

## **Mormons and Polygamy**

In light of all the negative media press about the Fundamentalist group of Mormons in the United States, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has created a web site to respond to the issue of polygamy. The web site includes a series of bullet points that respond to common misconceptions and questions. It also has a video clip of President Hinckley speaking on the subject. Links are provided to other areas of the Church web site that deal with related issues.

<http://www.mormonsandpolygamy.org/>

The rest of the article is by Mike Thomas:

***SALT LAKE CITY** 10 July 2008 On 26 June, Newsroom published a package of information featuring profiles of ordinary Latter-day Saints in Texas. With no other intention but to define themselves, these members provided a tangible depiction of what their faith is all about. They serve as the best distinction between the lifestyles and values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a Texas-based polygamous group that has recently attracted media attention.*

**Richmond, England**, 1 August 2008, As a Christian ministry, Reachout Trust, along with many other similar ministries, regularly seeks to define the Christian faith and provide a tangible depiction of what that faith is all about. The aim is to distinguish between the traditional, biblical faith and values shared by Christians, and groups such as the Mormons that use the name “Christian” to describe themselves.

*In an apparent misunderstanding of the aim of this Newsroom package, a coalition of polygamous groups expressed its opposition in a press release to what it described as the Salt Lake City-based Church’s “efforts to deprive us and others of the freedom to name and describe ourselves by terms of our own choosing.” The general term they prefer to be known by is “Mormon fundamenta list.”*

Mormons regularly object to these efforts at clarification, protesting that we have no right to define the term “Christian” and accusing us of depriving people of the right to name and describe themselves by terms of their own choosing. The general term they prefer is “Mormon Christian”, calling their church “The Church of Jesus Christ”.

*This is perfectly understandable from the standpoint of seeking the religious*

*legitimacy that the word “Mormon” grants. But from the organizational, doctrinal, historical and cultural standpoint of the mainstream Church, that term has long resided, in the public’s mind, within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah. Distinctions matter, especially when a term like Mormon has come to mean a very specific thing to the public. Mormon is commonly used to describe a Mormon temple, Mormon missionaries or the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. These images have long been ingrained in the public consciousness. But when the term Mormon is stretched out of proportion to apply to any group, however large or small, aspiring to establish a church in the tradition of Joseph Smith, only confusion ensues. Reduced to its lowest common denominator, the word Mormon loses its long-established associations among the public, rendering it unrecognizable.*

This is perfectly understandable from the standpoint of seeking the religious legitimacy that the word “Christian” grants. But from the organisational, doctrinal, historical and cultural standpoint of the mainstream Christian Church, that term has long resided, in the public’s mind with the traditional Christian denominations familiar to generations around the globe. Distinctions matter, especially when a term like Christian has come to mean a very specific thing to the public. “Christian” is commonly used to describe a traditional Christian Church, its members who claim an unbroken continuation with saints of all generations, identified by the symbol of the Cross, belief in a completed work of atonement on the Cross, salvation by grace alone, through faith, in Christ alone, which doctrine is found in the Bible as the only work of Scripture. These images have long been ingrained in the public consciousness. But when the term Christian is stretched out of proportion to apply to any group, however large or small, aspiring to establish a church in the tradition of Christ, Paul, and the Early Church Fathers, only confusion ensues. Reduced to its lowest common denominator, the word Christian loses its long-established associations among the public, rendering it unrecognizable.

*The coalition’s press release takes issue with a letter sent by the Church to media organizations to clarify the distinctions between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a polygamous sect near San Angelo, Texas, calling itself the “Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” This is a matter of promoting accuracy and clarity in media reporting, not defining other people’s religious traditions.*

*The Church does not seek to diminish the religious prerogative of any of these polygamous groups. Rather, it simply urges the use of terminology that clarifies the true identity of each party involved. Ultimately these groups can define themselves any way they wish as long as they don’t distort the well-established identity of a long-standing church. As part of the necessary give and take required by the media in this world of unprecedented informational access, it behooves all organizations to follow the recognized standards of journalism and*

*operate within the reasonable expectations of media nomenclature. In the case of the word “Mormon,” over 150 years of customary usage must not be summarily dismissed or ignored. Even the Associated Press Stylebook recognises the confusion created by allowing groups to refer to themselves as Mormons. If any organization expects to be understood properly, their terminology must reflect it.*

This is a matter of promoting accuracy and clarity in reporting, not defining other people’s religious traditions. We do not seek to diminish the religious prerogative of anyone. Rather, we simply urge the use of terminology that clarifies the true identity of each party involved. Ultimately, groups can define themselves any way they wish as long as they don’t distort the well-established identity of 2,000-year-old Christianity. As part of the necessary give and take required in this world of unprecedented information access, it behooves all organisations to follow recognised standards of reporting and operate within the reasonable expectations of society’s nomenclature. If any organisation expects to be understood properly, their terminology must reflect it.

*Perhaps what is needed most of all in this matter is a sense of proportion and perspective. Consider the following facts. According to the KSL news station, the group that now calls itself the FLDS began as simply “The Work” or “The Priesthood Work” in 1930. In 1942 it changed to “The United Effort Plan.” It wasn’t until 1991 that this group adopted the name “The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” a name almost identical to the official designation of what is commonly called the “Mormon” faith, and a full 161 years after the mainstream Church was founded. Any reporting of the worldwide Church and this smaller group must take this factor of time into account. To any average observer, it doesn’t seem fair or reasonable for a comparatively small religious group to adopt the full name of another well-established church after more than a century and a half.*

Perhaps what is needed most of all in this matter is a sense of proportion and perspective. Consider the following facts. The Mormon Church was known variously as “The Church of Christ” (1830), “The Church of Latter-day Saints” (1834) and “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (1838). Only in the late twentieth century has the leadership insisted that it should be “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, condensed to “The Church of Jesus Christ” or “The Church of Christ”, some 2,000 years after mainstream Christianity was founded and since its adherents were called Christians (Acts 11:26). The Book of Mormon was only dubbed “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” since 1980; again Millennia after the two definitive testaments (covenants) of the Bible had been defined and established. Any reporting of the worldwide Church and this smaller group must take this factor of time into account. To any average observer, it doesn’t seem fair or reasonable for a comparatively small religious group to adopt

the full name of an already well-established church after some two thousand years.

*Some members of polygamous groups have suggested that because they may use the Book of Mormon or revere Joseph Smith as a prophet, it entitles them to be included in a broader definition of "Mormons." Many religions share cultural, historical and theological origins. For example, Christianity, Islam and Juda ism all share the heritage of Abraham. Furthermore, all Christian denominations have some historical and theological connection to Catholicism. Nevertheless, this does not authorize them to use the word "Catholic" in their official name. Lutherans and Methodists do not call themselves "Catholic fundamentalists." Nor did the early Christians call themselves "reformed Jews."*

Some Mormons have suggested that because they may use the Bible or revere Christ as Saviour, it entitles them to be included in a broader definition of "Christian". Many religions share cultural, historical and theological origins. For example, Christianity, Islam and Judaism all share the heritage of Abraham. Furthermore, all Christian denominations have some historical and theological connection to Roman Catholicism. Nevertheless, this does not authorise them to use the words "Roman Catholic" in their official name. Lutherans and Methodists do not call themselves "Restored Roman Catholics". Nor did the early Christians call themselves "Restored Jews".

*Likewise, it just doesn't seem right that the FLDS can overturn more than a century and a half of common usage simply by virtue of the fact that it established itself a century and a half after the Mormon faith was born, and adopted many of its early principles. By declaring that any group professing Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon can rightly be called 20Mormon is akin to declaring that any Christian group that professes the Bible can rightly call itself Catholic.*

Likewise, it just doesn't seem right that the Mormon Church can overturn two Millennia of common usage simply by virtue of the fact that it established itself some 1900 years after the Christian Church was born, and adopted some of its early principles, though only in name. By declaring that any group professing Jesus Christ and the Bible can rightly call itself Christian is akin to declaring that any Christian group that professes the Bible can rightly call itself "Roman Catholic".

*As an illustration of the lack of proportion in this situation, in a 9 July article by the AP, one scholar who objected to the Church's efforts to define itself said that Joseph Smith, were he alive today, would be excommunicated by the Church*

*because he practiced polygamy. Hypothetical conjectures of this sort never work in serious discussions.*

*Such conjectures might sound clever rhetorically, but they fail logically. According to this logic, for example, the great Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be shut out of today's Christian churches because of their ancient practice of polygamy. One of Joseph Smith's main contributions to the religious world is the concept of continuing revelation. Churches are not immune to change; even they are subject to the vagaries of time and mortality. All churches adapt by responding to the challenges of any particular time. Any cursory glance at history clearly shows that religions, not excepting Christianity, unfold as developing works in progress until God himself brings everything to completion. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, such change is anticipated precisely by the concept of continuing revelation and the existence of councils of modern apostles and prophets.*

As an illustration of the lack of proportion in this situation Mormons commonly claim that what Mormons see as a departure by the early Christian Church from fundamental tenets of the faith has rendered Christianity as it is familiarly understood apostate. Hypothetical conjectures of this sort never work in serious discussion.

Such conjectures and claims might sound clever rhetorically, but they fail logically. According to this logic, for example, the leadership of today's Mormon Church might be considered apostate for having abandoned so many of the founding principles of Mormonism as taught by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, et al and faithfully believed and practiced by early Mormons. These would include the practice of polygamy, the Adam/God doctrine, the bar on Negroes having the priesthood, temple blood oaths, blood atonement, etc. The Bible teaches and Christians believe in an unfolding revelation of God's purposes from the Old Covenant to the New and on through these last 20 days until the final culmination of all things in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Any cursory glance at history clearly shows that the faith develops and grows to meet the challenges of any particular time and there will always be a disparity between man's imperfect obedience and God's perfect intentions "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:13). However, these things are underpinned by a sense of general continuity and agreement in the beliefs and practices of the saints of God of all generations on the fundamentals of the faith. The Mormon Church eschews all these treasured Christian principles together and thereby forfeits any claim to the name Christian no matter how many councils of prophets, books of "scripture" or letters of protest they may present to the world.

*The Church does not attack or belittle other faiths. But it will continue to better inform the public and media about its true identity and encourage its members*

*to speak for themselves.*

*“All their (the Christian churches) creeds were an abomination in [God’s] sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that ‘they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof” </EM>Joseph Smith, Mormonism’s founding prophet*

*“If the Catholic religion is a false, religion how can any true religion come out of it? If the Catholic Church is bad how can any good thing come out of it? The character of the old churches have always been slandered by all apostates since the world began” Joseph Smith, Mormonism’s founding prophet*

*“We talk about Christianity but it is a perfect pack of nonsense...Myself and hundreds of the Elders around me have seen its pomp, parade and glory; and what is it? It is a sounding brass and a tinkling symbol; it is as corrupt as hell; and the devil could not invent a better engine to spread his work than the Christianity of the nineteenth century” John Taylor, Mormon prophet*

*The Mormon Church is founded on the basis that all Christendom is corrupt and apostate, which belief is expressed in the most inflammatory language imaginable and of which these are but a few examples. If the Mormons want to be Christians they must first embrace “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude v 3)*

*Why not drop in for tea sometime?*

<http://mikes4tea.blogspot.com/>