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## Marriage Customs of the Quiché Maya

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**Abstract:** This article consists of a careful study of the religious beliefs and practices of the Quiché Maya, indicating that their roots may be found in the Book of Mormon narrative. The author discusses marriage customs of the Quiché Maya.

Lord. Despondency and discouragement are not of the Lord. Courage cometh from the Lord.

On Thursday morning it was our privilege as General Authorities of the Church to meet the First Presidency in the temple preparatory for this great conference. I do not have the ability to express to you and share with you the spirit of that meeting, but I can testify to you that I know that the spirit of the Lord was there in rich abundance and that the prayers that were offered and instructions that we received were divine.

Someone said at the close of the meeting in the temple, "If we could only go now from this beautiful meeting in the temple to the conference, then we would not need to worry, because of the beautiful spirit present." I believe that same sweet spirit that existed in the meeting in the temple has carried over in full according to the prayers and the supplications there, pleading with the Lord to bless the conference. Yes, I think the same sweet spirit has been here as we prayed to the Lord that it would be.

Much has been said about the Aaronic Priesthood. I shall not forget the visit I recently made to the Susquehanna River and the feeling that I had as I stood somewhere near the spot where the Prophet Joseph and Oliver Cowdery went to seek the guidance of the Lord, and where John the Baptist appeared to them. I wonder if we can imagine how they must have felt when the heavenly messenger appeared to them.

You know, when the Prophet received his first vision, there were some who said he was not a learned man. Perhaps not, if you judge by the knowledge of men, but he had seen God. He knew more about God than any other man in his dispensation. He had seen the Resurrected Christ. He knew more about Jesus than any other man in this dispensation. To know God and his Son, Jesus Christ, as Joseph Smith knew them, is divine power and the fountain of all knowledge. Someone has said, "He who knows books knows much; he who knows nature knows more; but he who knows God has reached the goal of human wisdom."

Much has been said about the visitation of John the Baptist to the Prophet and to Oliver. Oh, the feeling that they must have had! Oliver Cowdery attempted to write a letter to his brother, explaining the kind of feeling he had when the Aaronic Priesthood was bestowed upon him. Their eyes of spiritual understanding were opened. May I read a copy of the letter that Oliver sent to his brother describing the visit of John the Baptist and the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood?

On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us while the veil was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance. What joy! what wonder! what amazement! While the world was racked and distracted—while millions were groping as the blind for the wall, and while all men were resting upon uncertainty, as a

general mass, our eyes beheld—our ears heard. As in the "blaze of day"; yes, more—above the glitter of the May sunbeam, which then shed its brilliancy over the face of nature! Then his voice, though mild, pierced to the center, and his words, "I am thy fellow-servant," dispelled every fear. We listened, we gazed, we admired! 'Twas the voice of an angel from glory—'twas a message from the Most High, and as we heard we rejoiced, while his love enkindled upon our souls, and we were rapt in the vision of the Almighty! Where was room for doubt? Nowhere; uncertainty had fled, doubt had sunk, no more to rise, while fiction and deception had fled forever. But, dear brother, think further, think for a moment what joy filled our hearts and with what surprise we must have bowed, (for who

would not have bowed the knee for such a blessing?) when we received under his hands the Holy Priesthood, . . . (D.H.C. 1:43.)

May I plead with the boys of the Aaronic Priesthood and the men holding the Aaronic Priesthood to value highly that great blessing of the Aaronic Priesthood. May I plead with you, my brethren, my friends, and my associates, my business acquaintances, to make such adjustments as necessary in your lives and do not put it off too long so that you can have the joy and the blessings that come from the Holy Priesthood.

God bless you, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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## Marriage Customs of the Quiché Maya

by Milton R. Hunter

OF THE FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY

**M**Y DEAR brethren and sisters: It is with deep humility that I occupy this position this morning. I sincerely ask an interest in your faith and prayers and that the spirit of God may direct the things that I may say.

During the past eleven years in which I have served as a member of the First Council of the Seventy, I have had the marvelous opportunity, privilege, and blessing of participating in missionary work both in the stakes of Zion and in the foreign missions. I am indeed grateful for the numerous blessings derived therefrom and humbly express sincere thanks to my Father in heaven. I also take this opportunity to express deep gratitude to President David O. McKay, to his Counselors, and to President Joseph Fielding Smith, and to any others who have had a part in giving me my assignments, because I love missionary work very much and have a strong testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I know that the missionary program is one of the greatest assignments that God has given to the Church in this dispensation. I thoroughly appreciate the fact that the responsibility rests upon you and me to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people preparatory for the coming of the Son of Man. It is my firm conviction that when we have done this job sufficiently well, the Lord will accept our sacrifices, our efforts, and our accomplishments, and will usher in the millennial reign. The Savior told his apostles that

. . . this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matt. 24:14.)

As I stand here today, my thoughts revert to the numerous wonderful experiences which I have enjoyed while touring various missions. Perhaps paramount in these experiences are the missionary testimony and report meetings which I have attended. These meetings constitute some of the highlights of my life and especially of my participation in missionary work. In these meetings the elders and lady missionaries have poured out their deepest feelings unto God. On numerous occasions in those meetings missionary after missionary in deep humility bore witness that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ—the Savior of the world, that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, and that the gospel is on earth again; and then with the deepest of gratitude each missionary in turn thanked God for the privilege of serving in the great missionary work, even expressing gratitude for the privilege of paying his own expenses or of his parents paying them. On all of these occasions the room was filled with the spirit of God, and the Holy Ghost bore witness to me that the gospel of Jesus Christ was true and that the missionary program was of supreme importance. My heart was filled to overflowing even beyond expression; and silently I thanked God for the gospel of Jesus Christ, for my membership in the Church, for my sacred testimony, and for my privilege of participating in missionary work.

On many of those occasions the thought came to my mind: "If the parents of these elders and lady missionaries could be here today and could feel, hear, and see what we are experiencing, they would be fully repaid for sending their children on missions."

(Continued on following page)

In addition to the principal purpose of missionary work, i.e., finding the honest in heart, teaching them the gospel, and thereby bringing souls unto God, I truly believe that a mission is one of the greatest schools in the world for the personal development of the missionaries. Those humble laborers who put their hearts and souls into the work and lose themselves in the service of others naturally receive an individual growth and development beyond their greatest expectations. I think there is no university that can better prepare our sons and daughters for positions of leadership and for life in general, developing their personalities more fully, than can service in the mission fields. From this viewpoint, as well as from many others, the missionary program is marvelous and a great blessing to the members of God's kingdom.

In addition to the personal development that the missionaries receive, they attain an enrichment of one of God's greatest gifts—an increased testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ. By doing so they receive hidden treasures of knowledge—an absolute assurance that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world, and that the gospel has been restored to earth again—which knowledge surpasses anything which they could receive in a material way.

I rejoice in the numerous opportunities I have had to participate in the various phases of church work, and especially do I appreciate the privilege I have had of touring twenty-one missions which has given me the opportunity to bear witness to the truthfulness of the restored gospel and to the divinity of Jesus Christ in practically all of the major cities from Alaska in the north to the Panama Canal in the south. I sincerely thank my Eternal Father for these opportunities and once again express deep appreciation to the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, under whose leadership I serve.

Recently I had the privilege of touring the Central American Mission. Its headquarters are in Guatemala City. I am thoroughly convinced that there are prospects for unusual success in this mission. I am happy to report that under the able leadership of President and Sister Wagner, the proselyting work is going forward rapidly and successfully. The missionaries are laboring faithfully and enthusiastically. There was an average attendance of 229 percent throughout the entire mission tour, which fact indicates that the missionaries had done an unusually successful work in preparing the Saints and investigators for the conferences held during the mission tour. I congratulate President and Sister Wagner, as well as the missionaries of the Central American Mission, for their intelligent efforts and the high quality of work that is being done. May God's blessings continue to attend them.

I also congratulate all of the mission presidents and their wives in all the missions throughout the world for the

unusual accomplishments that they are achieving. I know that the mission presidents are outstanding men and their wives are marvelous women. Perhaps in no period in church history has the leadership been better in the mission fields than at the present time. I also congratulate all of the missionaries throughout the world for the high caliber of proselyting work that is being done. I know of no time in the history of the Church when the missionary program has been carried forward on as energetic, intelligent, and high plane in general as is occurring at the present time.

I was especially grateful for the privilege of touring the Central American Mission because of my intense interest in the Book of Mormon and in the Lamanites or Indians. Perhaps there is no part of either of the Americas that has as many full-blooded Indians residing therein as do some of the countries of Central America. This fact is especially true of Guatemala. In that country approximately sixty percent of the people are full-blooded Indians. They are primarily of the Quiché Maya race. These people have refrained from marriage with white peoples primarily because they believe that their Indian blood and their people in general are equal, if not superior, to the white races. The parents among the Quiché Maya people regulate the marriages of their sons and daughters, just as did the parents in ancient Israel. It is their purpose to see that their children marry within their own race and preserve their own religion and culture as far as possible.

The Quiché Mayan Indians have a great heritage and an unusual culture. They are a very religious people. Their religion became definitely paganized following the Book of Mormon period; however, a study of their religious beliefs and practices readily reveals the fact that the roots of many of their religious practices extend back into Book of Mormon times when the true gospel of Jesus Christ was had by their ancestors.

Following the Spaniards conquest of the Quiché Mayas during the sixteenth century, the Catholic *padres* soon found that they could not stamp out the Indians' religion; thereupon they superimposed as many of the Catholic beliefs and practices on the Indian religion as the natives would take, making the Quiché Mayan religion of today a conglomerate.

It is my personal belief that the Quiché Mayas of Guatemala are as directly descended from Book of Mormon peoples as any of the Indians of the Western Hemisphere. Through my research and personal contact with these people, I have learned that they have many traditions that have a kinship to the Book of Mormon teachings. This fact holds true in the written works, such as the *Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*, the *Popul Vuh*, and *The Annals of the Cakchiquels*, as well as in their oral traditions, many of which have

been handed down from generation to generation to the present day. The fact that many of the Quiché Mayas do not speak Spanish but have retained their native tongue has made it possible for their traditions to be carried forward unpolluted to our day.

I had been informed that the Quiché Mayas of Guatemala still retained many of their ancient traditions, some of which evidently had their roots in Book of Mormon times, and so when I received the assignment to tour the Central American Mission, I wrote to President Wagner and requested that his missionaries arrange for me to interview some of the old Quiché Maya Indians at Totonicapán. I advised the president to have the missionaries make arrangements for me to interview someone who was well informed on the traditions of that people. In accordance with my request, when I arrived at Totonicapán I found that the missionaries had engaged the services of a man named Jesus Caranza Juarez. Mr. Juarez was a very intelligent person. He not only spoke Quiché Maya, but he also was very apt in the use of the Spanish language. He had been initiated in all the rites and rituals of the Quiché Maya religion and had a thorough understanding of the traditions of that people. For these reasons he was an ideal person to interview.

Since I do not speak Spanish, I asked one of the missionaries to act as interpreter. I said to the missionary, "Do not give Mr. Juarez any lead questions that might indicate to him the kind of answers that we desire to receive. I want to know the exact and accurate traditions of his people; and so I would suggest that you ask simple, straightforward questions; for example, the first question I suggest that you ask is: 'What are the Quiché Maya practices and teachings regarding marriage?'"

Once again I warned the missionary to make no explanation to Mr. Juarez but merely to give him the direct question as I had suggested. This procedure the missionary followed. In response to the foregoing question, Mr. Juarez immediately replied:

"Marriage is the most sacred, the most revered, the most holy, and the greatest of all the religious teachings and practices in the Quiché Maya religion. We have two kinds of marriages. In one kind the ceremony is performed by the priest. Only the good people marry in this kind of marriage. By good people I mean those who do not get drunk, those who do not steal nor lie, and those who are morally clean—in brief, the people who live in accordance with all the teachings of the Quiché Maya religion."

Then he said, "The priest performs the marriage ceremony for those good people; and when he marries them, they are married not only for this life but for the next world also. They remain husband and wife forever."

I was surprised, in fact astonished, to get such an explanation regarding the marriage custom of the Quiché Maya Indians, and so I injected a question at this point. I said to the missionary,

"Ask Mr. Juarez where the Quiché Maya people ever got such a teaching and practice in their religion. Ask him if they got it from the Catholic Church?"

The reason I asked that question is because the Catholic religion is about the only one that has made much headway in Guatemala. The Quiché Maya Indians have had some of the Catholic beliefs and practices superimposed upon their ancient paganized Indian religion.

The missionary asked Mr. Juarez the question as directed, and Mr. Juarez immediately replied:

"Oh, no! Certainly not! We did not get that teaching from the Catholics. The Catholics do not have that kind of marriage, and they never have had that kind of marriage."

Then Mr. Juarez explained: "We got that type of marriage from our ancestors. It came down from generation to generation through tradition. Our people practised that type of marriage and had a belief in marriage after death many, many years before the Spanish conquest. In fact, it dates back as far as our traditions go."

I have never read in the writings of archaeologists or other students of the Quiché Mayas that these Indians perform marriages which they believe will endure after death. Perhaps the fact that these Indians believe that their marriages continue for the next world would not be of interest to most people who contact them, and so authors would neglect to make a record of that practice even if they had been told that such existed.

Although I was greatly surprised to find that the Quiché Maya Indians practise a form of marriage which they believe will endure throughout the next world, I was pleased to learn that such was their tradition because I have understood that every time the gospel of Jesus Christ has been on the earth in its fulness that God's true law of celestial marriage constituted part of that gospel. I also know that the true gospel of Jesus Christ was had in ancient America in Book of Mormon days, and certainly the Nephites would have had the true order of celestial marriage. Thus the Quiché Maya Indians of Guatemala, being descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, have preserved in their system of marriage certain things which hold a resemblance to the true order of marriage as given by the Lord to the Nephites.

Mr. Juarez continued his description of the Quiché Maya custom of marriage by describing the other type of marriage in a rather interesting terminology. He said:

"The other kind of marriage our people call the renegade marriage. Those who receive this kind of marriage are the people that the priests will not marry because they are not good people. They do not live in accordance with the teachings of the Quiché Maya religion."

Then he explained why they were not good people, pointing out that their lives were opposite to the lives of the people who were married by the priests

for this life and for the world to come. He said:

"These people who receive the renegade marriage get drunk. They are not honest. They are immoral, and they are not people of good integrity. Their marriages last only until death. They are not married for the world to come."

Mr. Juarez also described to us the various orders of the Quiché Maya priesthood. He stated that the priests were selected from among the spiritual-minded or psychic boys just as they merged into adolescence; and then he explained how these boys were trained for their appointments as priests. He also described to us the Quiché Mayas' system of baptism and the various other rites in their religion, as well as the tradition of their origin.

As you probably already know, the Quiché Mayas have a tradition that they are descendants of Abraham and Jacob, being of the house of Israel. Their traditions maintain that their ancestors came from over the sea and that they were brought to America by the Lord, being led by a prophet of God. They also maintain that that prophet had a peculiar instrument which guided them here which instrument operated in accordance with the faith of the people. Certainly one readily recognizes that instrument as being the Liahona, which is described in the Book of Mormon. (Alma 37:38.) All of the foregoing claims made by the Quiché Maya Indians are recorded in their early writings, and of course they correlate quite closely with the account given in the Book of Mormon.

The following day after interviewing Mr. Juarez at Totonicapán, the mission president, his wife, some missionaries, and I drove to Chichicastenango, Guatemala, for the purpose of attending a Quiché Maya religious service. At eight o'clock in the morning in the St. Tomas Cathedral, erected for the Indians by the Catholic Church, the Catholic priest conducted mass for the Indians, it being a Catholic religious service.

As soon as the Catholic mass ended, the Indians conducted their own religious services, which in general were definitely pagan but in which I could also readily recognize some factors which evidently had their origin in Book of Mormon days.

I was intensely interested to see twelve Quiché Maya men on the stand at the front of the cathedral presiding over the Indian services. I asked a young Quiché Maya man who was serving as our guide who those twelve men were. He replied:

"They are the twelve high priests who are in charge of the Quiché Maya religion."

I then asked, "Why twelve?"

The answer I received was: "Custom, tradition!" And then the guide explained that the twelve men were the best men that could be found among his people. He said that they were selected to be head over the church because of their good characters, because of their abilities of leadership, and be-

cause of various other good qualifications which he enumerated.

This young man who was serving as our interpreter could speak English fluently as well as Spanish and Quiché. He informed us that he had had very little schooling and had learned English and Spanish from the tourists. This fact indicated to me that he was very intelligent.

In a recent conversation with President Edgar Wagner of the Central American Mission, I stated that it was my opinion that if his missionaries could convert this Quiché Maya guide and several other young men of similar abilities—young men who could speak Spanish, English, and also Quiché—and then if they were called to do missionary work among the Quiché Maya people, they perhaps would make a marvelous contribution in taking the gospel to those people. Some of the elders from the United States could be assigned to serve as companions to the Quiché Maya missionaries for the principal purpose of giving them a basic understanding of the gospel. Then these Quiché missionaries, who would undoubtedly be favorably received by their own people, could easily obtain admittance into the homes of the best of the Quiché Maya families, perhaps even into the homes of the twelve high priests who preside over their church. In this way the gospel of Jesus Christ, with special emphasis on the Book of Mormon, could be taken to the Indians who speak only Quiché. I believe that these Indians would readily recognize that the Book of Mormon was their book, since the traditions which they hold so sacred fit so well with the teachings of that book.

At the present time we are not able to do missionary work with a vast majority of the Quiché Maya Indians because they do not speak Spanish or English and our missionaries do not speak Quiché. These Indians are a very religious people, practising their own religion according to their highly cherished traditions. I believe the day will come when missionary work will go forth with much power and success among this people. At that time we shall see results similar to those which we read about in the Book of Mormon when the sons of King Mosiah did such phenomenal work among the Lamanites. Eventually the day of the Lamanites will come when all of the predictions regarding them made by the holy prophets and recorded in the Book of Mormon will be fulfilled. It is my opinion that at that time thousands and thousands of the Quiché Maya Indians will join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and will become valiant in the faith.

In closing I humbly ask God's choicest blessings to come upon the missionaries in the Central American Mission and also upon the missionary work throughout the entire world. May the proselyting program go forward with much force that the honest in heart may be sought out quickly. This I ask humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.