Winning Souls unto Christ: The Meanings of Missionary Board Games, 1980–2008

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Article

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T HE FIRST MISSION TRIP THAT YOU CHOOSE IS TO CHINA. YOU CON-
vince the other players to come with you. All of you land in jail and
the trip is over. All of the other players are looking at you in a very
unchristian-like way." The back of the *Missionary Conquest* box continues to
outline the rest of the gameplay: you dupe fellow players into investing in a
flimsy financial opportunity, then land on Mission Board Hearing where oppo-
nents choose judgment "in the name of spiritual growth," losing you a claimed
country and "Blessing Points." Throwing caution to the wind, you venture
forth to proselyte in foreign lands and end up martyred for the missionary
cause.[27] *Missionary Conquest* may not hold the prestige of *Clue* or *Candyland,*
but religious theming has long been a major part of societal games and pastimes.

Religious board games have a vast history, dating back to Ancient Meso-
potamia. These ranged from role-playing as nuns and priests to basic competi-
tions of scriptural knowledge.[28] Board games were a common facet of popular
religious practice well before the rise of the commercialized games in nine-
teenth century America. Yet, while many board games shifted away from an

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27. *Missionary Conquest*, (D&E Enterprises, 1992).
28. See Steve Craig, *Sports and Games of the Ancients* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press,
2002) and R. C. Bell, *Board and Table Games From Many Civilizations* (London: Oxford
University Press, 1969).

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overtly religious tone in the early twentieth century, missionary-themed games saw an upsurge in production post-1980.[29] Previous games that centered on missionaries were usually historically based (about Saint Paul's missionary journeys, etc.), rather than themed after contemporary experiences.[30] However, Protestant and Latter-day Saint game makers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries attempted to transform their understandings of current missions into a competitive pastime. This included encouraging members to support or become missionaries themselves. Mission board games certainly fill a niche category of entertainment but are largely ignored even among religious board game scholarship.

The important research by Nikki Bado-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris is the most thorough exploration of religious board games to date.[31] In *Toying With God,* they noted the tendency of religious scholars to disregard games and toys. Bado-Fralick and Norris emphasized the significance of these pastimes as a part of the source base for historical religious research. Despite the innovative approach to expanding research avenues, modern missionary games are vastly underrepresented and unexplored. Only one uniquely missionary-themed game is mentioned in their work. Too often dismissed as childish, board games are often revealing of a community's standards, aspirations, and sense of place in the world.

From the production of the first such game nearly 165 years ago to the present, missionary board games have remained remarkably consistent in their portrayal of missions. Latter-day Saint and Protestant missions board games rely on militaristic rhetoric, missionary identity, and specific depictions of needy converts that are rooted in each religious group's lived and perceived experiences. The rich collections of missionary board games at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Church History Library, and Yale Divinity School's Special Collections deepens our understanding of how popular conceptions of missionaries

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29. See Philip E. Orbanes, *The Game Makers: The Story of Parker Brothers, From Tiddledy Winks to Trivial Pursuit* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, 2004) and Robert Rath, "Board Games Were Indoctrination Tools for Christ, Then Capitalism," *Waypoint*, last modified November 30, 2017, https://waypoint.vice.com/en_us/article/vb38gj/mansion-of-happiness-board-game-history.

30. There are a few examples of seventeenth century Italian Catholic missionary games (*Il Giuoco Del Missionario* and *Viaggi Missionari*) that follow a *Game of the Goose* board—a simpler version of *Chutes and Ladders*.

31. Nikki Baldo-Fralick and Rebecca Sachs Norris, *Toying with God* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010.)

reveal the complicated nature of religious identity, one that is inseparable from contemporary political and social ideologies.

Start on "Go": The Mission Board Game in America

Religious themes permeated the earliest American board games. In 1843, William and Stephen Bradshaw Ives created the first popular, manufactured board game in the United States, the *Mansion of Happiness.* This "instructive moral and entertaining amusement," involved players landing on either virtues or sins that affected their progress to the mansion.[32] *Mansion of Happiness* marked the beginning of the marketed, mass-produced commodity in pastime amusements and set the stage for missionary-themed games, as the Ives brothers then released *The Game of Pope and Pagan, Or Siege of the Stronghold of Satan, by the Christian Army* a year later. As the title explains, a Christian army of "devoted missionaries" moved toward Satan's fortress, guarded by his supposed allies of Pope and Pagan.[33] In this game, one player acted as the missionary force in an attempt to defeat their opponent who manipulated Satan's "defenders." It was a battle between good and evil, where the devil's side would almost always lose.[34]

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32. Margaret Hofer, *The Games We Played: The Golden Age of Board & Table Games* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), 78. Based on The Royal Game of the Goose, imported from Italy to England in the sixteenth century, with goose-pictured squares allowing players to take another turn. See R. C. Bell, *The Boardgame Book* (New York: Exeter Books, 1983), 141.

33. Based on the Middle Ages game, *Fox and Geese*, in which one player controls sixteen "geese" in attempt to trap the other player's solitary "fox" figure, which may jump over geese pieces to an empty space to eliminate them (akin to checkers). The odds are in favor of the geese, where if played right, the fox will almost always lose. See R. C Bell, *Board and Table Games*, 76. It evolved gradually to capture a more militaristic attitude in Asalto, where game pieces now represented soldiers attacking a fort. Success was always severely slanted in favor of the soldiers. The object of the game for the attacker is to use fifty soldiers to either surround the defender's three officers or invade the fort. The defender wins when they have killed enough soldiers, leaving less than the requisite nine to invade the fort. This version attempts to ease the disadvantages of the defending position However, the attacking player continues to have the upper hand.

34. However, should the person playing as the devil's cohorts win, they "are expected to be very liberal in his or her contributions to the missionary cause, for having dared to defend a bad cause." With this encouragement of financially supporting missionaries, the devil would never truly win, a justification for play-acting as the demonic.

The missionaries did not defend their convictions against malicious hordes of enemies, but rather proactively worked to destroy the fort of Satan. Here they ventured forth, not necessarily in pursuit of converts, but to siege the garrison of Satan and his supporters.[35] *Pope and Pagan* paved the way for future games to follow suit in crafting proselytizing into pastime.

Yet missionary-based games mostly disappeared from public view until the 1960s. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, board games became less religious as a whole. The only appearances of those based on missions were found at Protestant mission fairs. For example, a 1930s British game, *Snapshots* was available for purchase. Similar to Go-Fish, it includes cards with depictions of people, nature, characteristics, and missionary progress of twelve international nonwhite missions.[36] These kinds of games were found at exhibitions to raise both money and awareness for missionaries. Other products paraded at these events included calendars, trading cards, prints, coloring books, and other small items representing different cultures and lands of established Protestant missions.[37] However, board games intended solely for entertainment were not available for decades. Only in the 1980s did the number of Latter-day Saint and Protestant board games exponentially increase, and many of them were specifically missionary-themed.[38]

Onward, Christian Soldier: The Mission as a Battlefield

When mission-based games resurfaced, they remarkably resembled the lost *Pope and Pagan* thematically. It is unlikely that any of the modern game makers

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35. William and Stephen B. Ives, *The Game of Pope and Pagan, or Siege of the Stronghold of Satan by the Christian Army* (Salem: W. and S.B. Ives, 1844). The famed Parker Brothers would eventually buy out the Ives' holdings, making the Ives truly the forefathers of American board games.

36. See *Snapshots* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1935). The twelve country divisions are Japan, N. India, S. India, Sudan, Palestine, Persia, W. Africa, South Sea Islands, Egypt, N.W. Canada, S. China, W. China.

37. See "'Japan: A Missionary Color Book for Children' by Theodore W. Engstrom and Paul Hubartt, 1948" and other examples in Yale's Archive https://archives.yale.edu/search?utf8 =%E2%9C%93&op%5B%5D=&q%5B%5D=221+OV1&limit=&field%5B%5D=&from_year %5B%5D=&to_year%5B%5D=&commit=Search.

38. There are a few examples from around 1960, such as *Golden Converts*, yet only post 1980 is there an upsurge in the amount of mission-themed games.

ever knew about this century-old game, yet many new missionary games still relied on a militaristic setting for gameplay. An example from an Latter-day Saint background, *The Greatest Mission Is the World*, produced by the Missionary Novelty Company in 1989, was essentially a rebranding of RISK marketed for an Latter-day Saint audience.[39] The description read, "You [and your opponents] have been called as Mission President for Planet Earth," wherein you must "convert the world" by using your "missionary army [to] determine who's [sic] missionaries will be sent home." The use of "missionary army" did little to hide the aggressive tone of the game. *The Greatest Mission* displayed missions as a strategic field for world domination. The board game used the exact country breakdown and language as RISK, merely putting "Mission" after each region name. The same rules for gameplay applied to "calling" missionaries and strengthening missions.[40] Missionaries replaced soldiers for a competitive exploit in beating fellow players by capturing all countries. Even though *Pope and Pagan* and *The Greatest Mission* existed in a different time period and came from a different theological background, the concept of a mission was explicitly rooted in imperialism and war.[41]

Three years later, a Protestant missionary board game surfaced and likewise framed missions as a colonialism pursuit. Entitled *Missionary Conquest*, players competed to claim a certain number of missions around the world with the requisite accompanying "Blessing Points.[42] Squares lined the perimeter of the board, while the center contained a map of the world awaiting mission establishment. The map divided the world into sixty-four countries ready for

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39. Originally a bumper sticker company, selling over 50,000 "____ is the greatest mission in the world," the founder started creating board games to fill a "niche . . . market . . . for the Latter-day Saint consumer." His plan was to "take the most popular games and make them with an Latter-day Saint theme," selling to several Latter-day Saint bookstores, including Deseret Book, the BYU Bookstore, and at one point talking with Walmart about selling there. After games were discontinued in 2010 due to low popularity, the company switched to app games that now boast about 4,000 users. Bruce Hammond, email to the author, March 10, 2019.

40. Apparently the game did not achieve much success, as there was no copyright lawsuit filed. *The Greatest Mission is the World*.

41. Bruce Hammond, *The Greatest Mission Is the World* (Missionary Novelty Company, 1989).

42. Winning the game is possible by making four successful mission trips in one area of the world and earning 700 Blessing Points; six successful mission trips in any part of the world and earning 500 Blessing Points; or a successful mission to Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia with 400 Blessing Points.

the taking.[43] In the midst of world domination, players landed on squares that bring "Blessings," "Temptations," "Financial Opportunities," "Mission Trips" and "Mission Board Hearings."

Mission trips were a central part of the game. When a player landed on a mission trip square, they selected which country they want to claim. Other players could elect to join as a "fellow missionary." All missionaries helped pay for the cost and received any Blessing Points gained in that country. There were a number of possible Mission Trip outcomes, themed according to each country, and determined by rolling a dice. The most common results affected Blessing Points, but occasionally players could be sent to "Bad Stewardship," where they would lose a turn.[44] If a Mission Trip was successful (i.e. the player was not expelled), only the primary missionary would take control and claim the country. To win, a player had to proclaim "Missionary Conquest!" and then take their final turn. As long as they still had the requisite number of Blessing Points and controlled territories by the end of their turn, they would win. If this was not uttered, the player could not win, even if all other requirements were met. Mission trips were the best way to earn Blessing Points, but conscious declaration of conquest was the final, necessary key to win.

The game was committed to deliberately conquering the world. Players consciously strategized in selecting which countries to claim. This was a stark difference from similar board games, such as *Monopoly*, where so much depends on the luck of landing on certain properties. These missions became a place of competition, a colonial battle to claim countries and impede a competitor's progress. For this Protestant board game, preaching the gospel was secondary to dominating and controlling the most countries, a continuation of the military-mission concept.

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43. The divisions include North/Central America (Canada, Cuba, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua Panama, United States), South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay), Europe (Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden), Arabian Peninsula/Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey), Northern Africa (Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Sudan), Sub-Saharan Africa (Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zimbabwe) Middle East/Asia/Southeast Asia (Afghanistan, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, Russia) and the clumped group of Islands (Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands). *Missionary Conquest.*

44. Most often for refusing to take criticism or advice or for spending mission funds irresponsibly. Examples include buying excessive souvenirs, financing a yacht, taking side trips to Mount Fuji, and selling items on the black market.

Mission-themed imperial conquests persisted with the 2008 Latter-day Saint *Build the Kingdom* game, based on *Settlers of Catan*. Whereas *Catan* involved claiming natural resources to build roads, settlements, and cities, *Build the Kingdom* allowed players to use "Principles of the Gospel" cards (faith, repentance, baptism, prayer, Preach My Gospel) to set down copies of The Book of Mormon, converts, and wards. *Build the Kingdom* presented missions as an invasive expansion of religion. The title itself contained a double meaning. Reinforced by Latter-day Saint rhetoric of "building up the Kingdom of God," as a drive for spiritual development, the direct implication of a religious *Catan* posited the notion as a literal empire rather than a figurative one.[45] Even into the twenty-first century, board games established missions as conquests.

The appearance of this theme is directly connected to the political underpinnings of religious identity. As game makers combined light-hearted pastimes with a religious proselytizing theme, they continually returned to the global domination model. Militaristic rhetoric has been commonplace in religious discourse and continues to be used by leaders today.[46] Missions have a long tradition of being connected to militaries and colonialism. Yet these games were produced soon after formal colonialism began to be disestablished after World War II. Consequently, this reliance on militaristic imagery came from the conflation of religious and political identities. Most games have been produced at the end of the Cold War and during the increased involvement of the United States in the Middle East. These military engagements had a decisively religious tone. In his first speech after 9/11, President Bush identified the War on Terrorism as a "crusade."[47] Hearkening back to the aggressive, religiously backed military campaigns of the Middle Ages, Bush framed current events as no longer uniquely political. The blur between state and religion, between military and missionary, had not disappeared in the twentieth century.

Christian churches often came out in support of these administrative decisions. While there were factions of more liberal Protestants opposed to war, a

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45. Bruce Hammond, *Build the Kingdom* (Missionary Novelty Company, 2008).

46. "The prophet of God called for an army . . . when you enlist in military service, or as a full-time missionary, your life is drastically different . . ." See David Dickson, "How to Enlist (and Stay Enlisted) in the Youth Battalion," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* 2019, accessed January 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/youth/article/how-to-enlist-and-stay-enlisted-in-the-youth-battalion?lang=eng.

47. George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival," *The White House,* September 2001, accessed January 2020, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html.

large number of Christian denominations retreated to a conservative political stance.[48] Many church leaders backed President Bush and his policies of military involvement. He "received spiritual solace and counsel, and crucial public support," from local leaders as well as public figures, such as Billy Graham and Robert Schuller.[49] Latter-day Saint Church leadership also appeared to be more supportive than derisive, as shown by President Gordon B. Hinckley during the 2003 April General Conference. While he directed his audience to love people of all religions and nations, he did not condemn the war and was careful to align the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's position in compliance with the government.[50] The lay members of the Church likewise were generally supportive of the war. Members of the Church participated in the military as soldiers and nurses.[51] Attitudes trickled down to lay members of Protestant and Latter-day Saint congregations, including those who produced and purchased missionary board games. The militaristic-based, missionary-themed board games reflected the fact that these political tensions were linked with religious identity.

More Than A Pawn:
The Gender and Race of Missionary Identity

Missionary board games also exemplified the cultural perceptions that defined the concept of a missionary. One of the earliest Latter-day Saint mission-themed games is *Missionary Zeal*, "fun for all ages." Created in 1981 by Latter-day Saint

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48. ". . . leaders of more than 20 major Protestant and Orthodox Christian denominations, joined by 15 Roman Catholic bishops, have reaffirmed their opposition to the war and called for a cease-fire." Peter Steinfels, "WAR IN THE GULF: The Home Front; Church Leaders Reaffirm Opposition to War," *New York Times,* last modified 1991, accessed January 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/15/us/war-in-the-gulf-the-home-front-church -leaders-reaffirm-opposition-to-war.html.

49. Andrew Preston, "The Politics of Realism and Religion: Christian Responses to Bush's New World Order," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 99.

50. Gordon B. Hinckley, "War and Peace" *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 2003, accessed January 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-con ference/2003/04/war-and-peace?lang=eng.

51. Patricia Rushton, Lynn Clark Callister, Maile K. Wilson, comps., Latter-day Saint Nurses at War: A Story of Caring and Sacrifice (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2005), 199–270.

couple Scott and Marcia Richards, this game required players to set an individual mission baptismal goal to be met in a certain number of rounds, emphasizing the societal understanding that missions had specific deadlines. Cards and instructions were written in second person, but visual representations clearly demonstrated identity. Even though the game was created by a couple, all missionaries shown on the board are white males.[52] This imagery was perpetuated throughout subsequent decades.

For one game, the attention on male missionaries was an essential part of play. Happy Valley Publishing founder Mike Agrelius noted the lack of Latter-day Saint board games, particularly those of a mission theme.[53] After he returned from a mission, he created a card game called *Missionary Blues* (1981).[54] Some of the cards included "Zone Leaders," "Assistant to the President," and "District Leaders," all of which impeded another player's progress. Titles of power played an important role in establishing identity in the mission field. For Latter-day Saint missionaries, these titles are reserved for males only.

While most cards depicted male missionaries, there was one sister missionary in the deck. The "Lady Missionary" card reversed the order of play. The commentary is not subtle. A sister missionary was a reverse of the norm; a retreat from what a missionary was expected to be. "Lady Missionary" had been rarely used to describe sister missionaries since the 1910s.[55] Using this term further alienated women as missionaries, and their inclusion in the game seemed to only point out their absurdity in the mission field. While percentages of Latter-day Saint missionaries were heavily skewed to males in the 1980s, sister missionaries still made up about thirty percent in the field.[56] Certainly, Agrelius'

52. Scott and Marcia Richards, *Missionary Zeal* (Randall Publishing, 1981).

53. At one point, 4,500 of his games sold in a year in only six stores. See Mike Drysdale, Interview with Mike Agrelius, *Mormon Game Design Blog,* modified November 2009, accessed March 2019, http://mormongamedesign.blogspot.com/2009/11/mike-agrelius-from-happy-valley.html.

54. Can be played nine different ways. The box provides many examples: "Crazy Zone Leaders" for Crazy Eights, "Oh Fetch" for Go Fish, "Non-Alcoholic Gin" for, yes, Gin, and many more. See Mike Agrelius, *Missionary Blues* (Happy Valley Publishing, 1981).

55. "Women with a Mission," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,* last modified June 15, 2012, https://history.Latter-day Saint.org/article/women-with-a-mission-overview?lang=eng.

56. Clint Kimball, Figure 4i, "New Missionaries Breakdown," Estimated *Latter-day Saint Membership Statistics*, modified August 20, 2018, Accessed March 2019, http://www.fullerconsideration.com/membership.php.

perceptions of gender informed his decisions as he made his game. He felt that the few Latter-day Saint trivia games that already existed were not popular: "the girls that hadn't been on missions thought the questions were too tough and the guys that had been on missions thought the questions were too easy . . . nobody played them."[57] Even when he tried to create a game that would interest both genders, *Missionary Blues* catered mostly to returned male missionaries. Other games from around the same time were similarly designed. Despite the presence of women in the mission field, board games were targeted to the larger demographic of white male missionaries.

In the 1990s, Latter-day Saint mission-themed board games began to change the gender dynamic. In 1995, the Mountain Top Game Company produced *The Missionary Game*, an almost exact replica of the Richards couple's *Missionary Zeal.* This updated version switched between gendered pronouns in the instructions, but still retained the white male missionary images on the board. By changing the wording but maintaining the stereotypical missionary visual, the game served to include female players but not female missionaries.[58]

While attempts at inclusion of women began to appear, the overwhelming theming remained largely male. A slight change was made in the Latter-day Saint game *Missionary: Impossible* (1996), as they switched between gendered pronouns and included photographs of both male and female missionaries in the instructions. However, the telltale symbols of a shirt, tie, and badge show up in the dots of the "i" letters in the logo, which emphasized the male missionary outfit. The object of the game also skewed to the male missionary experience. This involved laying down "Week" cards to be the first team of two to reach 100 Weeks. Latter-day Saint missions are for a set period of time, eighteen months for women and twenty-four for men. The game's victory is measured closer to the 104 weeks males serve, again underscoring the pressured notion that missions are defined by length of service. The game expanded missionary identity with an intentional presence of women, but its core design still valued male missionary service as the goal.[59]

Further inclusion in *Missionary: Impossible* (1996) came with the depictions of nonwhite missionaries. After Church leaders rescinded the priesthood and temple ban for those of African descent in 1978, all members were finally

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57. Drysdale, "Interview with Mike Agrelius."

58. *The Missionary Game* (Mountain Top, 1995).

59. Aspen Books, *Missionary: Impossible The Game* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1996).

allowed to serve missions.[60] *Missionary: Impossible* acknowledges this change with diverse depictions on the cards. It is important to note the ratios: white males appeared on five and a half of the cards (one half of a companionship), versus the three white females, and the one and a half black male cards.[61] It took eighteen years after the lifting of the ban for black missionaries to appear in games, and still only on seventeen percent of the cards. While there were strides to create a fuller representation of missionaries, the white male still dominated the public imagination.

The most recent Latter-day Saint missionary board game redefined this concept altogether. *How to Host the Greatest Mission in the World* (2008) encouraged players to fill out ballots about their missions and takes turns telling stories. Those voted as "Best" for various categories received blue ribbons provided in the game, implying missions are only as good as the stories they make. However, nonmissionaries were invited to participate in the game as well, by sharing any missionary experience they had. The game redefined "missionary" in citing President David O. McKay's "every member a missionary" mantra.[62] The back of the box made this clear: "everyone has served a mission even those who didn't serve a full-time mission. Everyone lives in a mission and can talk about their missionary efforts." McKay's intentions were to increase "missionary work" by encouraging lay members to approach nonmember family and friends with gospel invitations. *How to Host* took this proverbial quote further by equating simple, religious conversations with full- or part-time service.

This is a fundamental shift from all previous representations of missionaries. Nearly fifty years of Church leaders and members employing the phrase has made it commonplace. But its presence as the justifying backbone for a new party game somewhat alters the original message of trying to be more open to discussing spiritual beliefs. According to this definition, no longer do individuals have to go through a process of spiritual, physical, and financial preparation; receive a formal call; be ordained and set apart; or temporarily ignore vocational and educational pursuits in order to be considered a missionary. While the board

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60. As the Church does not keep statistics of racial identities, black missionary numbers are difficult to trace. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 241.

61. *Missionary: Impossible*.

62. David O. McKay, *One Hundred Twenty-ninth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Report of Discourses,* (1959), accessed March 2019, https://archive.org/details/conferencereport1959a/page/n123.

game was really intended for returned missionaries, the caveat of "life is a mission" was included to reach a wider audience. It reconstructed the definition of missionary to include all lay members for the sake of entertainment and profit.

Yet, even with its inclusive redefinition, the intended audience was unmistakably male. The back of the box was careful to point out it was fit for any gathering from "a small group to a big Elders or High Priests Quorum social." [63] Despite the "every member a missionary" attitude, the game was still intended for mostly men. While there was a significant difference in the numbers of male and female missionaries, there were still over five thousand sister missionaries serving that were largely ignored or belittled by the time of the game's release.[64] Even in the twenty-first century, Latter-day Saint board games continued to deal with missionaries in very gendered terms.

For Protestant board games, missionary identities were a bit more ambiguous. In *Missionary Conquest*, there were references to gender-neutral spouses and children coming along on Mission Trips, a common occurrence for foreign Protestant missions. Different power struggles were also present in the form of "Mission Board Hearings." A player was sent to a *Monopoly*-like jail by landing on the square or rolling an unlucky number on a mission trip. Once here, the player defended his/her case of excellent missionary work while the other players voted to pardon or punish. Unlike *Missionary Blues*, this game allowed all missionaries to be in a role of power, rather than only those with appointed, gendered titles.

This move away from specific missionary identification was a stark difference from the male-heavy imagery of Latter-day Saint games, a reflection of the different cultures surrounding missions that defined who was eligible or likely to serve. Most of the Latter-day Saint games were produced years after President Spencer W. Kimball's 1981 address concerning the expectation that every male member should serve a mission.[65] As social and ecclesiastical pressure grew, so did the number of male missionaries serving. It became standard for

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63. Bruce Hammond, *How to Host the Greatest Mission in the World Party Game* (Missionary Novelty Company, 2008).

64. Sister missionaries made up about 20% of the mission field in 2008. Clint Kimball, "New Missionaries Breakdown."

65. Spencer W. Kimball, "President Kimball Speaks Out on Being a Missionary," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, May 1981, accessed March 2019, https://www.Latter-day Saint.org/study/new-era/1981/05/president-kimball-speaks-out-on-being-a-missionary?lang=eng.

nineteen-year-old males to venture forth to proselytize, deeply influencing public notion of what defined a missionary. Missionary depictions remained largely unchanged over time. Although later games tried to break the white male mold, the image was inescapable. Popular conceptions of missionaries continued to promote an unchanging standard, even as the mission field grew more diverse. Nonwhite female missionaries were not depicted anywhere, and little attention was given to any ethnicity outside the few token black males.

Because Protestant missionaries often included young husbands and wives as well as a large number of single female missionaries, the term did not become as synonymous with the male gender. The Protestant versions therefore did not include gender as a major part of the games. Condensing missions into 30–90-minute amusements revealed the limitations of popular understandings of missionaries. Board games reflected the social pressures and expectations surrounding missionary service, caught up in a default construction of the modern missionary.

Cannibals as Converts: The Missionary's Audience

Game boards carefully created specific depictions of the kinds of people missionaries would come in contact with. Yet, regardless of production date or religious background, board games emphasized common themes of a cultural, religious, and/or ethnic other. The way converts were included by each game revealed a great deal about the religious cultural attitudes.

The few mission-themed board games preceding the 1980s upsurge clearly outlined who the converts were, echoes of common societal discrimination. The nineteenth century game *Pope and Pagan* provided examples of non-Christian peoples, including "A Hindoo woman." An etching on the board portrayed the sati ritual, emphasizing the exotic, barbaric, pagan, and ritualistic nature of the racial, and specifically noted, religious other. This echoed many popular New England images that portrayed Hinduism as "bloody, violent, superstitious, and backward" in need of Christianity's light and order.[66] This paganized conception of converts was echoed in another game created in the early twentieth century. Produced by the Embossing Company of New York, *Missionary*

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66. Michael J. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30.

Puzzle intentionally aligned with the company's motto "toys that teach."[67] The game advertised five puzzle games in one, but only one game has a name, "Missionaries and Cannibals." The game was merely a mathematical puzzle, moving all pieces across an imagined river without leaving a solitary missionary alone with a cannibal at any time.[68] These small cubes had no resemblance to any human figure, whether missionary or cannibal, and there is little reason for such theming to be applied. This fantastical, exotic vision of the people that missionaries interacted with was evident in a simple, rebranded logic puzzle. It feeds into heavy-handed, rhetorical explanations of superstition and inhumane cultural practices in depicting a missionary's "heathen" audience. For "toys that teach," *Missionary Puzzle* certainly promoted a specific understanding about the missionary experience and their converts.

While games from post-1980 were not so blatant about heathenism, they continued to tap into a history of hierarchical divisions of power and importance. The 1992 Protestant board game *Missionary Conquest* emphasized religious and cultural differences from all around the world. The categorizations of people include Muslims, Buddhists, Catholic monks, Communists, Atheists, Hindus, Romani ("gypsies"), children, taxi drivers, civil servants, college students, Jews, refugees, alcoholics, cult members, ship builders, businessmen, old men, bus drivers, herdsmen, soldiers, Indians, local tribesmen, and construction workers. Muslims tended to appear the most frequently, both as opposition and converts. As the Persian Gulf War ended a year prior to the game's publishing, it comes as no surprise that the Middle East would be of particular interest to the game makers.

The Middle East stood out in the game thanks to the presence of martyrdom. Protestant missionary board games frequently referenced martyrdom. *Pope and Pagan* used names of well-known Protestant martyrs and allowed the Missionary Player to make necessary sacrifices to win the game. This reflected the deep

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67. "The Embossing Company," *Old Wood Toys*, Accessed March 2019, http://www.old woodtoys.com/the_embossing_company.htm. See also Richard Gottlieb, "Toy Companies That No Longer Exist: 'The Embossing Company of Albany,'" *Global Toy News*, November 20, 2017, https://www.globaltoynews.com/2017/11/educational-toys-a-look-back.html. The company began in 1870 by John Wesley Hyatt, specializing in wooden toys and later shifting to plastics. *Missionary Puzzle*, (Albany NY: Embossing Company). It would have been made before the Halsam Products Co. purchased the company in 1955, see Gottlieb.

68. In fact, a version involving husbands and wives existed a thousand centuries before the 1800s iteration of missionaries and cannibals appeared. See Ian Pressman and David Singmaster, "'The Jealous Husbands' and 'The Missionaries and Cannibals,'" *The Mathematical Gazette* 73 no. 464 (1989): 81.

convictions surrounding martyrdom. Protestant missionaries viewed it as a constant threat from all barbaric others that also sanctified missions for further gospel spread. *Missionary Conquest* highlights martyrdom as a region-specific incident. Players could only be martyred in Iran, Iraq or Saudi Arabia, which would put them out of the game. However, being martyred also resulted in 150 points, so if a player had already declared "Missionary Conquest!" before the start of the turn, those points could propel him/her into winning.[69] In *Missionary Conquest*, martyrdom was a strategic element of gameplay, but a somewhat rare occurrence. It would only happen if a player went to a Middle Eastern country and rolled the right number. This reflected a change in the understanding of martyrs in the twentieth century. Martyrdom was portrayed as a calculated gamble with serious risks—the threat was real, but highly unlikely. While the number of real-life martyrdoms officially recognized by leadership decreased over time, the tradition of revering martyrs and telling their stories endured.[70] *Missionary Conquest* reflected the retreat from a common, generalized heathenism to a specific political enemy, a shift seen in cultural attitudes of Protestants in the twentieth century. Yet rather than being a game entirely focused on converting the Middle East, the game looks to missionary work on a global scale.

While the cards depicted quite the spread of religions, occupations, and ages, they emphasized conversion numbers and reduced identity to a few characteristics. In some cases, only a specific number of people "won for Christ" were mentioned. These converts were a means to an end of getting Blessing Points. The goal of "converting," "winning," "accepting" and "saving" people was very much rooted in the rhetoric of ABCFM Annual Reports. Even as mission reports worked to expand home congregations' understanding of the larger Protestant world, many stereotypes and misconceptions persist, as seen in this household amusement.

Missionary Conquest was emblematic of another trend found in ABCFM reports. During the mid-twentieth century, the concept of Protestant foreign missions shifted from specific, select countries to a worldwide, increased humanitarian focus instead.[71] This is again a drastic change from previous Protestant

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69. *Missionary Conquest* instruction manual.

70. One of the more recent popularized (and controversial) martyrdoms is that of John Chau. See Eliza Griswold, "John Chau's Death on North Sentinel Island Roils the Missionary World," *The New Yorker,* last modified December 8, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/john-chaus-death-roils-the-missionary-world.

71. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 175.

definitions of "heathenism," as seen in *Pope and Pagan* and *Missionaries and Cannibals*.[72] The humanitarian aspects of missions appear in *Missionary Conquest* as players could build wells, construct schools, give money to the poor, smuggle in vaccines, and support orphanages. Attempts to improve impoverished countries were a part of real missions. This was especially true after 1910, as more missionaries became interested in the "worldly priorities of the social gospel," in providing temporal goods, infrastructure, and education.[73] Eighty years of increasing the amount of humanitarian work evidently impacted the reimagining of a mission as a board game. Yet, working to help people's temporal well-being sometimes fell secondary to other missionary efforts in the game.

In *Missionary Conquest*, the highest singular point value (second only to martyrdom) was rewarded for being expelled out of a country for political activism. Mission trip actions included protesting governments by speaking out against communism and condemning foreign leadership in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Indonesia. There were also a few instances where opposing abortion in places such as Poland and America provided those sought-after Blessing Points. Ironically, players achieved the most Blessing Points when forced to leave rather than staying to convert or strengthen a mission.

This move to celebrate political activism mirrored real-life Protestant missions. In the 1980s, Protestant mission leaders noticed a shift from "Bible-thumpers" to "Peace Corps types" among missionaries.[74] These missions were framed with very Protestant American ideals and politics in place. Condemning Communism and abortions superseded denouncing the devil. As Protestant and Evangelical votes became primary targets in late twentieth-century presidential campaigns, politics were stretched to become gospel truths. According to *Missionary Conquest*, subverting the government to further Protestant politics was more important than reconciling and converting.

However, not all political action was deemed positive. Often, players could get in trouble with local authorities for various misdeeds, costing Blessing Points. Even though much of the possible Mission trip action comes from an Americanized

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72. Protestants believed heathenism was deeply connected to concepts of civilization, and unless "profound changes" occurred, pagan audiences would always remain unconverted and uncivilized. See Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 210.

73. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 9.

74. William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 203–4.

stance, there were examples where acting like Americans was embarrassing or negative.[75] Acknowledging some faults in the American psyche was a break from the pattern established by previous missionary-themed board games.

For this Protestant game, the conscious construction of identity was more important. With increased education and global awareness, the recognition of the proud American mindset was clearly represented in this 1992 game. It reflected the complicated division of varying levels of support for Middle Eastern involvement. This self-awareness derived from continued efforts of intentionally creating "alliances with nonwhite, colonized people," or otherwise being "more globally conscious" over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[76] In 1930, the ABCFM encouraged, "our new attitude . . . is not one of assumed superiority but of sharing and cooperation . . . an eager welcoming of all the riches of truth and beauty they (of other lands) may bring to our total human heritage."[77] Inclusive rhetoric began to appear in limited ways in *Missionary Conquest*, but promoting Christianity over other religions and customs would still ultimately win the day. Disregard for religious groups and laws by bringing in illegal bibles, or preaching without a license were grounds for reward, not punishment. By the late twentieth century, the relationship between the missionary and the foreign other changed from fighting foes to teaching converts, although traces of superiority and exoticism remained.

The hierarchical relationship between missionary and foreign convert also appeared in the Latter-day Saint games of the same period. Converts were a main feature for half of the Latter-day Saint games, where having the highest number of believers constituted a win. Yet most of these games did not go into detail about who the converts were. The missionary's audience was a generic, unknown, blank slate, purposeless prior to a gospel invitation. This apparent lack of awareness of other cultures and peoples was a problematic issue that persists in Latter-day Saint attitudes to the present.[78] Converts were nameless, vague forms that were a means to an end. Latter-day Saint missions in real life

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75. Playing the "obnoxious," "spoiled" American, such as refusing to accept hospitality or aid from a religious or ethnic other or being culturally insensitive will lose Blessing Points. (Even though a great deal of the game is insensitive and stereotypical). Examples include telling a rather lame joke to aborigines in Australia, "berat[ing] a tribal chief for not accepting Christ" in Mali, or singing the "Star-Spangled Banner" in a Middle Eastern airport.

76. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad*, 1.

77. ABCFM Annual Reporting Minutes, (1930), 20.

78. *Decolonizing Mormonism: Approaching a Postcolonial Zion*, edited by Gina Colvin and Joanna Brooks, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press), 2018.

were often reduced down to the number of individuals converted. While this was not something explicitly instructed by leadership, it was and persists to be a common social belief among lay members. Most of the Latter-day Saint games of this period reflected the mix of religious identity with a societal influence. They were based in a societal conceptualization of what a mission and converts should look like.

However, there were some exceptions to the lack of convert identity in Latter-day Saint board games, yet they stayed rooted in focusing on what the convert lacked. In *Missionary Zeal,* contacts included a name, lifestyle description, and any anticipated issues in accepting the gospel.[79] These cards spanned a wide range of religions, occupations, and habits. Yet, the overwhelming dominance of American names implied that the "mission" was in the United States. These converts were not foreign because of their nationality, but rather because of their religion, attitude, and lifestyle choices.

In the game, players helped convert their contacts by playing cards such as "Needs of Love," "Inspiration," "Gospel Knowledge," and "Member Friendshipping."[80] If these cards were not played in a timely manner, the convert was lost. This placed missionaries in a specific timeframe for success, something that did not change in the 1995 reissue. Again, the Latter-day Saint concept of missions being set for a specific amount of time played a key role in the design of the game. The unconverted had a limited window to become baptized, but providing love, inspiration, information, and friends are all that were required for true conversion.

Part of this generic conversion formula came from the lack of proselytizing programs, as the first universal teaching pamphlet *Missionary Guide* was not published by the Latter-day Saint Church until 1988. It did not have a big enough impact to radically alter the redesign of the game seven years later.[81] Without standard practices across missions, understanding what it meant to preach and convert could vary drastically across locations. That did not stop

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79. The examples range from a sixty-year-old Protestant widow, to a forty-four-year-old Jehovah's witness, to a twenty-six year-old Born Again Christian. Problems preventing conversion include resisting the ban on coffee, tea, and alcohol, having depression and suicidal tendencies, reading anti-Mormon literature, struggling to leave one's original religion, and having concerns about women's roles in the church.

80. Players can only go along specific pathways to pick up these cards by means of an Obedience Card. These cards also bring Unexpected Blessings or Trials as well.

81. Benjamin Hyrum White, "The History of *Preach My Gospel,*" *Religious Studies Educator* 14, no. 1 (2013), accessed April 2019, https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-14-number-1-2013/history-preach-my-gospel.

Missionary Zeal and *The Missionary Game* from striving to impose uniformity on mission experience and individual conversion. It worked to define a specific concept of conversion by depicting converts with problems and missionaries with answers.

Mission-themed board games provided a fairly consistent view of converts across Latter-day Saint and Protestant backgrounds. While breaking away from the extreme rhetoric of the subhuman, exotic, base nature of nonwhite pagans to a somewhat more respectful approach to cultural differences, converts continued to serve as the wandering, confused, and lost other. As games reduced identity to religion or occupation, converts could not escape their cultural confines. Stereotypes and presumptuous phrasing dominated the games. This created an almost voyeuristic display of cultures, a global aisle of curios for tourists. Even for the converts presumably residing in the United States, the hierarchical relationship of missionaries and their converts was clearly established. While missions and missionaries could have created positive change and growth, too often the presumptuous attitudes appeared to prevail, a reflection of cultural attitudes brought from home.

Conclusion

Mission games were often targeted at families to encourage discussions about missions and future participation. In some ways, these games sought to normalize missions by repeating stereotypical tropes with common words, images, and symbols. They emphasized an aggressive expansion of missionary work into the world and zeroed in on conceptions of missionaries and converts. The focus of a global stage and descriptions of missionary experiences were readily found in the various games as well as in formal missionary reports and casual dialogues.

Cultural dialogues directly informed mission-themed games for both religions. Protestant mission reports were released in annual publications. They detailed the locations, programs, and experiences of various missionaries in countries around the world. Mission reports were an essential part of Protestant mission livelihoods, in raising money and awareness. The ABCFM specifically published annual reports about foreign, typically nonwhite missions. They provided details about different operations, positive stories from stationed missionaries, and information about hindrances to missionary work.[82] Prayer calendars

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82. See ABCFM Annual Reports from 1929–1939.

included descriptions of specific missionaries or projects that laypersons could pray for on each day of the year. The consistent output of information brought missions to the forefront of Protestant communities. Reports were divided into global regions, gave missionary families detailed attention, and emphasized stories of progress and humanitarian aid. They also noted instances of government opposition or international politics disrupting missionary goals. Mission reports clearly influenced popular understandings of how missions operated.

Missionary reports were also commonplace within Latter-day Saint Church culture. After returning from their assigned mission, missionaries reported to their local congregation about their experiences. Stories of converts and success permeated "homecoming talks" and missions were often posited as the hardest but best months of their lives. However, Latter-day Saint board game makers were usually returned missionaries themselves, and did not have to rely solely on public conversations to create a recognizable mission game. Many referred to their own missions as the background for inspiration. Yet, even as the specific objects or copied formats differed, the same clichés and themes appeared in all. Instead of representing their own distinct mission experiences, they created an amalgamation of typical missionary tropes to encapsulate a common perception of missionaries.

Cultural attitudes were deeply entrenched in the very manufacturing of a rather insignificant pastime. Something as innocuous as a board game could encapsulate so much of what leadership and congregations promoted. By transforming standard concepts into a game, complete with rules, strategy, chance, and objectives, popular notions of spreading the gospel became tied with subconscious national politics in the appearance of militaristic rhetoric. Social attitudes that usually defaulted to a tradition of whiteness and xenophobia became increasingly apparent in the depictions of missionaries and converts. The production of board games revealed inner workings of a complex religious identity, one that was inseparable from political and social movements and changes. Historical treatments of the past often pigeonhole individuals into categories of gender, race, religion, and politics, sometimes as inseparable and distinct parts of a whole. However, these board games emphasized the blending of a series of identities that are complicated. A single religious affiliation does not stand as an isolated aspect of one's self but is conflated with political and social identities as well. This rings true as these board games represent the mix of religion and economic identities as well.

The United States religious landscape is often regarded as a marketplace. With the disestablishment of state religion, expansion of capitalism, and

development of a middle class, religiosity has become increasingly commodi-fied. Churches enter a competitive fray against one another and other cultural distractions.[83] Mission-themed board games are yet another product of religious commercialization. By exploiting proselyting endeavors into profitable merchandise, board game makers capitalize on a niche market. Beyond any justifications of promoting missionary efforts, they must make games marketable, attractive, and appealing to make sales. Particularly as these games are targeted toward a Church member audience, the intentions are not to convert, but rather to add another consumerist product to the market. This is further emphasized in the amount of print-at-home for-purchase games available on blogs and Latter-day Saint nonofficial resource websites. While historian Laurence R. Moore explained that the commercialization of religion does not necessarily "make it peanut butter," the desire to manufacture fun through religious rebranding echoes larger ways in which individuals understand religion and culture.[84] Although board games became increasingly synonymous with secular, capitalist amusements, this did not stop many from creating an "-opoly" version of their own faith. Similarly, transforming missions into competitive, global conquests based on preexisting games reveals the inseparable nature of culture's influence in religious practices and products.

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83. Laurence R. Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

84. Moore, *Selling God*, 145.