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## **A study of Polish LDS (Mormon) conversion in two branches in Warsaw, Poland**

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## **7. LDS Religious Training**

This chapter assesses my PO and interview data for information regarding the religious training that Polish converts received before and after LDS baptism and LTIs have received during their LDS contact. Several themes/topics emerged from the data which I discuss below. After this, I assess how both LDS religious training and social interaction pushed my Polish convert interviewees towards LDS baptism and LTI interviewees towards refraining from it.

### **7.1 Recruitment time frames**

After a Testimony Sunday Sacrament meeting at Wolska on 3-01-10, the Relief Society President there told me that she had first met LDS missionaries on the street in Warsaw many years ago, when she had been a late teenager and practicing Catholic, and had become LDS two weeks afterwards. In my interview data, quite a few Polish converts spoke about how long it had taken them to join the LDS after first meeting missionaries/members or becoming interested in the LDS. A few talked about becoming LDS within a month of first meeting YMs. Michał (CTG) had taken 12 days to do this during his late 30s, and Alina (LA) four weeks during her early 20s. Ten years after first meeting some YMs, Szymon (LA) had met some others during his late 40s, becoming LDS in “two weeks rather than the suggested three” without any rigorous preparation. His YMs had just given him a blank official form to fill in his baptism/confirmation details himself. These accounts compare to just over a quarter of Nabozny’s (2009: 86) 18 Polish converts who joined the LDS within three months of LDS contact.

Despite only becoming LDS recently, Szymon (LA) was already a Missionary Director, trying to stop YMs from pushing people who had never read the BOM towards fast baptisms. He explained that YMs believed that it was easier to baptise recruits who had not read the BOM or had just started reading it after discovering their baptism date. Szymon pointed towards YMs searching for fast baptisms at LDS English lessons, and recalled an episode when a young practising Catholic woman, who had attended 2-3 lessons, had asked for some information about LDS festivals for an educational project she was doing, and some YFMs had asked her for a baptism date. In response, Szymon had told the YFMs that new recruits needed to be befriended before being proselytised, as not everybody could become LDS quickly. He explained that rather than teaching many doctrines, the LDS chased fast baptisms through directing the recruits’ emotions towards an attractive communal sociology. Szymon

believed that many recruits who became LDS within a month were affected by emotion rather than religious understanding, with YMs sometimes prompting this process. Thus, Szymon's insights may point towards some recruits reading little of the BOM and attending few Sunday meetings before becoming LDS (Stewart Jr. 2008: 355-356).

Quite a few Polish converts discussed the importance of not becoming LDS too quickly. Lech (CTG) had first met YMs when he was 12-13 years old and had taken 7-12 months to become LDS. Many years ago, in his early 20s, Wojciech (CTG) had spent a year learning LDS teachings with YMs, and had become LDS through feeling "the Spirit". For Dawid (CTG), an appropriate recruitment time frame depended on the individual, with it being possible to have six discussions in one month and a quick LDS baptism. He believed that it was wiser to take three months, because recruits had a better chance of making an informed decision based on a "proper process of repentance". On principle, he had shared his decision to become LDS with his Catholic parents and siblings, spending 1-2 weeks trying to get them to accept his upcoming baptism. Before getting baptised, Celina (TTG) had had a year of LDS contact in her late teens. She felt that she had not been pushed into baptism, as she had asked all the questions, nurturing her own interest in the LDS. In the UK, Damian's (TTG) YFMs had spent 6-9 months trying to make him LDS when he had been in his teens, but his heavy work and study schedule had blocked this from happening. Through noticing that YMs were "obsessed with" getting baptisms, he had resented them only "loving" him as a potential convert, and had remained non-LDS for some time to get more attention from them. Damian had felt the need to ask questions because he believed that a two-week recruitment period may have been appropriate for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but not for serious-minded, modern people. He revealed that President Nielson was "gunning" for fast baptisms through offering YMs rewards for high baptism rates, such as being able to choose their next mission post. Damian believed that recruits needed at least six months, possibly years, to decide whether to become LDS or not. Józef (LA) had been in his early 50s when he became LDS five months after first meeting YMs, through the nurturing of a "faith" already inside himself rather than any dramatic transformation. Thus, some converts here may point towards recruits needing to investigate LDS religiosity in their own free time and order of interest and, if necessary, over a long time (Decoo 1996: 110-113). Like Annus and Csepregi's (2018: location 3978) Hungarian LDS converts, the Polish converts above seem to view their conversion as a "gradually evolving experience". For me, longer recruitment periods may offer recruits more religious training, which may prepare them better for becoming CTGs, as post-baptismal religious training may not appear so dramatic.

Some recruits may receive religious training for many years without becoming LDS. From the LTIs, Witek, who first met the LDS in his mid-30s during the 1990s, had promised to become LDS many years ago but had not turned up for baptism because he had attended an Art exhibition in Białystok, a city in north-east Poland, instead. He had reneged on LDS baptism “many times” as he had never completely believed in LDS teachings, so the LDS had “stopped feeling” that he “really wanted” it. During Tomasz’s year with the LDS in his early 40s, the LDS had never invited him to become LDS nor “mentioned anything about baptism for a long time”. Eventually, his YMMs had invited him to an LDS baptism “to see what it looked like”, but he had not attended it through feeling uncomfortable about a probably Catholic person being baptised a second time, as he believed that baptism was a once-in-a-lifetime event. Despite this, a YMM who had offered to help Tomasz set up business ventures in Poland had believed that Tomasz would become LDS. In August last year, this missionary had “in a way” suggested that Tomasz had to become LDS because the missionary was leaving Poland in October. After Tomasz had refused, the missionary had cold-shouldered him. Maczek had first encountered the LDS in his early 20s six years ago. Recently, Józef (LA) had advised Maczek “to think” about baptism for a year and not become LDS “without proper consideration”. Maczek felt that some missionaries served their missions through a “kind of tradition” inherited from their parents, and that despite their wonderful behaviour, recruits had to be wary of their unorthodox teachings. For him, YMs often “pressurised” recruits because through their “culture and mentality”, they believed that if somebody expressed “positive emotions” towards the BOM, it was a “signal” of readiness for LDS baptism. Maczek described a process through which YMs directed their recruits to read the BOM in the “morning and evening”; invited them to become LDS and set a baptism date; and got the recruits to prepare for baptism through completing an official form over about a “month and a half”. He had been given baptism dates “a few times”, but had reneged on them all, so the missionaries had been “very disappointed and sad” stressing that he could only become a “fully worthy member of their society” through his life acquiring “some new meaning” after LDS baptism. Maczek said that he had only agreed to become LDS several times to see “how patient” the missionaries were, and through getting to know new missionaries after old ones had left, he was able to continue having baptism lessons and reneging on decisions to become LDS. He was determined “to remain friends” with all his missionaries and not become their “enemy”, and would “either get baptised” LDS some time or “just shake their hands” and wish them well. Maczek explained that if he lived somewhere “like the States”, where Catholicism was “not so strong”, he would have few problems

becoming LDS. Bogusław had had a “five year break” from the LDS after first meeting YMs “several times” in his early 40s. During his first encounters, he had been “curious” about the missionaries and their religion, but this had been quickly “quenched” as he too had sensed that they were on a “kind of tour” uneasily trying to justify their unorthodox beliefs. Adam had met the LDS while in his mid-40s and had been reactivated as a recruit numerous times from the mid-1990s onwards. He was now in his early 60s and had been meeting two YFMs until recently who after “about a year”, had started asking him to become LDS so he could “understand all the stuff”. In response, he had asked why he should do something that he did not “feel like doing”, which had “quite disappointed” the YFMs. Adam was no longer answering their phone calls and saw that they were looking for fresh recruits to push towards baptism, bringing “casually-dressed” and “quite simple people” to their Sunday meetings.

The information above suggests that when recruits become LTIs, the likelihood of them becoming LDS may recede through them becoming more sceptical about LDS religiosity. Recruits may try to stay friends with missionaries/members without becoming LDS, while YMs may get upset and try to make their recruits feel guilty, especially when they renege on baptism decisions. If the missionaries fail to get their recruits baptised, they may stop socialising with them.

## **7.2 Religious training during recruitment**

During a Family History Centre Evening for non-LDS visitors at Wolska on 15-05-10, Damian (TTG) told me that he enjoyed being able to talk openly about religious issues with the LDS. In my interview data, Bogusław (LTI) explained that YMs always tried “to convince people to get baptised”, and that after several baptisms at Wolska on 23-10-10, some YMMs and Józef (LA) had gathered a few male LTIs, including Bogusław and Maczek, together in a side-room, but had been disappointed when the men had seen no reason for becoming LDS. After the last baptism, Elder Harding from Raclawicka had encouraged all the investigators present to attend a meeting afterwards, where Józef had tried convincing Bogusław that the LDS knew God as a fact while the Catholic Church only knew him as a rational argument. On 7-11-10, I saw Bogusław attend the Wierzbno Sunday Sacrament meeting, but not the following Sunday School lesson. As I was leaving Wierzbno, through a window, I saw Bogusław surrounded by four YMMs in a side-room. All this points towards interaction between people and representatives of a religion giving the latter opportunities to convert the former (Kong and Nair 2014: 72).

At Monday Chapel Home Evenings (for people over 30) in January/February 2011 at Wolska, Sister Harding from Raławicka encouraged me to attend Institute meetings (for people over 30) at Wolska on Thursday evenings. The three Institute meetings that I attended, all in February 2011, were like a stronger religious-flavoured version of Chapel Home Evenings. They were hosted twice by Marysia and once by Romuald (Raławicka CTGs), while Stefan (Wolska CTG) did the translation work, with all these roles possibly being branch callings. In the audience, the Hardings (Raławicka), Michał (Raławicka CTG), and Lech (Wolska CTG) were mixed in with 3-5 LAs, 2-4 recruits/LTIs, and a long-term African convert. Two YFMs attended the first meeting and an older missionary sister from the Wolska Family History Centre the third meeting. The LAs outnumbering recruits/LTIs may suggest that the Institute meetings were geared towards (recent) convert retention rather than recruitment. In the first lesson, after an Elder Holland (Quorum of the Twelve) video presentation, Marysia elicited testimony stories from Polish CTGs. Two YFMs were sat with a Polish male LTI and new-looking Polish male recruit, who they possibly had baptism lessons with, but not with another Polish male recruit, the partner of a recent female convert from Raławicka. During the second and third meetings, section-by-section analysis of the D&C was followed by all types of participants talking about such issues as young children being free of sin; wider Catholic society condemning the LDS in Poland; the ideal of living the law of consecration (offering all one has to the LDS Church) etc. At the Chapel Home Evening and Institute meetings, I saw that older, single people with free time enjoyed socialising together.

In my interview data, quite a lot of Polish LDS converts talked about the LDS directing them towards baptism. As mentioned in 6.4, a few became interested in LDS religiosity through meeting older missionaries. Moreover, a few recalled becoming interested in LDS religiosity through having baptism lessons with YMs. At Jola's (TTG) baptism lessons during childhood, her YMs had made LDS scripture enjoyable and easy to understand through explaining who "Heavenly Father" was and answering her questions. Paweł (LA) had first started visiting an LDS church while middle-aged, where YMs had answered his questions, and he had decided they were "his Church". During baptism lessons, something deep within himself had started accepting LDS religiosity, as everything the YMs had said echoed his own thoughts about God having helped him to survive tough situations as a TV reporter, stuntman, and racing car driver. Paweł had always sensed God guiding him towards deciding what was possible in dangerous situations, which offered him proof that God existed. Michał (CTG) had been in his late 30s when he had felt something profoundly spiritual during his baptism

lessons, prompting him to become LDS not long after first meeting his YMs. As a teenager, Martyna (CTG) had been invited to have discussions with two YFMs after she had attended her first LDS Sunday meeting with her older sister. The YFMs had visited her house with her Catholic mother's permission, where she had enjoyed six official baptism lessons, but her mother had not allowed her to get baptised straightaway. While her older sister had not had any baptism lessons, studying *Gospel Principles* (1978/2009) and asking lots of questions privately, Martyna had reflected on what her missionaries had said and had read the Bible on her own. Martyna's baptism lessons had felt just right, like she had experienced the same thing before, which had prompted her desire to become LDS. In his late 20s in California, Stefan (CTG) had only shown interest in his early meetings with YFMs to appear polite. However, the meetings had turned into something spiritual, as the YFMs had got him interested in religion like never before through bringing him activities to do, answering his questions, and confronting his doubts. Thus, no matter what age, the Polish converts here seem to have had their religious interest ignited and strengthened through LDS religiosity being explained/justified by YMs during baptism lessons. The convert reflections/stories point towards recruits having their worldviews changed through having regular meetings with YMs, as the latter offer opportunities for people to discuss their religious experience and the meaning of life which mainstream religious clergymen may not provide (Gooren 2007: 350-351; Chryssides 2016: 32-33). They also mirror Annus and Csepregi's (2018: location 3934-3943) Hungarian converts who were lead to LDS baptism through missionaries introducing them to LDS teachings, "rituals and social practices"; answering "their questions"; showing the "rational nature" of LDS teachings; and addressing "issues" sensibly. All this suggests that LDS missionaries may often have the time/inclination to explore people's religious identities, and to teach a universal religious lesson programme to recruits (Obirek in Harrison 2009; Trigeaud 2009: 279-280).

Two Polish LDS converts revealed that they had only started meeting YMs regularly after first reading LDS scripture. Marek (CTG) had started meeting them and attending LDS Sunday meetings after he had begun reading the Bible and BOM. Ten years after receiving the BOM and D&C from some YMMs, Szymon (LA) had had 3-4 meetings with different YMMs, knowing more about LDS religiosity than them. Both these converts seem to have been religious-minded recruits who studied LDS scripture privately/freely, away from the influence of YMs. They may mirror Annus and Csepregi's (2018: location 4115) Hungarian LDS converts who valued "studying the scriptures" as a "foundation of their faith" and "relationship with God". Moreover, they may point towards some recruits preferring to



investigate LDS religiosity in their own time and order of interest, as many conversion theories/models overlook religious factors in recruitment/conversion, assuming that recruits build bonds with members before developing religious interest later on (Decoo 1996: 110-113; Gooren 2007: 348).

When two YMMs and two YFMs visited my flat on 5-06-10 to look at my books about LDS religiosity/culture, a YMM became annoyed when he saw a critical account of LDS religiosity and missionary work by an ex-LDS missionary, Worthy (2008). This book was on my bookshelf amongst many positive accounts by official LDS, academic LDS, and academic non-LDS writers. The angry YMM referred to Worthy (2008) as a “jerk”, told a YFM that he was not interested in my books, and insisted on having a prayer session around extracts from the BOM. In my interview data, all my LTIs recalled experiencing some kind of religious tension with YMs. Witek had become interested in LDS religiosity through meeting YMs but had been unable to accept it 100%, which, for him, could only be possibly done after LDS baptism. Moreover, he had “felt a bit uncomfortable” when some YMs had shown him “many films” about their religion “from America” at his flat. When Witek had said that he did not believe in “this or that” about American features of their religion, the YMs had got “nervous” which he had found unpleasant. Maczek explained that to remain friends with YMs, recruits had to avoid arguing with them, while being “careful” about accepting LDS teachings or not, as they sometimes differed from mainstream Christian doctrines. However, through the YMs being “great” people, Maczek wanted to remain friends with them, and did not rule out becoming LDS in the future. Despite having felt some uplifting emotions while meeting YMs, Bogusław had broken off contact with them some years ago, and was currently doing the same, as he sensed that they felt “uneasy” trying to justify their non-mainstream beliefs. Moreover, Bogusław felt that the LDS viewed him as a nuisance as his Catholic background prompted him to raise awkward questions. However, he also thought that they may view this as a “positive experience”, because it made them do “more research” to answer questions effectively, as they seemed less familiar with the Bible than the BOM. When Tomasz had first met his YMMs near Wierzbno metro station the year before, he had been impressed by their sense of “harmony”. Like Maczek, he had got on well with his missionaries, because they knew that he would not argue with them, and through sharing a liking for prayer, they “suited each other”. However, Tomasz claimed that some missionaries had mislead him into believing there was a temple in Warsaw. While expecting to see a temple at Wolska, Tomasz had been shocked to see a “small building with only one tower”, with his YMMs “not saying anything”. He had then started questioning why there was “no cross or crucifix”, and why the

LDS prayed in a “different way” while still mentioning Jesus. Adam tried to avoid a “trap” where LDS missionaries prompted their recruits to read and pray about something, and “then talk about it in the next meeting”. He did not like being asked to pray, something he had never done as a Catholic, and had felt himself being manipulated through his YFMs telling him that he had to become LDS to understand all LDS “thought”. Most of the LTIs above seem to feel uncomfortable about YMs pushing them towards a brand of Christianity which contains unorthodox teachings/practices. This may suggest that arguments/debates between YMs and Polish recruits, especially those from Catholic backgrounds, are inevitable as Catholicism may be accepted as historically-grounded Christianity, and LDS religiosity less so.

At a Raclawicka Sunday School meeting for recruits/recent converts on 3-07-11, a young adult, recruit couple declined to read LDS scripture, possibly wanting to attend the meeting on their own free terms. In my interview data, a few Polish LDS converts spoke about how they had started taking LDS religiosity seriously at LDS Sunday meetings. Paweł (LA) became certain that the LDS were the religion for him when he started attending LDS Sunday meetings. Celina (TTG) had decided to check out LDS religiosity properly at the Szczecin LDS meeting place after first meeting YMs playing basketball, and had started valuing the LDS for being a warm, interactive community. Moreover, Marek (CTG) had learned more about God and the origins and meaning of the world from LDS Sunday meetings than the Catholic Masses he had still attended during recruitment. Marek’s case here may mirror those of Rigal-Cellard’s (2018: 3694) French LDS respondents who highlight religious reasons for becoming LDS. This may suggest that when some recruits start attending LDS Sunday meetings, they may start feeling that LDS religiosity fits their needs. Through encountering LDS religious/social activities, they may start valuing a sense of “being different from other people” (Gooren 2008: 379-380). However, Damian (TTG) had disliked attending “static” LDS meetings in Basingstoke, where he had been pushed to discuss the meaning of Sunday meetings with young LDS men, and the free food after Testimony Sunday meetings had not been enough for him to become LDS.

Some LTIs talked about having unfulfilling experiences at LDS Sunday meetings. Bogusław thought that they took up too much time, usually “three hours in the morning” and longer once a month when the LDS had a meal after the other meetings had ended. He viewed all these Sunday meetings and weekday activities, such as LDS members visiting each other’s families, as being “designed” to control LDS member lives. Adam disliked the LDS encouraging “quite simple people” to attend their Sunday meetings, as the latter did not wear “Sunday clothes”. Tomasz was attending both LDS Sunday Sacrament meetings and Catholic

Masses on Sundays to compare the different prayer formats. After first meeting his missionaries, Tomasz had been afraid of not being accepted at LDS Sunday Sacrament meetings, and his YMMs had “prolonged the moment” to start teaching him English. He had also started asking himself what LDS missionaries were doing in Poland speaking Polish, and, “as a Catholic”, had felt a “bit uneasy” knowing little about the LDS. Still, he had been impressed with how his YMMs had carefully arranged to take him to his first Sunday Sacrament meeting at Wierzbno, where he had wanted to see if he could “fit into their environment, feel the way they feel, and understand them”. At first, he had found the “alien environment, language, and people completely strange”, and had started wondering if the LDS were a “sect”. Despite this, he had accepted that they had “something to do with Jesus” and had tried to feel “God’s spirit” while assessing whether it was right for him to attend LDS meetings or not. While reflecting on “how God worked in his life”, Tomasz had asked himself if the smartly dressed LDS men were talking honestly from their “inner selves”, and had recognised that they were speaking about something meaningful. In response, he had started looking at a “traditional Bible”, and, at Sunday Sacrament meetings, he had kept asking his YMMs what their bread-and-water communion was about, and whether he was allowed to take it or not. After receiving permission, he had been taking the LDS sacrament for some time now, although he still wanted to learn “new things” about it because he was not from the LDS “community”. He took LDS communion respectfully as he wanted his missionaries to respect his Catholic background, which they seemed to do. Tomasz’s YMMs had not tried to integrate him with Polish LDS quickly because they had, “in a way”, been looking after him. Despite this, he had started to feel some kind of pressure when an LDS member had asked him why he was attending Sunday Sacrament meetings without becoming LDS and some “wise guys” had tried to “make fun of things”. Also, when he had talked about his Catholic beliefs in the Trinity being “three persons but only one God” and Mary being the Mother of God, his YMMs had just thought “their own thing”. Moreover, he sensed that the profound harmony between his YMMs gave them some kind of spiritual “authority”, and he had tried to learn more about the LDS through assessing what their gestures, movements, and speech meant. Thus, the LTIs above do not value LDS religiosity and Sunday meetings enough to become LDS. In particular, Tomasz appears to be frustrated at not finding the religious meaning/fulfillment he seeks from the LDS, and to be worried that LDS religiosity differs from the Catholic religiosity he has been brought up on and understands.

### 7.3 LDS scripture, hymns, and music

After a Wolska Priesthood meeting on 2-05-10, Wojciech (CTG) told me that the Polish LDS used Protestant Bibles in Polish that were close to the King James Version, with the most similar one being called the Gdansk Bible (see <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/products/9788385260165/> accessed 12-02-21) . At the baptisms of a middle-aged Polish pop star and his teenage daughter at Wolska on 8-05-10, Roman (LTI non-interviewee) revealed that he valued the LDS for having modern scripture and revelations appropriate for the complexities of contemporary life, as the Bible was outdated as a 2,000-year-old product. After a Nigerian man's baptism on 3-07-10, the new Mission President Nielson told me that while mainstream Christians focused on the Jesus of 2,000 years ago, the LDS had up-to-date revelation from modern-day prophets. At a Wolska Sunday Sacrament meeting on 18-09-10, Radek's (CTG) future wife emphasised that her LDS testimony was based on the four books of LDS scripture.

In my interview data, many Polish LDS converts talked about valuing LDS scripture, hymns, and music during or after recruitment. First, a few recalled having initial negative impressions of the BOM. Jola (TTG) viewed the Polish translation of the BOM as “messy”; Dawid (CTG) had understood little of the book before LDS baptism; and Alicja (CTG) had thought it was written by a “kid” as its simple language was nothing like the archaic language of old Polish Bibles. Alicja now viewed this as natural because Joseph Smith had been an uneducated young man when producing the BOM. Marek (CTG) had only accepted the BOM to not appear impolite but had then felt moved to read the book, and, for the first time in his life, had read the New Testament too. He had felt “inspired” reading the BOM and Bible together with them showing him “many things” that he had not seen before. Hence, these converts point towards recruits/converts sometimes being sceptical about the BOM, but then starting to accept it as scripture before or after LDS baptism. In contrast, two LTIs had serious reservations about the BOM. Witek had been wary about reading it, because the Bible was “the most important book”. When reading the BOM, he had “found many strange details” thinking that the book was a “little crazy”, influenced by a “devil or something”. Maczek had thought that unlike the historical authenticity of the Bible, the BOM “was some kind of forgery”, and when he had spoken to some Catholic priests and Protestant clergy, they had “claimed it was falsified” scripture with “strange teachings”. Maczek's comments here may mirror Annus and Csepregi's (2018: location 3845) point about many Hungarians having their views of the LDS “shaped” by “mainstream historical churches”, especially the Catholic Church.

Second, quite a few Polish LDS converts spoke about being directed towards understanding and gaining a testimony of the truthfulness of the BOM. Edyta (LA) believed that through reading the BOM, she had learnt more about history and Jesus. Despite not liking reading “that much”, Dagmara (TTG) had wanted to read the BOM more and more. She especially valued the 3<sup>rd</sup> Book of Nephi’s account of an ancient people’s lives changing “when Jesus came” to the Americas, because this mirrored her own life story. Celina (TTG) had started treating LDS religiosity seriously through digging into the BOM. While doing Moroni’s challenge, praying directly to God about the BOM, she had felt something special and taken the “big step” of becoming LDS after finishing the book. Celina now believed that literal and metaphorical truth could be found in both the Bible and BOM. Regarding the BOM, she believed that it was possible that ancient Jews had migrated to the Americas, and accepted the book’s story about Jesus descending from heaven to give people his gospel there. From the CTGs, Dawid had been encouraged to read all the BOM as a recruit, but through struggling to understand it, he had just tried to find questions for his YMs to answer, and had only started accepting it as scripture some time after LDS baptism. Martyna had followed her YFMs’ directives to read the book, and had prayed and got answers about it. In California, Stefan’s YFMs had encouraged him to read the BOM, asked him how he felt about it, and led him towards praying for a testimony about it being authentic scripture or not. At first, he had told the YFMs that the book was “good”, but that he was unsure if it was real scripture like the Bible which he had read a few times. After being asked to pray about the book, on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1990, Stefan had knelt down and prayed, becoming convinced that it was holy scripture like the Bible. Having offered his full desire to know if the BOM was true or not, he had received a sense of certainty from God that it was, as, without any delusion, he had felt “the Spirit”. However, Stefan acknowledged that he had never approached the book from a critical perspective because he had only encountered it with the LDS. Before becoming LDS, Bruno had read a meaningless testimony about the BOM but had then taken only a week to read the book, quickly coming to believe that it was the key to understanding everything about life. Over seven days, he had felt every part of his body testifying to the truth of the BOM and had been unable to contradict this sense of truth. Moreover, Bruno could not understand why some people became LDS without reading the BOM fully. Thus, both Bruno and Stefan recall receiving intense perceptions which they interpret as dramatic forms of revelation, gaining direct contact with God (Stark 2005: 38-39).

Some converts above seem to be drawn towards the BOM message that anybody can communicate with God directly, and Joseph Smith’s First Vision approach of asking God

questions and sensing them being answered (Givens 2007: 213-215). However, while some converts may start believing that the BOM is true through gaining a testimony about it before LDS baptism, others like Dawid (CTG) may struggle to understand it, hoping to comprehend it better after baptism. Again, all this highlights that many conversion theories/models overemphasise psychological, social, and economic issues at the expense of religious/scriptural ones (Gooren 2007: 348).

Szymon (LA), who had received the BOM 10 years ago, had only started empathising with it recently. He stressed that unlike many Polish LDS who viewed the BOM as literal history, he only believed in the “evangelical” aspect of the book and its events, and struggled to find the “historical Jesus” in it. This may highlight that people who do not have a “burning testimony” of the BOM, and view it as allegorical and uplifting, but not historical, may be accommodated inside the LDS Church (Givens, T.L., Givens/Givens on FairMormon 2014). From the LTIs, during Tomasz’s year as a recruit, the LDS had “talked him into reading” parts of the book. Over the years, Adam had read some parts but had never understood “much”, as the BOM contained “simple truths” without any “deep revelation”. Witek had started reading the BOM when the LDS had told him to start practising the WOW. He had found the story about ancient Jewish tribes discovering the Americas a long time before Columbus “very interesting”, and had questioned whether this was true or not “many times”. For Witek, it was “interesting” that the BOM contained “many names similar” to ones found in the Bible, which made it easy to “make many mistakes”, as people with names like Noah in the BOM were not the same as their namesakes in the Old Testament. Like Szymon (LA), Witek felt that “many details” in the BOM were historically inauthentic. For Maczek, the name of the book was a “problem” as he felt that “holy scripture” should have a special title and not just be named after one of its writers. He also pointed towards there being no real evidence to support the BOM’s historical claims, with only the LDS believing that the text had been hidden on golden plates for hundreds of years until Joseph Smith discovered them in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, Maczek had felt “some internal spiritual” emotions while reading the book, possibly through the influence of the Holy Ghost which the LDS often focused on rather than their teachings. During Bogusław’s first contact with YMs some years ago, they had tried convincing him that the BOM was true and that their religion was the revival of an ancient Christian gospel, but he had discarded these claims through having his “own views” formed from having done an MA at a Catholic Theology department in Warsaw. Bogusław rejected the LDS claim that the BOM “was some kind of complement to the Bible”, as it was “written in a kind of weak way” with “repetition, inconsistencies, and

anachronisms”. He also could not accept the BOM account about Jews emigrating to the Americas many years before the coming of Christ and them having “some kind of premonition” about the latter there. However, his earlier opinion about the BOM being “plain forgery” had given way to him now viewing it more positively through following a Vatican II directive to view all religions as “the works of God, in some way”. Despite not viewing the BOM as the “work of the Holy Spirit”, he sensed that it made people “get closer to the Spirit” and prompted them to live according to serious moral principles. Still, he regretted that this positive spirituality was “accompanied” by the LDS having “strange convictions” and exerting “tight control” over their members. Through knowing the Bible well, Bogusław noticed that the LDS spoke about it much less than the BOM despite claiming that the two books were “in a way, equal”. Thus, the LTIs here do not view the BOM as authentic scripture, especially when compared with the Bible, which may have blocked them from becoming LDS.

Third, a few LAs spoke about not reading all or much of the BOM. Over the years, Franciszek had never enjoyed reading the book. During Gabriela’s five-year LDS career, she had not read the BOM fully so she felt unable to judge its merit, but loved the encouraging messages that some YMs had left in her copy of the book. Moreover, Józef recalled his YMs saying that to become LDS, he only needed to desire to know the BOM. This had alleviated his worries about not knowing much about LDS theology which had previously blocked him from becoming LDS. Thus, the LAs here point towards some converts reading little of the BOM before and after becoming LDS which may impede LDS career development (Stewart Jr. 2008: 355).

Fourth, quite a lot of Polish LDS converts discussed other LDS scripture. From the LAs, Gabriela had not read all the D&C or POGP which were combined together as one book in Polish, *Nauki i Przymierza. Perła Wielkiej Wartości* (1981/1989). Szymon, who was currently reading the D&C again, believed that alongside the BOM, the two books represented a profound synthesis of all the world’s religions. For him, the BOM was a compilation of Buddhist and Hindu ideas rather than Christian ones, which was amazing given that Joseph Smith had no prior knowledge of these two religions. Franciszek viewed the D&C as a well-rounded piece of work, but could not accept the POGP as scripture because an LDS story about “some guy” finding part of the text in Egypt was “crazy”. Here, Franciszek may be referring to how the LDS believe that the Book of Abraham from the POGP originates from an ancient Egyptian text that Joseph Smith received from a travelling salesman in the USA (<https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

accessed 28-02-18). Recent convert Dagmara (TTG) valued the Bible and BOM more than the other two books, but was aware that the WOW came from the D&C. In contrast, Celina (TTG) found the D&C more interesting than the BOM, especially its details about LDS Church organisation. From the CTGs, Romuald had read the Bible and BOM extensively, but had only “dipped into” the other two books. Having only glanced at the D&C before LDS baptism, Martyna had studied it after baptism to learn about LDS Church history. Through reading the BOM, Dawid had started accepting Joseph Smith as a modern-day prophet, and had this confirmed as a testimony through reading the D&C later on. Stefan’s testimony about the BOM being true scripture had prompted him to join the LDS. Shortly after, he had received a second testimony through recognising that no other Church had a book like the D&C which had strengthened his convictions that the BOM was authentic scripture, Joseph Smith a latter-day prophet, and the LDS God’s Church on Earth. During recruitment, Marek had connected the D&C more with the Acts of the Apostles than the BOM, as it had shown him how God had given direct revelations to a young Church. Thus, some converts above speak about starting to seriously encounter the D&C after LDS baptism, with two viewing it as a testimony that confirmed the truth of the BOM and LDS Church. This may suggest that while the BOM, sometimes alongside the Bible, may push recruits towards LDS baptism, the D&C may push converts to enter the temple. Again, this seems to mirror Annus and Csepregi’s (2018: location 4115) Hungarian LDS converts who valued “studying the scriptures” as a “foundation of their faith” and “relationship with God” (Ibid 4115).

During a teleconference with Elder Hales (Quorum of the Twelve) from Salt Lake City at Wolska on 4-06-10, his wife talked about LDS music putting the gospel into peoples’ hearts. After a Raławicka Sunday School meeting for recruits/recent converts on 26-06-11, Jacek, a male recruit in his early 30s and sound engineer by trade, told me that religious music such as Gregorian and Slavonic chant could draw people to attend Catholic and Orthodox churches, because the human body feels in rhythm with pleasant sounds/vibrations. Especially during the Engbjerg Poland Mission Presidency between 2007 and 2010, I saw some entertaining musical events at Wolska. Some occurred in 2008 while an old American male missionary, a retired music teacher, was leading musical proceedings at Wolska. On 9-08-08, the first Poland Mission President and Music Professor, Walter Whipple, played some piano pieces by Chopin, a national hero in Poland, and discussed some BOM passages in English and Polish. I also saw a touring LDS youth choir from Idaho sing at a Sunday Sacrament meeting on 20-07-08; concerts by a touring LDS young adult choir from Germany, Vocalis, on 20-10-08, and Jenny Phillips, an American recording artist, on 13-02-09; and a fireside by Tomas



Kofod, a Danish opera singer on 6-03-10. Kofod, who had starred in a professional *Les Miserables* production, sang the mainstream Christian hymn *Abide with Me* in English and Polish with two YMMs. He also spoke about having to paint floors to support his family and opera-singing career, while his wife Ane Marie discussed their love for their adopted children, with Martyna and Stefan (CTGs) doing the English-Polish translation. During this event, two Polish friends of mine, visiting a Warsaw LDS event for the first time, noticed excessive smiling and bodily contact amongst the large LDS turnout. The Kofod fireside showed how music and moving stories of LDS faith were sometimes juxtaposed together by the Warsaw LDS, especially during the Engbjerg Mission Presidency.

Sometimes, especially at baptisms, I saw YMs doing musical presentations at Wolska. A spectacular one occurred at a Warsaw District Conference on 22-03-09 when about 40-50 YMs entered the main hall singing the LDS missionary hymn, *Called To Serve*. At Warsaw District Conferences with visiting foreign speakers from the First Seventy, and Quorum of the Twelve member visits from Salt Lake City, big choirs made up of YMs and mainly CTG members from both Warsaw branches sang for the audience. At a Warsaw District Conference on 21-03-10, I saw a big choir sing three LDS hymns, with a Polish woman who had served a mission in Russia leading the proceedings. The latter role was mainly done by Polish female teenagers/young women inside both Warsaw branches. After the second hymn, a British middle-aged man, an LDS theology advisor under President Engbjerg, thanked the choir for bringing “the Spirit” (Holy Ghost) into the meeting. This was a recurring phrase inside the Warsaw LDS world.

At both Warsaw branches, I saw recruits/converts singing LDS hymns at Sunday Sacrament meetings. In my interview data, a few Polish converts discussed how LDS hymns and music had influenced their recruitment/conversion. Weronika (TTG) valued singing LDS hymns because the words spoke about Jesus in a simple, direct way. From the CTGs, Marysia (CTG) had always found LDS hymns beautiful, inspiring, and uplifting. Stefan had enjoyed singing them in California, feeling warmth and truth coming from them. He had studied their words every Sunday morning in preparation for Sacrament meetings, and had attended choir practice after the latter had finished. He had enjoyed singing LDS hymns in their original language to understand English language and LDS teachings better. Stefan still preferred singing them in English, his “first language in the gospel”, as he believed some Polish translations were not done well. He lamented that most Polish members did not understand English well enough to sing LDS hymns in English, but accepted that it was more important for them to understand LDS religiosity in Polish. When Radek had started listening to LDS

hymns/ music, he had got rid of all his secular music as it had reflected his pre-LDS views on life. Alicja had never been a “choir type of person”, so LDS hymns had never affected her recruitment/conversion. Marek had never empathised with LDS hymns because he was not moved by music. He joked that if music had been a “prime factor”, he would have joined the Orthodox Church, as the latter sang much better than the LDS. Marek believed that while some Christian denominations created a “special kind of atmosphere” between faith and music, this was not the case with the LDS. All this suggests that some Polish recruits/converts value LDS hymns/music, while others do not.

Two LTIs spoke about valuing LDS hymns. After meeting his YMs, Tomasz had “really wanted to learn American hymns” to understand English language and American culture better. Witek liked LDS hymns “very much”, and “six, eight years ago”, he had sung alongside “many missionaries who played the piano”, learning many hymns “by heart” as a missionary had given him a big “songbook” with a green cover which had belonged to an LDS “brother” who had been “very ill” and died. He had recorded LDS hymns with missionaries “many times” and could still hum some of the tunes. At Wolska, Witek had sung in an LDS choir at concerts, sometimes in the early afternoon after Sunday meetings had ended and other times during “fantastic evenings”. He had done this for 2-3 years and had gone to choir practice at 9am before LDS Sunday meetings had started. Witek recalled performing with the LDS choir at big Conferences at Wolska, when the choir members had been “sitting and standing and singing”. He had also enjoyed watching the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on film “many times”.

The convert and LTI comments above suggest that the singing of LDS hymns can help to draw and keep some Polish recruits/converts inside the Warsaw LDS fold. Recruits/converts may become comfortable with LDS religiosity through reading and singing LDS hymns in Polish at Sunday meetings, as communal singing creates “emotional energy” and “social solidarity” in an environment where people may be persuaded to convert (Yang and Abel 2014: 144).

#### **7.4 Unique LDS religiosity**

During a baptism lesson with two YFM's on 13-05-10, I talked about mainstream Christians being offended by the LDS teaching about God the Father and a Goddess Wife producing Jesus as a spirit child in pre-mortality. A German/British/American YFM replied that this was because they associated the physical body with sin, while the LDS viewed it as sacred. After a Sunday School meeting for recruits/recent converts at Racławicka on 3-07-11,

Damian (TTG), who had just returned from serving a mini-mission in Gdańsk, confided that the LDS expected people to believe in things that were unreal. He asked why I was unsure about the LDS Church being a Christian religion or not, and I replied that LDS beliefs about Jesus being below God the Father in the Godhead and people being able to develop into gods themselves were not mainstream Christian teachings. Shortly afterwards at Raławicka metro station, Damian acknowledged that Joseph Smith had had legal problems with his gold-seeking business, but was surprised to discover that he may have married polyandrous women ([https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Joseph\\_Smith/Polygamy/Polyandry](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Polyandry) accessed 27-12-19). At the Bierhalle bar, Arkadia shopping centre on 4-06-11, Franciszek (LA) told me that he did not know whether to believe stories about Joseph Smith being involved in criminal activities or not, and that he loved looking at anti-LDS websites and had been anti-LDS himself for about two years. Thus, Damian and Franciszek highlight that some Polish LDS converts may be unconvinced by LDS beliefs and the prophet figure of Joseph Smith.

In my interview data, a few Polish converts spoke about receiving limited religious training before LDS baptism. Patrycja (LA) had collected some LDS materials without really reading them, and Celina (TTG) had only started believing in LDS religiosity months after baptism. Dawid (CTG) had been attracted to the LDS Church's basic "faith in Jesus Christ". Martyna (CTG) had only glanced at LDS teachings before baptism, and during her first "couple of years" after baptism, many had gone "over her head". Years afterwards, Martyna was still coming to understand LDS teachings through searching the internet, borrowing books in English, and asking people questions about them. This suggests that many Polish LDS converts receive most religious training after baptism, especially if/when they start working towards becoming CTGs. Such insights may point towards many unique LDS beliefs being downplayed during early LDS recruitment, with greater stress being placed on sharing mainstream Christian beliefs, and many recruits being involved in religious experimentalism rather than transformation (Bainbridge 1992; Lofland and Skonovd 1981).

Despite the above, many Polish converts spoke about encountering unique LDS religiosity during recruitment/conversion, and valuing LDS teachings which differed from mainstream Christianity. Damian (TTG) did not care about unique LDS teachings, but Martyna (CTG) valued the LDS for offering something different from mainstream Christianity. During Martyna's baptism meetings, her YFMs had told her about God and Jesus, the restoration doctrine, and the baptism commitments/promises she was expected to make. Through accepting the teaching about Joseph Smith restoring an ancient Church with additional doctrines, Stefan believed that the LDS had far greater religious understanding than any

mainstream Christian group. Quite a few Polish LDS converts spoke about encountering POS teachings as new doctrines before or after baptism. While attending LDS Sunday meetings before baptism, Martyna had empathised with the children of God doctrine which teaches that people are the pre-mortal offspring of God the Father. Weronika (TTG) had been surprised by the pre-existence of souls teaching, but had grown to like the idea of pre-mortal souls being allowed to choose whether to live on Earth or not. From the CTGs, Stefan had not learnt about pre-existence as a Catholic, so the POS and eternal family doctrines had only started making sense after LDS baptism when he had learnt more about them. Romuald had only started understanding the pre-existence teaching when encountering LDS scripture, especially a story about a pre-existent Jesus creating the world, and an account from the Book of Job (Old Testament). Regarding the latter, Romuald seems to be referring to Job 38: 7, which the LDS interpret in terms of literal “‘sons of God’” witnessing the “creation of the world” (Wayne 2018). Romuald valued the pre-existence teaching for explaining why people are born unequal, with them having learnt things with different degrees of diligence during pre-mortality. Despite the Catholic Church not mentioning pre-existence, Dawid had always believed that human life had to begin before conception on Earth, so he had quickly accepted the POS teachings as being logical. Alicja explained that through the pre-existence teaching locating the origin of humans somewhere, and her having never believed that people come “out of nowhere” on Earth, the LDS religion had started making sense to her. Alina (LA) had heard about pre-existence at a religious presentation after her first LDS English lesson. It had surprised her because despite having worried about going to hell after death, she had never thought about what might precede human life on Earth. Hence, the pre-existence teaching may surprise many recruits/converts, but in time, some may start valuing it as a doctrine not taught by the Catholic or other Christian Churches. Alicja had also been unfamiliar with the baptism of the dead teaching, and had only started understanding it over time. It had been a new concept for Romuald too because the Catholic Church had not taught it. Alina recalled the LDS explaining that baptism of the dead was necessary, because many people had died without the opportunity to receive LDS baptism on Earth. Edyta (LA) and her husband had decided to become LDS through empathising with the eternal family doctrine, especially the idea that temple-married couples can stay together procreating for eternity. Dagmara (TTG) recalled that the agency/free will doctrine had pushed her towards becoming LDS, as she had chosen to move “towards perfection” through applying LDS religiosity to her life, rather than following her family towards an “imperfect life”.

Many Polish LDS convert views above seem to mirror those of Rigal-Cellard's (2018: 3694) French LDS respondents who give religious reasons for becoming LDS. The Polish converts point towards the LDS directing them to become and remain LDS through them encountering and coming to value core, unique LDS teachings. Moreover, they highlight that Polish recruits/converts may start valuing LDS teachings that mainstream Christians do not have, being attracted to the LDS Church's extensive account of eternal purpose and core unique teachings (Givens 2007: 215-216; Mauss 2008: 43-45; Decoo 1996: 105, 114). This suggests that some recruits/converts may sense themselves becoming different from the non-LDS world through being immersed in many LDS religious/social activities and codes of conduct (Gooren 2008: 379-380). It may also point towards active-passive recruits assessing and being influenced by LDS teachings/practices; having their worldviews changed as they assess an LDS outlook against their previous views on life; and converting when not strongly developed pre-LDS beliefs are challenged through encountering LDS ones and being encouraged to convert (Rambo 1998; Gooren 2007: 350-351; Paloutzian 2014: 221).

Despite the above, Szymon (LA) believed that the LDS had "dodgy" doctrines. He was intrigued by the LDS notion of God the Father originally being a man, "half a God", and people being able to develop into this kind of God which he compared to a Hindu concept of individuals seeking access to a path of self-realisation. Moreover, he valued the LDS for being the only religion he had encountered that offered the reward of godhood status to everybody through teachings found in the BOM and D&C. Thus, Polish converts may start encountering unique LDS teachings before or after baptism, but rather than accepting them as true doctrines, some, like Szymon, may enjoy comparing/contrasting them with non-LDS teachings, which may block them from becoming CTGs.

When encountering unique LDS teachings, some recruits may feel uncomfortable about moving away from mainstream Christian or other worldviews. From the LTIs, Witek had been blocked from becoming LDS through rejecting the pre-existence teaching. For him, some LDS teachings were "very logical", but the pre-existence doctrine was "very strange" because it contradicted a common belief that people receive their souls (rational intelligence) during conception on Earth, a view grounded in Judeo-Christian and ancient Pagan history. This suggests that recruits who accept the latter belief may reject the pre-existence teaching. Despite respecting LDS morality for mirroring Catholic morality, Bogusław was uncomfortable with LDS religiosity differing from Catholic religiosity. Tomasz had tried to comprehend the LDS bread-and-water communion rite, but had attained no clear understanding of it. He was also suspicious of crosses, crucifixes, and other mainstream

Christian symbols being absent from both Warsaw LDS chapels. The last point seems to highlight the institutionalised taboo position of the cross in modern-day LDS religiosity, with the LDS being uncomfortable at using it as a religious symbol (Reed 2011, 2012; Gaskill 2013: 185). All this suggests that recruits from Catholic backgrounds may feel uncomfortable with the different visual and ritualistic aspects of LDS religiosity, and that people with strong beliefs are more able to resist the “pressure to change” from other belief systems (Paloutzian 2014: 221). Again, this supports the rational agency theory from 2.1 which highlights that recruits/converts freely assess NRM teachings/practices.

A few Polish LDS converts spoke about having problems accepting the LDS modern-day prophet doctrine. Stefan (CTG) had known about Brigham Young having many wives, but nothing about Joseph Smith, and had only started viewing Smith as a prophet when he came to accept the BOM as scripture. Dawid (CTG) had found it difficult to believe in the modern-day prophet doctrine, as the Catholic Church had said nothing about it. When the LDS had mentioned prophets, some Old Testament, Moses-type figures had entered his mind, and it had been difficult to become LDS without a “personal witness” of the modern-day prophet doctrine. He had gained the latter after baptism through reading talks by modern-day LDS leaders, and seeing the LDS President (prophet leader) speaking at General Conferences screened from Salt Lake City at Wolska. Alicja (CTG) had found it difficult to believe in modern-day prophets, as, like many people, she had thought that the line of prophets had ended when Jesus came to Earth. For two years, she had viewed the LDS claim to have scripture written by a modern prophet as “weird”, and had only read “bits and pieces” of the D&C. However, through coming to believe in the LDS Church, she had accepted Smith as a scripture-writing prophet. Thus, Stefan and Alicja may point towards recruits/converts gradually accepting Joseph Smith as the “once and forever Mormon prophet” through coming to value his extensive religious revelations and books of scripture which underpin the LDS religion (Givens 2007: xii). In contrast, Patrycja (LA) had read non-LDS accounts about Smith, so, despite viewing the LDS as fine people, she had never believed that Smith was a prophet which had made some Polish LDS friends cry. This may suggest that with or without post-baptismal religious training, some Polish LDS converts may never accept the modern-day prophet and Joseph Smith being a scripture writer teachings, especially if they have encountered non-LDS accounts about LDS history and religiosity.

From the LTIs, Witek talked about the LDS prophet leader doctrine mirroring the Catholic idea of having a Pope, both of which he found unbiblical. Maczek discussed how some time after Joseph Smith’s death, one of his sons had “started a new Church” to rival the one that

Brigham Young had inherited from Smith, which was a kind of “apostasy”. Here, Maczek seems to be referring to Smith’s oldest son, Joseph Smith III, becoming the leader of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1860 (Shipps 1987: 84; Russell 2015: 82). This Church, now known as the Community of Christ and centred in Independence, Missouri, was formed from LDS congregations that remained behind in the American mid-West after Brigham Young had lead many LDS westward in 1847 (Shipps 1987: 84; Russell 2015: 82). In contrast to the LDS Church led by Young, the RLDS Church has rejected the practice of polygamy from its early years onwards (Shipps 1987: 84-85; Russell 2015: 82-83). Maczek also stressed that many Polish recruits became LDS “hastily without knowing the teachings”, being unaware that the “beginnings of Mormonism were strange” through Smith having been “convicted” as a criminal for something concerning “land conveyance”. For Maczek, this may have been due to the early LDS being forced to move “from one place to another”, buying and selling land with Smith having “to sign some kind of contracts”. He viewed Smith as a maverick who had, amongst other things, campaigned to become the President of the USA. The latter point refers to Joseph Smith starting to campaign to become US President, with fellow LDS Sidney Rigdon as vice-President, on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1844, and this ending when Smith was murdered in Carthage Jail, Illinois on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1844 (Garr, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2009/02/joseph-smith-campaign-for-president-of-the-united-states?lang=eng> accessed 17-06-20). All this suggests that some recruits will be aware of the controversial side of the Joseph Smith story, and may become fascinated with this and the LDS themselves with little intention of becoming LDS. Again, this supports the rational agency theory from 2.1.

At Sunday and weekday meetings for recruits/recent converts, I saw recruits saying prayers directly to Heavenly Father. I was encouraged to do so at the end of private baptism lessons with YFMs. During a baptism lesson on 13-05-10, both YFMs compared the LDS creating their own prayers with Catholics saying formulaic prayers, and looked surprised when I replied that Catholics meditated on the meaning of formulaic prayers and sometimes created their own prayers. After a General Conference session screening from Salt Lake City at Wolska on 31-03-12, Stefan (CTG) criticised Catholics for praying in groups and repeating words without thinking about their meaning, and never responded to my point about a hypnotic, collective quality of group prayer. Furthermore, after the LDS baptism of an old Polish man on 28-04-12, Stefan got annoyed when I told him that Catholics said the *Hail Mary* prayer because they believed that Mary was the mother of God.

In my interview data, a few Polish LDS converts talked about being attracted to the LDS practice of praying directly to God the Father. Weronika (TTG) had always prayed straight to God. For Dagmara (TTG), doing this was a big reason for her becoming LDS. In contrast to her “imperfect father” on Earth, Dagmara valued having a “perfect Father” in heaven who she could be “completely open” with about anything during her prayers. Radek (CTG) had believed in praying directly to God the Father before meeting the LDS, but Dawid (CTG) had only become aware of it through discussions with YMs, as the Catholic Church had never encouraged it. The converts above seem to view direct prayers to God the Father as being more authentic than Catholics praying to Jesus, Mary, the saints etc. This may point towards some Catholic lay people suffering spiritual voids through not addressing God the Father directly and priests mediating with God on their behalf at Sunday Mass (Obirek in Harrison 2009).

The Polish LDS converts above suggest that some Catholics do not pray much beyond vocal rote formulas and do not engage in much mental prayer. Frankini and Coulombe (2020) explain Catholic mental prayer in terms of adoring and praising God; discussing concerns with and saying sorry to him for sins; and asking and thanking him for blessings. Ripperberger (2018) defines authentic Catholic prayer in terms of spiritual reading being followed by four main acts of mental prayer. First, religious objects (the Trinity; the Incarnation; God’s attributes; Christ-like virtues; the Mother of God; angels and saints etc.) may be reflected upon from many different points of view. Second, examining one’s conscience may prompt virtuous “affectations” towards God, such as repentance and humility. Third, petitioning God may involve seeking to understand how to develop faith and perseverance; how God’s grace can provide growth in virtue; and how God can be loved more perfectly. Finally, making “resolutions” may involve finding precise ways of improving oneself; consistently praying for uprooting vices; thanking God; and not allowing oneself to just focus on emotional consolations. Thus, some Catholics will have stronger prayer lives than just reciting rote prayers.

From the LTIs, Tomasz had been impressed with his YMMs praying a lot. However, through feeling that they had misled him into believing there was a temple at Wolska, he had started questioning why they prayed in a “different way” mentioning but not directly addressing Jesus. Adam had disliked his YFMs pressuring him to pray, as he had never prayed as a Catholic, and was too busy for it. This suggests that some recruits may feel uncomfortable with praying directly to God the Father and LDS pressure to engage in intense, private religiosity.



A few Polish LDS converts touched on the mainstream Christian Trinity versus LDS Godhead issue. Weronika (TTG) felt that Jesus and God the Father were at the “same level”, because when the LDS prayed to the Father, they prayed to Jesus too. In contrast, Alina (LA) believed in a 100% unity of agreement/purpose between the three Godhead members, but rejected that they shared the same essence/nature. Moreover, Martyna (CTG) felt that the LDS Godhead teaching might be off-putting for some people. However, like Weronika, many Polish LDS converts may not be aware of the difference between the mainstream Christian concept of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost sharing the same divine essence/nature and the LDS idea of the Father having higher status. Thus, many converts may only start understanding and accepting the LDS Godhead doctrine when they receive more teachings after LDS baptism.

Two LTIs pointed towards the different mainstream Christian and LDS notions of God being an uncomfortable issue for recruits, converts, and missionaries. Tomasz recalled “some wise guys” mocking him and his YMs remaining silent when he had talked about “God being in three persons”. During Bogusław’s early contact with the LDS, he had recognised a huge difference between the “image of God in Christianity” and that in “Mormonism”. He explained that in LDS theology, God is the “creator” of the Earth and “other worlds”, and that temple-married couples believe that they can become gods after death through populating their own worlds. Moreover, he felt that some YMs could see that the idea of perpetual god-making amounted to a “never-ending chain” of polytheistic gods populating an infinite number of other worlds, which was difficult to comprehend and defend. However, when the LDS had arranged for Bogusław to speak with Józef (LA), the latter’s “vision of God was more Catholic than Mormon”. Bogusław believed that many Polish LDS maintained a mainstream Christian psychology, and, while mainly admiring LDS morality, did not attain a “strict” understanding of LDS theology. At a Family History Open Evening at Wolska on 15-05-10, Damian (TTG) told me that it was logical that God must be the first cause of everything, and looked uneasy when I mentioned Joseph Smith’s King Follett teaching that God was originally a man. Moreover, Damian stated that he had learnt more about LDS teachings in half an hour with me than with the LDS in 18 months. All this suggests that many Polish LDS converts may retain a mainstream Christian image of a monotheistic God, and may only start accepting a polytheistic outlook if they become CTGs. Again, this may imply that doctrinally aware Catholics are less likely to join the LDS (Obirek in Harrison 2009).

## 7.5 The Word of Wisdom

After a Chapel Home Evening at Wolska on 17-01-11, a middle-aged male recruit (non-interviewee) told me that he had met LDS missionaries in Warsaw 10 years ago; had lost contact with them through moving to Slovenia; and was in contact with missionaries again after returning to Warsaw recently. He felt drawn to the WOW, especially a less-known rule about not eating much meat, because he was vegetarian. After the Raławicka Sunday meetings on 19-02-12, a middle-aged male LA (non-interviewee) told me that he had always lived healthily through being sporty and practising karate, so becoming LDS had involved no major life readjustment for him. Thus, both participants here were attracted to the WOW mirroring their healthy lifestyles.

In my interview data, many Polish LDS converts spoke about (not) needing to adapt to the WOW during recruitment. First, quite a few spoke about the WOW fitting their already healthy lifestyles. Wojciech (CTG) had never smoked or drunk alcohol, so he had not needed to change his lifestyle to become LDS. Jola (TTG) had become LDS as a child so she had been spared any addiction problems through having always practised the WOW. None of her family had ever smoked, she had hated tea/coffee from kindergarten onwards, and she had always felt protected from the disastrous effects of alcohol. In the UK, Damian (TTG) had never had the time or money to drink the expensive alcohol there. Damian's healthy approach to life had continued in Poland through him seeing the "potential suicide" of smoking and how alcohol could damage people's lives, so following the WOW had never been a problem. From the LAs, Szymon had practised the WOW before encountering the LDS. Before becoming LDS, Paweł had kept his body healthy through only drinking alcohol on social occasions and never trying drugs like marijuana because they were dangerous. He believed that alcohol was a drug scientifically and that the LDS rightfully prohibited it. Józef had never smoked or taken any drugs, and five years after becoming LDS, the WOW health regulations were still "very attractive" for him. Alina had practised most WOW rules before encountering the LDS, as she had hated cigarettes and her mother had stressed that tea/coffee and alcohol were unhealthy. However, she had not known that any Christian Church prohibited these substances, and had occasionally broken LDS-type health rules, but had started obeying them all after becoming LDS. The Polish LDS converts here mirror a few of Annus and Csepregi's (2018: location 4019) Hungarian LDS converts who before LDS contact, had not drunk alcohol, smoked, or partied the way "their peers" did. Moreover, they may point towards some Polish recruits/converts sensing that the LDS offer a religious community that fits their needs away from the Catholic and secular worlds in Poland.

Second, many Polish LDS converts recalled having few or no problems dropping different kinds of non-LDS behaviour. Recent convert Barbara (LA) had no problem following all aspects of the WOW. Gabriela (LA) was grateful to the LDS for helping her to overcome a “bit of trouble” with beer and vodka. For five years as an LDS, she had never drunk any alcohol or mixed with heavy drinkers, and had not allowed her non-LDS husband to drink alcohol at home to set a good example to their children. She also criticised Catholics and other mainstream Christians for having no strict rules against alcohol. Recent convert Weronika (TTG) had never smoked or drunk tea, had no problem giving up alcohol, and advised me to ask God for the strength to give up beer. Celina (TTG), another recent convert, had drunk alcohol and coffee and had smoked 5-10 cigarettes a day, but now, she did not miss any of this “at all”, as she felt healthier practising the WOW. For her, the WOW protected people against unhealthy habits like smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs. From the CTGs, Radek had started following the WOW rules after first meeting the LDS, feeling that they were “just right” for modern times. Marek had drunk tea and small amounts of alcohol, but had quickly followed the LDS example of having fun without stimulants, and had politely refused any offers of alcohol ever since. Michał’s “interest” in LDS religiosity had stopped him from drinking alcohol, and Alicja had had no difficulty avoiding alcohol after becoming LDS. In California, Stefan had drunk 7-20 beers a week, regularly having a few with his roommate especially while playing table tennis with other people. He had also visited some Latino friends to dance and drink beer and champagne with, but had never tried drugs or smoked cigarettes. Upon meeting the LDS, he had had no problems giving up alcohol but a little difficulty giving up lemon tea. By June 1990, two months before becoming LDS, Stefan had started practising the WOW. Martyna had tried alcohol and cigarettes as a teenager “to see what they tasted like”, but upon becoming LDS, the WOW had made sense, so she had committed herself to practising it long-term. She had tried the WOW out to see if it made her feel better and increased her spirituality, and, over the years, she had retained her resolve to practise it, living without wine despite knowing how good it tasted. Thus, the Polish LDS converts here have mainly made small adjustments to practise the WOW, and those who have made bigger ones seem to value their moral development. They also appear to mirror Annus and Csepregi’s (2018: location 4063-4071) Hungarian LDS converts who before conversion: some had drunk alcohol “occasionally”, none had taken drugs, but most had drunk tea or coffee. Like the Hungarian converts, the Polish ones seem to view the benefits of LDS conversion as outweighing the costs, with the WOW being valued as a positive “investment” through it providing moral “boundaries” which protect people from unhealthy and sinful

lifestyles (Ibid 4082-4097). Overall, the Polish converts above highlight that the LDS can gain converts in modern secular societies through offering moral guidelines, religious commitment, self-control, and a longer, healthier life (Farrin 2009: 27-40; Givens 2007: 208-220; Millet 2007: 171-172; Nabozny 2009: 65-66; Marks and Beal 2008: 261). Besides this, they may value the LDS Church for it requiring more moral commitment than most mainstream Christian churches.

At my flat on 8-10-10, Roman (LTI non-interviewee) told me that he knew many Polish LDS who smoked, drank alcohol, and never visited the temple, with the Warsaw LDS leadership not knowing how to make Polish members active. In my interview data, a few Polish LDS converts talked about themselves or converts in general having difficulties following the WOW. Recent teenage convert Dagmara (TTG) had gone to parties, so it had been a “little difficult” dropping smoking and drinking alcohol, as everybody had done this “for show”. Many years ago, giving up tea as a teenager had been a “big thing” for Martyna (CTG), while in California, Stefan (CTG) had sensed himself breaking the WOW through doing erotic dances from the 1987 film *Dirty Dancing*. Franciszek (LA) was currently not practising LDS commandments, and as a Sunday Priesthood meeting teacher, found it difficult to teach what he had trouble comprehending. Moreover, he drank beer and Bacardi rum, especially at nightclubs and an American hotel bar in Warsaw. Szymon (LA) believed that many Polish LDS never followed the WOW, and joked that he had never met one who disliked coffee, tea, or alcohol. For Szymon, Polish recruits were almost hypnotised by LDS “charm”, but quickly became disgruntled and often disappeared after baptism due to the WOW demands. He believed that Joseph Smith had only banned alcohol, tobacco, and gambling because they were expensive habits in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Smith had wanted people to donate their money to his Church. Some comments above suggest that high levels of discipline and motivation are necessary to practise the WOW long-term. However, many LAs appear to value the WOW which may imply that practising it may be more important for them than becoming temple-goers.

From the LTIs, Witek found it difficult to understand and follow the WOW. Being instructed not to smoke was no problem because Witek had never done this, but he had never understood the prohibition against coffee, as it was “not very dangerous” for his health. Still, at some point, through LDS pressure, he had fluctuated between drinking and not drinking coffee. Despite this, he sometimes drank beer, and at “opening exhibition celebrations” at art galleries/museums, he drank wine to suit the occasion. Moreover, after I had interviewed

Adam, Bogusław, and Maczek, they all drank some beer. All this may suggest that the LTIs here drink alcohol in a controlled manner, so they do not feel a need to give it up.

Finally, a few Polish LDS converts talked about being ridiculed for practising the WOW. When Dagmara (TTG) refused to drink tea at school, her schoolmates sometimes accused her of belonging to a “sect”. Marysia (CTG) had always been the only LDS at home and work, so she had felt “strange” practising the WOW rules in places where people did not accept them and told “bad jokes” about religion. However, this kind of “mockery” had stopped in time. Stefan (CTG) had been ridiculed by his Latino friends in California for refusing to drink alcohol, but through being impressed by films and the atmosphere at the Los Angeles Temple Visitors Centre, he had developed a strong resolve against drinking it. The converts here may have felt uncomfortable at being ridiculed for practising the WOW, especially before or not long after baptism. However, this may become less of an issue in time, especially if the converts become temple-goers. This may suggest that the WOW and other LDS forms of self-sacrifice offer recruits/converts a more meaningful life than modern-day moral relativism and secularism, with them valuing a sense of becoming different from the non-LDS world through being immersed in many LDS religious/social activities and strict codes of conduct (Millet 2007: 171-172; Gooren 2008: 379-380). Despite this, Maczek (LTI) feared becoming especially an “active” LDS, because he felt that his family and Polish society would think he was “crazy”. He believed that this was a big reason why the LDS “only had about six million active members” practising the WOW from about “14 million members” worldwide. Such comments highlight that WOW practice may make LDS members stand out from the surrounding Polish social world. They may also support van Beek’s (2005: 29) idea that being a member of a “small and unusual” religious group can be more difficult than belonging to a mainstream religion, especially in Poland where the Catholic Church still has a strong influence on wider society.

## **7.6 Testimonies**

At Warsaw LDS meetings/events, I saw older American/foreign missionaries giving magical-type stories to support LDS religiosity. On 23-10-10, during the baptism service of five converts for Wierzbno, Sister Harding spoke about an episode when she had driven with young children through a blizzard in the USA, and had sensed Heavenly Father sending angels to protect them all. At a Sunday Scripture meeting for recruits/recent converts at Wolska on 2-01-11, a Family History Centre sister talked about feeling togetherness in the temple with her late husband and a daughter they had lost at only two weeks old. On 17-03-

13, at a Warsaw District Conference, Sister Nielson spoke about coming close to death recently and having to wear a heart monitor which reminded her that God still had a plan for her on Earth. At the same event, President Nielson discussed how his family had been irregular chapel-goers when he was about 10, and how a home teacher, a policeman, had motivated them all to become full-time LDS through recognising that something was missing in their lives. Such testimonies supported the LDS faith through the speakers reflecting on real-life situations and concerns which prompted everybody to feel “uplifted and edified” (Givens, F., Givens/Givens on FairMormon 2014).

During the Elder Christofferson Conference in Warsaw on 3-03-12, in front of 500-600 LDS from all over Poland, a Polish female YSA member (future missionary) stressed that her testimony was about the LDS fulfilling a need to build on the work of Jesus Christ, with Joseph Smith being a “true hero” for sacrificing himself for God. She also talked about receiving spiritual strength from the BOM and the atonement of Christ, and LDS religiosity blessing families. For her, the LDS Church was a big family which offered inspiration from President Monson right down to local leaders. She tearfully emphasised how she had learnt to do missionary work through the missionaries’ example, and called for others to become missionaries. For me, such a testimony, with successive rhetorical references to LDS religiosity, may represent a procession of “platitudes” (Givens, F., Givens/Givens on FairMormon 2014).

In my interview data, many Polish LDS converts discussed LDS testimonies. First, several talked about receiving them before LDS baptism. Recent convert Celina (TTG) had gained a pre-baptismal testimony about the BOM being true scripture through doing Moroni’s challenge. From the CTGs, Dawid believed that recruits should wait and pray for their decision to join the LDS to be confirmed by the Holy Ghost, with Lech having received this kind of testimony. As mentioned in section 7.3, Bruno and Stefan had received epiphany-type, pre-baptismal testimonies about the BOM being true scripture. While visiting a Warsaw LDS office, Michał had felt like on “another planet”, which had prompted him to become LDS soon after first meeting YMs. Alina (LA) had initially not believed what her YMs had said, but had then developed a “little faith”, sensing that it was good to pray about things. Moreover, she had interpreted an older male missionary’s talk about the purpose of LDS English classes as a sign that the LDS religion was true, and had told him that she wanted to get baptised. The older missionary had then given her a blessing saying that God wanted her to become LDS, and Alina had prayed for three weeks maintaining her decision to get

baptised. The convert comments above may point towards recruits starting to become internally converted through:

- Praying about the BOM/Joseph Smith and receiving a spiritual confirmation that LDS religiosity is true (Ballard 2000).
- Praying to God and committing themselves to the LDS faith (Rector Jr. 1975).
- Directly communicating with God, and receiving modern-day religious revelation and emotionally-driven religious experience (Givens 2007: 212-215, 218-219)
- Desiring to know if LDS religiosity is true or not, undertaking Moroni's challenge, and receiving an epiphany of LDS truth (Coleman 2003: 64-67)
- Sensing themselves finding a true religious path and connection with God (Eliason 1999: 142-143).

As modern-day religious-seekers, the converts above seem to have trusted their own spiritual intuitions, interpreting any uplifting feelings they had towards doing Moroni's challenge or other aspects of LDS religiosity as validating the truth of the BOM and LDS faith (Mauss 2008: 22-25).

After a Wolska Sunday School meeting for recruits/recent converts on 27-01-13, a young adult male LTI (non-interviewee) told me that he was satisfied with his visit and would be returning the following week. He liked the idea of the LDS having a priesthood related to the family like the Old Testament patriarchs (e.g. Abraham). When asked about whether he viewed Jesus as God or a prophet, he shrugged his shoulders saying that he liked the LDS idea of him being an older brother. He believed in an early Church with Jesus as the leader, and was interested in a Church as a group of people, but not the historical, philosophical outlook of the Catholic Church. However, he had never received any religious testimony, with the LDS testimonies that he had heard being emotional and open to interpretation. The last point may point towards some recruits being sceptical about LDS testimonies through seeing no objective criteria for measuring them. All my LTI interviewees except Adam spoke about having uplifting spiritual feelings with the LDS, but this had not prompted any of them to become LDS. Adam believed that his most recent YFMs had tried to lure him into a "trap" of discussing and then praying about the BOM and LDS teachings which suggests that some recruits may sense that YMs are pushing them towards receiving testimonies, which may make them defensive against any uplifting feelings they have towards LDS religiosity. Thus,

LTIs may have higher levels of scepticism which block them from viewing uplifting experiences as confirmations of LDS truth.

Second, many Polish LDS converts spoke about receiving or building up testimonies after LDS baptism. From the LAs, Barbara believed that testimonies involved recruits/converts learning about different LDS teachings. As a convert, Józef gained insights from his Wierzbno/Raławicka community that built upon his pre-LDS search for goodness, beauty, and truth. He now viewed it as a duty to learn things from LDS colleagues, Institute lessons, and Sunday meetings, and to reflect on and pray about any new information on his own. For Paweł, giving testimonies at LDS meetings was a crunch test as individuals had to declare their faith in front of colleagues. Gabriela's post-baptismal testimony concerned seeing many miraculous-type things "come true". One episode involved a Polish LDS man who had only been expected to stay alive for three days survive to the amazement of the doctors and medical profession. Interestingly, only Gabriela from the LAs here talks about having an epiphany-type, post-baptismal testimony which may suggest that some LAs struggle to become CTGs through not having such testimonies after baptism.

From the TTGs, Dagmara described her testimony as a "confirmation" of the teachings/practices she had learnt from the LDS. Weronika viewed testimonies as expressions of gratefulness to God for being lead in a "good direction" that were shared with LDS colleagues. Jola believed that the Holy Ghost prompted people to have testimonies through testifying to them about religious truths concerning "Heavenly Father", Jesus, and LDS scripture/teachings. For her, this involved people starting to believe in LDS teachings, living according to LDS Church laws, and praying to get a "strong feeling" that the teachings were true. Jola stressed that everybody experienced testimonies differently, as the Holy Ghost could work through scripture or other people to answer somebody's questions. She revealed that LDS members receive testimonies about many "different topics" which cannot be scientifically proven, but can be strongly felt as "different knowledge" received from "Heavenly Father". Jola also discussed one of her own testimonies where rather than just going to church, she had "wanted to know" if God really existed, as she had been "searching the scriptures to learn more about him". Then, during a summer vacation, the weather and beach had been so beautiful that she had been forced to acknowledge that God exists, as the beauty of creation "couldn't happen by accident". During this episode, she had experienced the strongest, most profound, "soft" feeling imaginable, as the confirmation of God's existence had entered her brain. Despite her young age, Jola had been an LDS member much longer than any of the other TTG interviewees, which may suggest that long-term converts



are more likely to receive testimonies than recent ones. For temple-going converts, receiving testimonies may be an ongoing, episodic process which prompts them to feel more uplifted as their faith grows stronger.

Amongst the CTGs, Radek stressed that testimonies should not be kept secret because LDS colleagues can learn many “great things” from them. For Alicja, her testimony was no “one-day boom”, but a lifelong process that kept getting stronger. Her post-baptismal testimony about “the prophet, Joseph Smith” had occurred while teaching a lesson about the First Vision as a trainee missionary at the MTC in Preston (UK). Without being a “crying-type”, Alicja had just started weeping the more she had felt the Joseph Smith/latter-day prophet teaching to be true. Martyna had strengthened her faith while serving a mission in Britain, as she had tried to help people by becoming involved in their problems, and offering them a “better life” through introducing them to LDS religiosity to bring them “closer to God”. For Marek, having a testimony was a more complex process than “the Church is true, the Book is blue!” rhetoric of many new converts. He believed that genuine testimonies involved the Holy Ghost guiding converts to understand LDS religiosity at a higher level. Marek explained that through converts gaining a “confirmation” of having a relationship with God, just believing in something such as LDS scripture could turn into strongly sensing it was true. Romuald stressed that having a testimony was more than just deciding to become LDS, because it involved fulfilling obligations and developing spiritual knowledge after baptism. To highlight this, he pointed towards the LDS being blessed for paying tithing, as they gained greater understanding about the value of obedience and self-sacrifice. Stefan’s post-baptismal testimony revolved around having a “personal relationship” with the D&C which he had started studying a few months after baptism. This was a “second testimony” after his BOM epiphany, as, through the D&C not being “owned by any other Churches on Earth”, he had gained a “very strong conviction, confirmation” supporting his decision to become LDS. Dawid’s testimony was based on sensing that his ancestors had put him in “the right place” to make the “the right decisions” necessary for him to become LDS and do baptism of the dead for them. He explained that his ancestors had not had the “opportunity to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ” on Earth, and that in the post-mortal world, they had been waiting for him to “open the door” for this to happen. Thus, the CTGs here view their testimonies as long-term processes, which may involve receiving profound learning experiences that strengthen their faith in LDS teachings/practices and sharing their experiences with LDS colleagues. This seems to mirror many of Rigal-Cellard’s (2018: 3685-3693) French LDS respondents who

assessed their testimonies by giving “long explanations about their innermost motivations”, possibly influenced by an “American custom of testifying publicly on one’s faith”.

Many Polish LDS converts above discuss how they built up their testimonies, convictions about different aspects of LDS faith, over time (Gooren 2008: 367). Their comments highlight that while LDS testimonies sometimes only involve recruits/converts becoming certain about what God wills them to do on Earth, other times they may interpret intense, intuitive experiences as gaining contact with God (Stark 2005: 26-27, 38-39). This suggests that converts continue to construct/reconstruct their conversion stories long after joining the LDS, with some building up long-range testimonies through assessing how the LDS have benefitted their lives over the years (Stromberg 1993/2008, 2014: 130).

### **7.7 Baptism/confirmation**

Inside the main hall at Wolska, on 5-09-09, I saw Damian (TTG) and President Engbjerg who were sat in central, front pew positions, all dressed in white. Nearby, Damian’s mother and sister were sat with a German YFM. After an opening hymn, a female YSA member (non-interviewee) from Wierzbno gave a speech smiling at Damian non-stop, and a recent English male convert did a violin version of the *I Am a Child of God* hymn. Also from Wierzbno, Patrycja (LA) and Marysia, Michał, and Jola’s mother (CTGs) were all sat together, and Józef (LA) was leading events on stage. In a small pool in a side room, Damian first resisted being baptised, but President Engbjerg then gently immersed him under the water. After this, two YMMs showed a video about Joseph Smith’s First Vision on a big screen in the main hall. Damian gave his testimony in a suit/tie, looking like a model convert. On 31-09-09 at Wolska, I saw a female in her 30s receive baptism and confirmation on the same day. LDS confirmation usually occurred 1-2 days after baptism in Warsaw. The laying on of hands (confirmation) ceremony was performed by Lech (CTG), Edyta’s reactivated husband (LA), and four YMMs including two who had met the baptised/confirmed woman when she had been in hospital. One of the YMMs took the lead, referring to the woman as “Córka Ojca” (Heavenly Father’s daughter).

A Wierzbno Sunday School lesson for recruits/recent converts on 13-06-10 was lead by a Polish female TTG (non-interviewee), with an American YFM translating the Polish into English. The lesson covered the LDS baptism chapter in *Zasady ewangelii/Gospel Principles* (2009). When the host asked what LDS baptism meant, a young Puerto Rican woman gave party-line answers about it involving repentance; remission of sin; returning to a childlike state; starting a new life; receiving the Holy Ghost; and becoming LDS. The host added that it

involved an exchange of agreements/promises between God and the baptised person. When the host contrasted the LDS belief in people having to freely choose baptism with the Catholic concept of baptism eradicating original sin, Bogusław (LTI) explained that Catholics baptised babies to not only eliminate original sin, but also impart grace on their souls. While the host looked confused, the YFM assistant thanked Bogusław for his point. Bogusław also pointed towards the apostle Paul saying that baptism was a symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ, which the LDS host agreed with. This episode showed that theologically-minded Catholics could be found inside the Warsaw LDS field.

At our usual Vietnamese restaurant on 31-05-11, Damian (TTG) revealed that Maczek (LTI) was considering LDS baptism, but his missionaries were frustrated at trying to make him give up smoking and him having cancelled numerous baptism dates. During a phone call on 17-06-11, Damian talked about Maczek having problems/struggles which blocked him from becoming LDS, but remained silent when I suggested that this may have been an inner defence mechanism. Before a Sunday School meeting for recruits/recent converts at Wolska on 30-12-12, two YMMs revealed that Roman (LTI non-interviewee) was due to be baptised in two weeks time, although the exact date had not been confirmed. During the meeting, Roman was flanked by two YMMs, the first time I had seen this with him. At a Wolska (Testimony) Sunday Sacrament meeting on 3-02-13, an older male missionary jokingly pushed Roman towards the stage, with Roman saying that there were too many people present for him to give his testimony. Despite looking embarrassed, Roman went on stage talking about how much he enjoyed attending meetings at Wolska. After the meeting, a YMM told me that Roman was being encouraged to get baptised when he felt comfortable, with it being entirely his decision, although Roman had started becoming committed to the idea through giving up smoking and reading the BOM daily. Despite this, Roman's baptism never materialised. Thus, the PO accounts here highlight that LDS baptisms do not always go ahead as planned.

On 13-04-13, I attended the baptism of a 70-year-old woman and attempted baptism of her 94-year-old mother. To make things safer, the LDS tried to immerse the women forwards rather than backwards. During one baptism attempt, the 70-year-old woman shouted "Nie" ("No"), and a Polish leader from Wolska halted the proceedings. The woman was eventually immersed after seven attempts by an African man. A Polish man then made six attempts to immerse the 94-year-old woman, but each time, she shouted "Nie", and the proceedings were halted. After about 20 minutes of hymn-singing, both baptisers tried to immerse the 94-year-old woman together three times before the local Polish leader waved things off. Afterwards,

Michał (CTG) acknowledged that the baptism procedure had been dangerous, and a YMM informed me that the older woman would be baptised in a swimming pool the following week. Michał added that he would rather see a very old, sick person receive a proxy baptism in the spirit world.

In my interview data, a few Polish LDS converts discussed LDS baptism/confirmation issues. Two spoke about some recruits becoming LDS to “maintain friendships” with missionaries. Stefan (CTG) recalled an episode from about 10 years ago when three girls had got baptised and disappeared after some YMMs had “changed the city”. Patrycja (LA) had decided to become LDS upon discovering that her favourite YMM had become President of the Białystok branch in north-east Poland. This now ex-missionary maintained their “special bond” from the USA through speaking to her on Skype at 4pm every Sunday. However, Patrycja never became a CTG, which may suggest that without face-to-face contact with influential missionaries, some Polish converts may become LAs quickly.

Stefan and Patrycja also revealed that YMs had asked them to help plan their baptism ceremonies. In California, Stefan’s missionaries had asked him for a baptism ceremony plan, to find out who he wanted to organise things and what he wanted to do after baptism. Recent convert Patrycja had felt “special” when she had been asked to plan her baptism ceremony, but she had had to argue with her missionaries to get the colourful baptism invitations and LDS hymns she had wanted, as they had tried to save the coloured photocopying cartridges and had wanted to choose the hymns themselves. All this may suggest that LDS missionaries may encourage recruits to help organise their baptisms to increase the likelihood of them turning up for the baptism event.

On 6-02-10, I attended a musical event that should have been a baptism, as a Polish man had dropped out of being baptised a few days beforehand. At the event, a middle-aged couple who I had never seen before sang LDS hymns well, but this could not overturn a downbeat atmosphere. Again, this showed that there was no guarantee that recruits would turn up for their baptisms. In my interview data, a few Polish LDS converts talked about fearing LDS baptism. Patrycja (LA) had been late for her baptism interview because she had sensed something holding her back from becoming LDS, which had made her favourite YMM angry. Stefan (CTG) had felt in shock when his YFMs in California had asked him to get baptised after he had told them about his BOM testimony. In response, he had wanted to get baptised later than the proposed August 26<sup>th</sup> date, as, through being afraid of “entering a new life” and being “a bit of a digger”, he had wanted another confirmation of LDS “truthfulness” before baptism. Moreover, something inside had been telling him that LDS baptism “wasn’t right”,

tempting him not to go through with it. Stefan also discussed a male LTI who was in his 30s and had attended Wolska meetings for many years, but had kept changing his mind about LDS baptism because “he just got scared” through searching for the truth in too many places and his parents being against it. For Dawid (CTG), anti-LDS websites prompted recruits to doubt what they had felt to be true, to wait too long to become LDS, and to lose their sense of having a relationship with the Holy Ghost. All this suggests that to become LDS, Polish recruits may have to overcome both inner fears and external opposition from non-LDS family/friends. They may fear being viewed as traitors by Catholic society, as while some Poles view NRMs with indifference, others condemn them as non-mainstream, psycho-manipulative groups (Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2006: 195; Zielińska 2006: 217-218). Like many other Europeans, many Poles may know little about the LDS, not condemning them but inaccurately ridiculing them as polygamists.

A few Polish LDS converts recalled having special feelings on their baptism days. From the CTGs, Bruno had felt elated entering something heavenly, sacred, and universal during his baptism, while Stefan had felt relieved and “anew” during and after baptism. Despite having been tempted to put off his baptism, Stefan had gone through with it, and during the immersion, he had felt happy at “doing something right”. During Lech’s baptism, he had felt himself gaining “something really amazing”, and had seen others taking in the experience more spiritually than him which was “nice”. In contrast, Alina and Patrycja (LAs) had been afraid of drowning, although, despite not having understood the meaning of her baptism at the time, Alina had felt excited before and after it. On her baptism day, Patrycja had felt a bit uncomfortable about YMs blocking her from seeing her favourite missionary. Nevertheless, she was proud about having been escorted to Wolska by four YMMs, as she believed that recruits were not usually given this kind of treatment and that it had been done to fulfil her wish for a well-organised baptism. During the journey, she realised that she had forgotten her mobile phone and a top that she was going to wear for baptism, which had intensified a feeling that things were conspiring against her. Still, despite feeling nervous/apprehensive, she had gone through with her baptism. While the CTGs above experienced uplifting feelings on their baptism days, the LAs had been more apprehensive which may suggest that having uplifting memories from baptism may energise Polish converts towards becoming CTGs. Moreover, Patrycja’s YMs may have been escorting her to Wolska to counter the possibility of her not turning up for baptism, as I sometimes saw recruits arrive at Wolska for their baptisms with LDS missionaries/members.

Finally, a few CTGs explained how confirmation had completed their LDS baptism process. Lech compared his confirmation to receiving the Melchizedek priesthood as he had felt “something” special entering himself. In California, Stefan had been baptised and confirmed on the same day, with confirmation being the “sealing” of LDS baptism. During the confirmation, the local bishop’s palms were placed on Stefan’s head and a standard word formula was given for him to receive the Holy Ghost. Stefan stressed that being baptised without receiving confirmation was invalid, and that some newly baptised people never got confirmed because they were “scared” of what their non-LDS family/friends might think. Dawid explained that confirmation completed LDS baptism because the convert received the “seal of the Holy Ghost” as a constant companion. During his baptism, Dawid had felt the Holy Ghost becoming his “companion” and had wanted to keep “him”. The laying on of hands ceremony had been a “great experience”, with Dawid promising God that he would keep LDS commandments through not wanting to lose the Holy Ghost by breaking them. Again, all this suggests that if Polish LDS converts have profound/uplifting memories from baptism/confirmation, this may energise them to become CTGs. This may point towards some converts feeling transformed through gaining uplifting outlooks on life (James 1902/1985; Libiszowska-Żółtkowska 2006: 199).

### **7.8 Post-baptismal adaptation and difficulties**

During a Sunday Scripture meeting for recruits/recent converts at Wolska on 22-05-11, a recently baptised, male convert repeatedly commented on the BOM texts that were read out. In my interview data, quite a few Polish LDS converts spoke about adapting positively to LDS member life. As recent converts, Celina (TTG) enjoyed encountering different types of LDS who tried to help each other, and Szymon (LA) praised the LDS for fulfilling his need to practise a meaningful religion. From the CTGs, Lech recalled being a young teenage convert who had started to think more seriously about life. He now valued LDS callings and organised member support which attempted to stop fresh converts from disappearing shortly after baptism. Martyna had been “put to work straightaway” as a teenage convert, learning more about LDS religiosity and strengthening her faith through teaching Primary classes for young children on Sunday and doing other callings. During this time, Martyna had developed the desire to serve a mission to thank God for what her YMs had taught her, and had started believing that the LDS could “change people for the better”. Stefan recalled his time after baptism in California, when his YFMs had mentioned the usual LDS things but from a member’s perspective, and he had started to feel detached from the non-LDS world through

gaining some new spiritual “understanding”. Soon after Dawid’s baptism, the missionary who had baptised him returned to the USA and his other missionaries were changed regularly. Despite this, he had become curious about the temple being a “special place”, and had done a course to prepare for entering it which had been organised by his branch President. His goal of entering the temple had become clearer over a year of coming to understand LDS religiosity more fully, with “each part” of the D&C and POGP becoming easier to comprehend. Thus, some Polish converts above may mirror Annus and Csepregi’s (2018: location 4115) Hungarian LDS converts who felt themselves changing through increasing their “self-esteem” and gaining “new skills” by doing church callings/duties.

The comments above suggest that to move towards CTG status, Polish converts need to integrate with LDS colleagues; do callings; read more scripture; develop a desire to enter the temple; and sense themselves becoming more religious. While religious transformation may be unnecessary for LDS baptism, it appears to become more so for entering the temple. All this points towards active-passive converts becoming committed to an LDS worldview through assessing and being influenced by LDS teachings/practices, and developing core LDS identity through becoming more active inside their group (Rambo 1998; Gooren 2007: 350-351). However, my research points towards only a small number of Polish LDS becoming CTGs which suggests that the LDS only select and train new members who strongly adhere to their beliefs/practices for higher LDS status (McBride 2007: 404-412).

In time, I saw a few young Polish LDS converts go on to serve missions. During a mobile phone chat on 17-06-11, Damian (TTG) informed me that he was going on a 1-2 week mini-mission outside Warsaw organised by President Nielson as preparation for an upcoming two-year mission. Damian stressed that he just wanted to get his two-year mission out of the way. At a Testimony Sunday Sacrament meeting at Raławicka on 3-07-11, Damian had returned from his Gdańsk mini-mission and gave a speech about what he had learnt from it. Inside Raławicka metro station afterwards, Damian confided that his mission had been “no bed of roses” due to the workload and lack of free time. After a Raławicka Sunday Sacrament meeting on 18-12-11, Damian told me that he had received his official mission paper to serve in Tacoma, Washington, and a female YSA colleague had received hers to serve in Moldova/Romania. At the Elder Christofferson Conference at the Radisson Hotel, Warsaw on 3-03-12, the future YFM talked about receiving her mission call, and being due to travel to the Provo MTC the following week.

In my interview data, quite a few Polish LDS converts talked about having difficulties after baptism. Patrycja (LA) believed that most Polish LDS were too poor to pay tithing. She

got angry when the LDS preached about it during Sunday meetings and tried to get members to give money at Testimony Sunday meetings. For Celina (TTG), it was difficult for anyone to give away 10% of their money, especially LDS from “poor countries” like Poland who did not earn much. From the CTGs, Stefan’s first few months as an LDS convert had been “semi-difficult”, as he had needed to become more scrupulous in behaviour than when Catholic, but despite some difficulties learning LDS rules, he had started following them. Lech believed that it was natural for new converts to question their decision to become LDS because they feared making big changes in life. For him, new converts sometimes disappeared quickly through not receiving enough missionary/member support, especially when a pre-baptismal period of feeling uplifted by “the Spirit” was replaced by everyday problems remaining after baptism. Dawid stressed that local members should attend missionary-recruit meetings to push future converts towards integrating inside a branch. He felt that some young converts disappeared quickly through viewing themselves as too weak to keep LDS commandments, and not knowing how to take the Sunday Sacrament properly to maintain their repentance/conversion process. For Martyna, new converts disappeared quickly through feeling close to and sometimes in love with missionaries who moved on, being expected to pay tithing, and receiving hostility from non-LDS families. Hence, new converts may disappear for many reasons, with the directive to pay tithing being a massive problem because Poland is not an affluent country. It may also be difficult to replace influential missionaries, as trust between recruits/converts and new missionaries often takes time to develop. Many Polish converts may dislike being pushed towards becoming committed LDS members shortly after baptism, as they need time to assess what they have got themselves involved in. All this suggests that recent converts may not be supported by foreign missionaries or local members, and that quickly recruited ones may become disillusioned through exciting recruitment journeys being replaced by arduous membership routines (Glad 2009: 157; Decoo 1996: 108-109). LDS member duties may be especially off-putting for Polish converts from nominal or inactive Catholic backgrounds, as investing significant time/effort in a religion may be alien to them. Thus, given the many difficulties that Polish LDS converts face, it is unsurprising that few become CTGs.

Recent convert, Szymon (LA) was confirmed a day after LDS baptism, and then became an Aaronic priest a week after, missionary leader two weeks after, and Melchizedek priest four weeks after. As a missionary leader, he coordinated the work of YMs, and had access to all Polish LDS member data at both Warsaw branches. Despite being a Melchizedek priest, he criticised the LDS and spent 5-6 hours a day studying mainly non-LDS and ex-LDS (e.g.



Jerald/Sandra Tanner; ex-BYU professors etc.) accounts about LDS teachings/history. He believed that official LDS accounts about the latter often contradicted each other, and that the BOM was “evangelically” rather than “literally” true, so parts of the Warsaw LDS hierarchy were encouraging him not to speak to other LDS about such things. While Szymon had not had any mystical experiences with Buddhism or Hinduism, he believed that he was having them with the LDS, with many LDS in Warsaw wanting to be blessed by him. He had recently blessed and reactivated a Polish LDS woman who had quickly disappeared from Wolska after her baptism through the “badness” there, and they had both felt something extraordinary during the blessing, but nothing “hysterical”. After witnessing the latter, a YFM from Wierzbno/Raławicka had said that for the first time in her life, she had seen and felt “the Spirit” breaking through a veil, which had annoyed President Nielson. Despite feeling “the Spirit” working through himself, Szymon did not want to bless people to get mystical effects. During a private meeting, President Nielson had told Szymon about seeing similar power from “LDS Apostles” (1<sup>st</sup> Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve members), and had advised him not to discuss such matters with other LDS members. Given that Szymon disappeared a few months after LDS baptism, his frenetic post-baptismal life may have prompted some kind of religious burn-out or other Polish LDS members (especially CTGs) and the American LDS leadership in Warsaw/Poland to be suspicious of his charismatic approach to LDS convert life.

In summary, the issue of LDS religious training influencing Polish LDS recruitment/conversion seems to involve several big factors. Religious transformation over various amounts of time will involve a person changing or adapting a system of ideas to give his/her life new meaning. Some recruits may resist LDS religious conditioning to maintain features of Polish cultural identity, while others may accept/embrace it as a countercultural move. Recruits may experience internal conflict/crisis while evaluating pre-LDS and LDS worldviews against each other, with some overcoming a sense of guilt about leaving past customs/lifestyles behind, and others not. During recruitment, investigators may have some mainstream Christian beliefs reinforced and may encounter some unique LDS beliefs. Stronger religious transformation may occur after LDS baptism if converts encounter more unique LDS religiosity and become CTGs. LAs and LTIs may experimentally taste and enjoy LDS religiosity without (strongly) committing to it. Overall, my CTG interviewees appear to have undergone religious transformation; TTGs semi-transformation; LAs limited transformation; with the LTIs remaining as sceptics. Thus, the CTGs and TTGs may be viewed as orthodox LDS; LAs as heterodox/hybrid LDS; and LTIs as sceptical curiosity-

seekers. Regarding Girard's mimetic theory, CTGs may compete with rivals for higher LDS career development, while LAs may not have or may lose the desire to do so, being possibly scapegoated as causes of disorder/disunity inside the Warsaw LDS community (Girard 1979/in Williams, ed., 1996/2000: 7-14).

### **7.9 Social interaction and religious training influencing recruitment**

I will now summarise which religious and social factors influenced the recruitment of members of my Polish LDS convert and LTI groups. From the CTGs, Wojciech had not needed to adapt to the WOW through never having been a drinker/smoker, and had received religious training from YMMs for a year before LDS baptism. When Radek first encountered the LDS in Kraków, he had been drawn towards the WOW, while an appreciation of LDS music had prompted him to stop listening to secular music. After meeting LDS missionaries, Bruno had read the BOM in a week, becoming convinced that it was authentic scripture and LDS shortly afterwards. Romuald had had his eyes opened to religious truth while sharing similar ideas about the Bible with an older missionary couple, and Marek had studied the New Testament, BOM, and D&C on his own before baptism. Hence, the male CTGs here may have had mainly religious journeys to LDS baptism. Zofia had spoken with a Polish LDS friend about LDS religiosity, after which she had been prepared for baptism by an older missionary couple. Stefan had studied the BOM and met his YFMs over a long time, and had enjoyed attending LDS social activities before receiving a dramatic testimony about the BOM being authentic scripture. Martyna had attended LDS social activities, had met her YFMs regularly, and had read the Bible and BOM as a teenager. Michał had become LDS within two weeks of first meeting missionaries in Warsaw, having felt like in heaven. These CTGs may have had (sometimes dramatic) balanced religious-social journeys to LDS baptism. During recruitment, Alicja had admired how the LDS put their faith into practice, valuing her missionary friends and the safe cheerful environment that the LDS provided. Lech had been impressed by the exciting interaction and friendly missionaries he had encountered as a young teenage recruit. Dawid had attended LDS free English lessons, formed a friendship with a missionary, and had only understood the BOM and unique LDS teachings after baptism. These CTGs may have had mainly social journeys to LDS baptism. Some CTGs (Alicja, Dawid, Martyna, Stefan etc.) point towards Polish LDS converts receiving limited religious training before baptism, and a fuller understanding of LDS religiosity after baptism. However, given that all the CTGs above became LDS some/many years ago, they may have framed/

reconstructed their recruitment stories in religious or social terms when the reality may have been different.

From the TTGs, Jola had been LDS since childhood, while the four others were in their first year of LDS membership when I interviewed them. In childhood, Jola had enjoyed meeting LDS missionaries who had taught her religion lessons in a friendly way. Weronika valued making LDS friends as an antidote to her painful shyness; enjoyed singing LDS hymns through their focus on Jesus; and liked the LDS pre-mortality teaching. Dagmara appreciated a warm/friendly LDS atmosphere, and enjoyed reading the BOM. Celina had valued meeting friendly/uplifting people when first attending LDS Sunday meetings, and had then received a testimony about the BOM which prompted her to become LDS. Thus, these TTGs may have had balanced religious-social recruitment journeys. In contrast, Damian had only attended LDS social events for free food, but during a YSA conference in the Czech Republic, he had become impressed with the moral outlooks of young LDS, so he may have had a mainly social recruitment journey.

Amongst the LAs, Edyta had become LDS with her husband which shows how the LDS may recruit family members together if the opportunity arises. She now read the Bible privately, and felt more religiously active with the LDS than the Catholic Church. Gabriela had valued the WOW and LDS interaction during her recruitment. Recent convert Barbara had become curious about a male LDS workmate who had talked about the BOM with her. While attending an American LDS guest speaker event at Wolska with her workmate, she had enjoyed meeting YFMs for the first time which had increased her interest in the LDS. Paweł had read about the LDS on the internet; had met some LDS missionaries in Warsaw years after; and had been impressed by LDS member behaviour. Despite encountering LDS religiosity long before LDS interaction, both factors seem important for Paweł. After meeting LDS missionaries, Józef had been impressed by the WOW, LDS behaviour, and basic LDS teachings about God and Jesus, without having read the BOM. Alina had attended LDS free English lessons where she had encountered smartly dressed, well-spoken YMs. At some point, she had started praying, receiving a testimony that it was God's will for her to become LDS. Recent convert Patrycja's recruitment seems to have been dominated by a bond she felt with an American YMM, with her not reading the religious materials that the LDS had given her. Despite viewing the LDS as good/moral people, she had read some anti-LDS literature so she could not accept Joseph Smith as a prophet. All this points towards the LAs here receiving balanced religious-social recruitment journeys. Franciszek had first encountered the Warsaw LDS through a non-LDS friend telling him about them giving away free copies of the

BOM, and had then enjoyed socialising with American and Polish LDS during the early days of the Poland Mission. Despite this, he had never enjoyed reading the BOM. Thus, Franciszek's recruitment journey may have been a mainly social one. Recent convert Szymon had encountered LDS scripture about 10 years ago through some missionaries giving him the BOM and D&C. A few months ago, he had met some more missionaries knowing more about LDS religiosity than them. This suggests that Szymon's recruitment was mainly religious, as he had privately studied LDS scripture for many years.

From the LTIs, Adam valued the LDS English lessons and social activities that he had attended over the years, but had little interest in LDS religiosity. Despite this, he had periodically attended Wolska Sunday meetings and read the BOM during baptism lessons with YFMs, which suggests that long-term LDS recruitment inevitably involves some religious training, although some recruits may be disinterested in it. The other four LTIs were all interested in LDS religiosity. Bogusław viewed the BOM as inauthentic scripture; critiqued the LDS polytheistic concept of God; and saw no need for anybody to get baptised LDS if they had already received baptism with another Christian Church. In contrast, he respected LDS morality for mirroring Catholic morality, and believed that there was some allegorical truth in the BOM, but criticised YMs for trying to control their recruits' time as part of a recruitment technique. Maczek enjoyed comparing and contrasting Catholic and LDS doctrines, especially rival claims about having an original Christian priesthood instituted by Jesus. He had encountered the four LDS books of scripture at Institute meetings, and enjoyed attending LDS social activities. Like Bogusław, Maczek was wary of the control aspect of LDS interaction, and saw that missionaries did not tolerate having their religious teachings challenged. During Witek's early contact with the LDS, he had got to know some members; had enjoyed being a Wolska choir member; and had helped missionaries to seek recruits in Warsaw city centre. He had never become LDS through not accepting the BOM as authentic scripture nor the pre-mortality teaching as true doctrine as it contradicted a common view that human life starts with conception on Earth. With the more recent recruit, Tomasz, his missionaries had spoken little about LDS religiosity while befriending him, but he had started feeling uncomfortable because, like Bogusław, he saw no reason for recruits to receive LDS baptism if they had been baptised before. He was also suspicious that LDS chapels contained no mainstream Christian symbols, and was uncomfortable with some LDS members mocking his Catholic beliefs. Thus, the LTIs here may have refrained from becoming LDS through having religious objections and disliking how some missionaries try to push recruits towards LDS baptism.