Danielle Mills

Comm. 335

June 7, 2010

ANOTHER KNIGHT JOINS THE ROUND TABLE

Life through the eyes of a convert

As a young boy, stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table flowed through Johnny Mills’ mind often; stories of the knights rescuing damsels in distress and fighting off strange beasts with stealth and integrity. These knights also searched for lost treasure, which they believed could cure illness. Johnny longed to be like these knights: courageous, chivalrous and honorable in what was right.

“The knights lived by a code of chivalry. They had a set of rules and morals they lived their lives by,” he said brightly. “I was always fascinated by this code of chivalry…and who knew that I would one day find out that the knights of old are still around today?” he exclaimed, smiling brightly.

In his younger years, Johnny compared the perfect home and family to the 1950’s television show, “Leave it to Beaver” where the mother always kept the house clean, cared for the children and had dinner on the table at 6p.m. every evening. The children were well-behaved in the home and the father was the breadwinner of the family. Johnny longed to have the kind of experience where his home could be filled with love, warmth and care.

Johnny was continually searching but his home did not have the love, warmth and care he saw in “Leave it to Beaver”. Johnny explained, “Dad tried…but there was no religious feeling the house to help bring out the love and care I was looking for.”

At the evangelical church his family attended, Johnny would lay in the back pew and draw cartoon characters. ”You would go to church and hear all about the fire and damnation you were going to suffer, then go home and eat Sunday dinner with the family,” Johnny said. “It didn’t make sense to me.” He decided to search for something better and so began his search for a “code of chivalry”.

As Johnny searched, he came upon a pamphlet from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, given to him weeks before. “I decided to give it a shot,” he said.

When Johnny walked into the LDS Church building for the first time he was stunned. “I felt that feeling of warmth and love I have never felt before; not even in my home,” he said. Complete strangers came up to Johnny and shook his hand. They welcomed him to the sacrament meeting and invited him to sit with their families. He noticed that there was something special about these people. “Although not perfect, they strived to live by a moral code, which was impressive, and reminded me of the morals the Knights of the Roundtable lived by,” Johnny said.

One month later, after being taught by two missionaries, Elder Brown and Elder Bodkin, Johnny was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Only his mother and sister showed up, but that didn’t stop his belief in what he knew to be true. “It is the best decision I have ever made,” he said, teary-eyed. “If I hadn’t have made the decision to be baptized, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Johnny is not the only person who searched for the values he wanted in his lifetime. In a poll given in 2008, it was found that one in every four Americans convert to a different faith than of their upbringing. The two following case studies taken from a newspaper, *The Economist*, show other reasons people around the world convert.

In the mid- 1950s, a man named Marc Schleifer working in Morocco was looking for new cultural and spiritual experiences. He was considered an Anglo-Catholic, but didn’t believe the doctrines being taught. Schleifer had the opportunity to experience different lifestyles and cultures in Morocco to find the better fit for him. After returning home to New York, he was disgusted with the western society’s harsh way of thinking. Schleifer opened a Koran he had with him and read a passage that said the mysteries of God were beyond human understanding but so close at the same time. The lesson he learned from that passage forever touched him and is what converted him to the Islamic religion.

Another case of conversion involved a woman named Jennie Baker, who was an evangelical. She wasn’t satisfied with her religion either because she didn't feel like she could relate to it, but when she moved from Malaysia to England, she found that the Orthodox Church shared her beliefs of her Asian heritage.

These three case studies show a few reasons why people convert to new religions in their lifetime. Schleifer was looking to experience different lifestyles and cultures to find a belief that worked for him. He ended up finding his religion while reading religious text. Baker already knew what she was looking for; a similar belief to her heritage as an Asian woman and was able to find it. Johnny just wanted to be part of a religion that lived by a moral code, like those Knights of the Round Table. For him, that religion was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Terry Call, a mission preparation teacher at BYU-Idaho said most people join the LDS church because “They [are] looking for truth in their lives. The spirit is the most important in this work.”

“They [are] looking for answers to life’s questions,” said Scott Ferguson, also a mission preparation teacher at BYU-I. “They like the answers they get and find those are good reasons to join.”

“Each of us is always on a search,” Johnny said. “Sometimes, situations in life can cut you down so much that the search becomes very important to your future and takes the forefront to your life.” He wanted to belong somewhere that would give him a sense of welcome and would appreciate his moral standards.

Religious Conversion is a way for people to find their meaning in life and have something of their own to believe in. Conversion can be life-changing for the soul and the mind. For Schleifer, he wanted to experience different cultures and experiences. For Baker, she wanted to belong to a religion that they can relate to.

As for Johnny, he found a religion that teaches its’ members to live by a “code of chivalry”, which allowed him to put on his spiritual armor, and join the other Knights at the Round Table.