arrow,' with a lot of emphasis on the rules, and a 'tracting machine.' He wore his suit on P-day and so did I until one of my zone leaders told me that I didn't have to. I took a lot of his attitudes from him, in essence I made my choices of what to be like, but all the choices that I had were of what he taught me . . . and so the choice was limited." Alex's second companion was

> more to the "mellow" end of the spectrum. He was my senior but I knew the area. This created a good situation because there was interdependence. For the first week all was well. It seemed like he was the same as my trainer, . . . the "hard working missionary." I guess he didn't want me to think that he was anything else. Soon, however, he figured that he had had enough of my hard nosed attitude and took it upon himself to show me that there was more to being a missionary than going by the book. This was when we really started to work hard at the military base [rather than in an unresponsive community of Quebec francophones]. From that point on, tracting was out of the question for him . . . and for me. The results were too small to allow for the time spent. This companion turned out to be the one that I got along with best.

In his last companionship, Alex had to train an elder who

> had lived in France and so was ready to dive right in. The fact that I had already trained and knew what he expected helped out a great deal. We got along great. There was a quick division of labor and I helped my comp to take his share of the work. He came with a great desire to tract, etc., and so I took him out for about eight hours in the cold wind. He didn't really enjoy it, and I took the opportunity to tell him of the many other things missionaries could do in this mission as a more productive way to spend time.

Clearly, from his own experience, Alex had identified "iron rod" and "liahona" styles in missionary work and had chosen to employ and propagate the second of them.[13]

The Lifelong Perspective

To "Ease the Adjustment that Marriage Brings"

I have used several approaches to sketch the companionship as it provides for personal growth by compelling missionaries to examine and shape their own personalities—both in learning to accept or at least cope with the personal and cultural idiosyncrasies of successive partners and in learning to use formal and relatively impersonal procedures, such as the CI, to resolve interpersonal problems when informal compromises fail.

Certainly, my informants recognize the enduring value of their own personal growth as companions, and they note its particular dimensions. Beyond that, they acknowledge the worth of the companionship as a preliminary to marriage. Says Gary:

> The lasting benefits have become much more obvious since I have been married as this is just another kind of companionship. All the little problems that missionaries have with their companions are the same ones that many people have with their spouses. Having had the experience of having a companion, I am able to deal with married life a lot easier than I could have without. I learned to communicate with a companion to work out disagreements rather than letting them get in the way of the relationship.

Wayne believes that

> the church is giving us a chance to use the companion relation to, in some ways, ease the adjustment that marriage brings. Being recently married myself, I can see the truthfulness and purpose of this concept. . . . Learning to love a companion despite his weaknesses has been an asset, along with being able to learn to count on, trust, and love someone. These all helped in marriage. In fact, when I was thinking about what I held to be important in a wife's characteristics, I realized that a lot of the characteristics decided upon were ones that some of the companions that I looked up to had.

Ken had "no idea" beforehand that he would learn anything about marriage on his mission: "I was very surprised at first when my mission president talked about marriage at our zone conferences, but later I learned that this was a very important part of a mission. In a lot of ways a mission was the best way to prepare for marriage (a practice relationship in a sense). . . . Before my mission I was looking for a girl friend (good looks and so on), but after my mission I am looking for a good wife and mother. Companionships . . . taught me so much about what I wanted in a wife."

Preparation for a Career of Service

Only in speaking of marriage do my students relate the companionship to a specific aspect of their adult lives. Not one of them mentions it as a preparation for a career of church and community service. Yet its potential as a means to foster an enduring concern for others is evident in that each missionary, as a companion, is made responsible for the well-being of a series of partners. Joanne recalls the words of a visiting church leader: "The most important responsibility is to protect your companion. Don't endure a companion who breaks the rules. You are as guilty if you can't stop him." Continuing, Joanne observes that the general authority "even went so far as to say that if one missionary had to leave a meeting to go to the washroom, then his companion had better leave the meeting with him, and if a missionary was leaving the apartment in the middle of the night, then his companion had better pray that he might be awakened to stop him."

For the senior companion, there is an added obligation "to keep the work going." Responsibility is fused with an opportunity to exercise authority. Bob writes:

> In Ames, I had two companions. . . . They were both very unsure about their abilities as missionaries and many times I would have to take control of a discussion or a meeting where they lost their place or when they couldn't answer a question. . . . [Elder Janes] would start a door approach and get lost halfway through and freeze at the doorstep. Working with these . . . missionaries gave me confidence because I was forced to take a leading role. . . . The experience in Ames not only made me a senior companion but it made me a leader instead of a follower.

Senior companions faced a different kind of challenge in juniors whose "major concerns were not missionary work" (to use Gary's phrasing)—especially if the companion willfully broke mission rules. Lloyd was paired with a problem elder who had "spent over $1000.00 in phone calls in just one month." Furthermore, "he had taken his green companion on a double date. When he came to me he was on his last straw and I was told to watch him very closely." In Ken's view, however, the worst way to cope with such a challenge was by "getting on your companion's case every bit of the day for every little thing, correcting him in front of members." According to Ken, an "I'm right, you're wrong" relationship "produced nothing for missionary work, and usually ended up with the two companions 'waiting it out' for a transfer." Again, Ken disparages the relationship "where one missionary would not really do anything bad to hurt his companion" but would not "go out of his way to correct or help" the partner. Here, the missionaries were "not very 'close' at all" because their "intellectual" ties lacked a "spiritual" complement. The best relationship was one in which the missionary would strive "to help and teach his companion. The key to this type of companionship (now really a relationship) was that missionary A would want missionary B to change for his [own] benefit, not for missionary A's comfort . . . or reputation." Ken concludes that a missionary's motives in asserting authority over a companion were "spotted very easily." Evidently, while serving as an exercise in adult responsibility, the companionship also schools the missionary in distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of leadership.

Though authority in the companionship depends substantially on office, seniority, and adjudged commitment and competence, the relationship encourages a spirituality that has interpersonal as well as personal dimensions. Lloyd recalls the morning when his junior "came down with tears in his eyes and said 'will I ever have any spiritual experiences, Elder Spohn?'" Lloyd counseled and reassured the junior, who was transferred shortly thereafter. Later, Lloyd reports, the novice "came to me at a zone conference and said 'I am just beginning to understand what you meant.' With moistened eyes he gave me a hug and said thanks." By contrast, Joanne drew on her greenies for spiritual sustenance. She speaks of a Chinese sister who thought about serving a mission and "came for a week, like a trial run. She seemed willing to work and we worked long hard days with lots of walking and bike riding. At the end of the week she told me that the reason she didn't know whether or not to serve a full-time mission was because she had a problem with her leg and the doctor had told her not to walk on it too much. I couldn't believe she hadn't told me sooner, but she said her leg had never felt better than it had that week. Both of our testimonies were strengthened by the experience." Joanne feels that she learned the most from her "green companions. They are the ones who taught me about faith. . . . One of them knew her scriptures inside and out and knew how to make them come alive to investigators. It thrilled me just to be able to translate for her on her first week out as she taught investigators how to find the answers to their specific problems." From the companionship, Joanne took a maturing spirituality into her adult life.

Through a succession of partners, the missionary experiences the transience of persons and the priority and continuity of church offices and roles. Joanne notes, "It seemed like with all my companions we were just getting started working as a real team when we got separated. I never got to have a companion for more than two months." Paul offers a similar comment: "Things never really clicked between us till we taught the Smarts [a family that was investigating the church]. . . . The spirit was so strong during that meeting and we were so excited about the way things had gone that it made us a true companionship for the first time. Things were really starting to progress when Mallory got transferred." Ken recalls, "My companion and I had established great relationships with the members, and things could not have been better (we were top baptizers in the mission one month). Then my companion went home." LeRoy affirms that "the bond between companions, when strong, was very strong. After being together for an average of probably three months, it was amazing how close a friendship could be formed. When transfers came, it was like leaving a lifelong friend and yet in some cases you may not remember or even have known their first name." Finally, Bob places the companionship in a broader context of transience: "Not only would there be a new companion. . . . When I was transferred, there would be a new area, new members, a new apartment, and even a new bed to get used to. . . . I would have to start all over again." Still, personal ties might persist after formal separation. Rick remembers a companion "fresh out of the missionary training center [who] was a real shot in the arm." Though the two were together for only a week, they kept in touch after being separated: "We called each other on the phone whenever we could and we would discuss problems of our companions. We continued to help each other out throughout our missions."

Certainly, in its transience and its arbitrariness, the companionship acquaints the missionary with the nature of a bureaucracy—the necessity of working according to rule with the incumbent of an office in the pursuit of institutional goals, regardless of personal factors. Yet Gary recognizes that "it was the learning to live with and work with a total stranger that helped you to teach and do missionary work amongst strangers. If you could learn to love your companion, you could learn to love the people you were trying to teach the gospel." Ideally, in the companionship, the missionary will learn to infuse bureaucracy with love, and this is perhaps the best preparation for a lifetime of service to the LDS Church.

The Comparative View

The ethnographic literature shows that many societies provide a challenging experience to acquaint young persons, especially young men, with fundamental social values while expanding the social horizons of these young people beyond the immediacies of family and locality. In "bush" schools, for example, neophytes are gathered together in isolation from kin and other personal acquaintances. Here, the prior social identity of novices is effectively set aside as they are instructed by strangers who act for the larger society. Through rites of passage, adolescents progress toward adult status, their sojourn in the bush school or some analogous institution providing the liminality that facilitates the adolescent-to-adult transition.[14] Certainly, youthful service as a Mormon missionary fits this model. Away from home and closely confined to the role and title of elder or sister, young Mormons discover the worldwide church and the priority of its values as they work with companions drawn from the length and breadth of Mormondom.

By definition, each rite of passage bears some resemblance to every other. Yet each is a unique expression of a particular culture's meanings, including those defining age and gender. While Mormon missionary service displays certain of the usual features of adolescent rites of passage, it also exhibits atypical aspects, all of which involve the companionship. In the first place, the Mormon mission employs an educative strategy that is not often encountered in rites of passage out of adolescence—"socialization of the young by their peers and near-seniors" (Mayer and Mayer, 1970:159). Social means and ends valued by Mormons are inculcated in missionaries through interaction with companions who are usually close to being age-mates, this under the direction of adults in a church authority structure that remains by and large at arm's length. Then again, the missionary's rite of passage is exceptional in that the peers and near-seniors who are primarily responsible for his or her socialization are encountered serially and not at all by choice, since their role and presence as companions are mandated by the more distant adult authority structure. A third distinctive aspect of the young Mormon's missionary service lies in the functional ambiguity of the companionship. Missionaries must constantly balance a duty to propagate the gospel with a responsibility for the well-being and progress of a companion, especially a junior companion. That these two concerns are potentially in tension is evident in the anxiety of certain of my informants about meeting their work quotas despite various impediments posed by a partner's performance, as well as in the feelings of some neophyte missionaries that they were neglected by seniors who were more concerned with their own images in mission statistics. How are the two concerns to be balanced? While that question may trouble the missionary, the anthropological analyst is likely to treat the experience of anxiety as an essentially positive feature in any rite of passage. Paradoxically, from the standpoint of an ethnographic comparison, the Mormon mission is all the more effective as a rite of passage in that the young missionaries take their liminality into the world under the shield of the companionship so as to further the work of the church. Not surprisingly, the companionship must bear a heavy burden of stress.[15]

A fourth aspect of the Mormon mission may also depart from the usual rites-of-passage model, though an argument to the contrary is easily made. Typically, societies that emphasize gender segregate males and females and contrast their identities when using rituals to accomplish the passage out of adolescence.[16] Mormon society, with its emphasis on gender-based roles in the church and the family, seems at first glance to run counter to this norm because young people of both genders are called to the mission field and more and more young women are going. A closer inspection suggests, however, that the Mormon reality is more complex: in general, young women are not *expected* to serve missions; nor, therefore, are they stigmatized for not doing so; those who aspire to a mission are sometimes discouraged on the grounds of gender, while those who serve may encounter male ambivalence in the mission field; there, the roles of male and female missionaries differ, as does their authority; and companionships are always based on gender. On the other hand, as my data show, aspects of the companionship transcend gender distinctions. To what degree and in what ways do the mission and the companionship prepare young Mormon men and women to play gender-based roles in their adult lives? How does the missionary experience—more particularly, the experience of companionship—affect the value orientations of females who, in seeking and accepting a mission call, would already seem to be more committed to basic Mormon values than are some who join the male missionary cohort (see Adams and Clopton, 1990)? Having only a single female informant, I cannot respond to such questions except to say that the Mormon case may be closer to the ethnographic norm of gender dichotomy than I had initially supposed.

From an anthropological standpoint, the Mormon missionary companionship is intriguing. From the standpoint of the young returned missionary, it is focal to the Mormon missionary experience—itself deemed by Mormons to be crucially significant for the socialization of males in particular. It surprises me, then, that a substantial study of the companionship has yet to be published.[17] Perhaps this essay will prompt such a study by suggesting some of its parameters.

Notes

1. Here and elsewhere, in speaking of the mission, the missionary experience, and the companionship, I have only the Mormon youth in mind. While the full-time mission served by Mormons in maturity (see Jacobs and Jacobs, 1983) will function more or less obviously as a rite of passage in particular cases, discussion of it lies beyond the scope of this essay.

2. Wards and branches are the basic social and geographic units of the LDS Church. In general, the former are taken to be more stable and more capable of providing their own leadership.

3. Before the young Mormon man begins his mission, he is admitted to the higher of two priesthood orders and thereby acquires the title of elder. During his mission, that title should displace his given name in all discourse. For female missionaries, the title of sister functions analogously.

4. More than seniority, recognized commitment and competence can move a male missionary upward in a hierarchy of offices, to district and then to zone leader. In either position, he will assume responsibility for those missionaries working in his area.

5. P-day, properly preparation day, is the day of the week when missionaries may rightly perform domestic chores and enjoy approved forms of recreation.

6. For Mormons, *mission* is a term with several meanings. One is the service undertaken by missionaries; another is the administrative division of the church to which missionaries are called and in which they should remain until their service is completed. The administrative division is subdivided into zones and then into districts, with the mission president having overall authority.

7. The missionary must show mastery of a series of doctrinal presentations, each one designed to draw an investigator into discussion.

8. Mormons are strongly encouraged to keep journals, as a benefit to themselves and their posterity.

9. A *fireside* is a meeting that serves as a context for the informal discussion of matters of faith. The term is not to be taken literally.

10. The missionary's effort and achievement are routinely quantified and publicized in the mission, where the "stat sheet" can punish, reward, and set goals.

11. Welfare missionaries are usually more involved in imparting skills and solving practical problems than in proselyting.

12. Missionaries are allowed an occasional brief and temporary exchange of partners and sometimes use such an exchange to alleviate strain.

13. Drawing on the Book of Mormon, Richard D. Poll (1967) employed these terms to define "two types of active and dedicated Latter-day Saints" (107–8), whom he depicted as questioning (liahona) or unquestioning (iron rod) about sources of religious authority (109–12) and differing in their ways of looking at "the guidelines" (116).

14. The preceding sentences resonate with a number of paradigmatic statements: Arnold Van Gennep's ([1909] 1960) characterization of rites of passage and their three phases, including a liminal second phase in the transition from one "situation . . . or social world" to another (10–11); Mark Hanna Watkins's

([1943] 1963) study of the West African "bush" school, "a thorough physical, mental, and moral test" for novices removed from "normal family ties" (436); C. W. M. Hart's ([1955] 1963) study of male postpubertal education, in which he argues that "initiation instruction . . . is made the responsibility of men who are comparative strangers to the boy," while the latter is subject to "a long catalogue of . . . obligatory behaviors [and avoidances] covering practically every daily activity and every hour of the day and night" (412–13) as he is taught "the whole value system of the culture, . . . its justification of its own entity as a culture" (419); and Philip Mayer and Iona Mayer's (1970) depiction of the "widening of social horizons" from the neighborhood to the tribe, significant for the "self-identification" of Red Xhosa youths approaching manhood (178–80).

15. According to A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952), "In our fears or anxieties as well as in our hopes we are conditioned (as the phrase goes) by the community in which we live" (149). See Paul Spencer's (1970) appraisal of the place of anxiety and other manifestations of stress in the lengthy Samburu transition from boyhood to manhood; for a succinct statement of the rigors of the Mormon youth's missionary life, see William A. Wilson (1988:272); and see Madison H. Thomas and Marian P. Thomas (1990) on stress and the Mormon missionary experience, noting in particular their use of a study that identifies "companions" as the foremost source of "strain" for young missionaries in the field (50–53).

16. See Kenneth Little ([1951] 1970). See also Walter J. Ong's ([1959] 1963) study of Latin language instruction as a renaissance rite through which boys were inducted into the "extra-familial world of learning (which used Latin)," a world centered on institutions that were "closed to girls and women" (448–49). For contrast, see Melford E. Spiro's ([1955] 1963) discussion of the passage to adult status of youth in the Israeli kibbutz, where gender distinctions are deliberately diminished.

17. Though not at all sociological in its intent, Jack Stephan Bailey's (1976) brief and partly personal account of the companionship (66–73) points to certain of the directions that I have taken in this analysis.

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