

Dick Hanson  
Logan, Utah  
November 1982

## **"Baptism for the Dead"**

Supernatural Religious Legend

### **Informant:**

Dick Hanson is twenty years old and was born and reared in Moab, Utah. He recently moved to Logan, Utah, to attend Utah State University. His major is computer science. He converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) last year and is now actively attending Mormon church services and is devout in his belief. Dick is single and lives with two other male students who are returned missionaries. Dick's family--his mother, father, high-school-aged brother, and younger sister--still reside in Moab.

### **Context:**

Dick heard this story around the time he was converting to the Mormon and was about to be baptized. One of Dick's friends in Moab, who was encouraging him to join the church, related this story to him after Priesthood meeting. Only the two of them were talking in the lobby of the church house. Dick had been attending church meetings to get a better idea of what the church was like. A story like this is most likely to be told in the context of a religious discussion, but on this particular occasion, Dick, who is a good friend of mine, told me the story in the Business Building hallway while we were waiting for the professor to arrive.

### **Text:**

There was this lady up at the Salt Lake Temple who was doing baptisms for the dead. Every time she was baptized for someone and coming out of the water, she would look to the back of the

room and see the spirit of the individual she was being baptized for walk across to the other side of the room. When the officiator who was doing the baptisms said that they were done, she looked to the back of the room and saw a little girl who had not yet crossed the room. She then told the officiator that they were not done and that there was still a little girl who needed to be baptized. The officiator then rechecked his paper and noticed that the paper had been folded in such a way that it concealed this girl's name. They then proceeded with the baptism and the girl (her spirit) walked across the room.

**Texture:**

Dick told this story with total earnestness, and in a hushed voice, because he didn't want other students in the hall to get nosy about what we were discussing. I recognize the story as one I have heard before, and it may reflect the possibility that this kind of event has occurred a number of times. The theological reference is to the Mormon belief in baptism by proxy for people who died before they had the opportunity to know about the Church. Baptism for the dead rituals, as well as other temple rituals, are part of formal Mormon religious teachings, and are not to be discussed in detail outside the temple. Stories like this one, however, are not considered sacred texts, but circulate in oral tradition, told by people in appropriate settings to illustrate the actual occurrences in everyday life which ratify or strengthen their own personal beliefs in Church teachings.

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