

# **Polygamy in Mormonism: History, Conflicting Doctrines, and Contemporary Perspectives**

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## **Abstract**

Polygamy is considered the most sacred and crucial doctrine in Mormon belief, revealed to the founding prophet of Mormonism for dissemination to humanity on Earth. In practice, polygamy has reached remarkably high levels, sparking controversy since the 18th century and engendering conflicts between the Mormon Church and the governments of the regions where they reside, causing disadvantages for Mormon followers settled in those areas. This article provides a detailed examination of the practice of polygamy within the Mormon Christian doctrine, deemed the most sacred tenet in their faith. Employing a qualitative approach, the research analyzes literature using a historical method to explore the history of polygamy in Mormon teachings. Additionally, an in-depth analysis is conducted to comprehend the definition, legal basis, conditions, and purposes of polygamous practices within the Mormon community. The research findings indicate a high population level of polygamous practices in the early 18th century, where one man could have dozens of wives. Despite being prohibited in the 19th century, Mormon adherents vehemently maintain this practice. Based on analyses from various sources, this research discovers that polygamy

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within the Mormon community is regarded as the highest form of marriage. This is due to the overarching goal of Mormon beliefs: to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. The more polygamous practices, the more individuals born, seen as a contribution to fulfilling the Kingdom of God. The primary principle for engaging in polygamy is to have as many wives as possible, with the aim of liberating unborn spirits.

**Keywords:** Christian, Marriage, Mormonism, Polygamy, Good Kingdom.

### Abstrak

Poligami dianggap sebagai ajaran paling sakral dan krusial dalam kepercayaan Mormon, yang diwahyukan kepada Nabi pendiri Mormon untuk disampaikan kepada umat manusia di bumi. Dalam praktiknya, poligami mencapai tingkat yang sangat tinggi dan menjadi sumber kontroversi sejak abad ke-18, memunculkan konflik antara Gereja Mormon dan pemerintahan negara tempat mereka berada, serta memberikan kerugian bagi pengikut Mormon yang menetap di wilayah tersebut. Artikel ini akan secara rinci membahas praktik poligami dalam doktrin Kristen Mormon, yang dianggap sebagai ajaran paling sakral dalam keyakinan mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menganalisis literatur melalui metode historis untuk mengeksplorasi sejarah poligami dalam ajaran Mormon. Selain itu, analisis mendalam juga dilakukan untuk memahami definisi, dasar hukum, syarat ketentuan, dan tujuan dari praktik poligami dalam komunitas Mormon. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik poligami memiliki tingkat populasi yang tinggi pada awal abad ke-18, di mana satu pria dapat memiliki puluhan istri. Meskipun diharamkan pada abad ke-19, penganut Mormon masih mempertahankan praktik ini dengan tegas. Berdasarkan analisis dari berbagai sumber, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa poligami dalam komunitas Mormon dianggap sebagai bentuk pernikahan tertinggi. Hal ini dikarenakan keyakinan Mormon memiliki tujuan besar, yaitu membangun kerajaan Tuhan di atas bumi. Semakin banyak praktik poligami, maka semakin banyak individu yang lahir, yang dipandang sebagai kontribusi untuk memenuhi kerajaan Tuhan. Prinsip utama untuk mempraktikkan

poligami adalah memiliki sebanyak mungkin istri, dengan tujuan membebaskan roh-roh yang belum dilahirkan.

**Kata Kunci:** Kristen, Mormon, Pernikahan, Poligami, Kerajaan Tuhan.

## Introduction

In the context of marriage, polygamy has been a longstanding issue for centuries, notably within Mormonism, where it is considered the holiest doctrine.<sup>1</sup> The practice of polygamy has led to significant conflicts between Mormonism and the State.<sup>2</sup> In summary, the persistent historical presence of polygamy as a contentious matter within the institution of marriage, as exemplified by the case of Mormonism, highlights the intricate interplay between religious doctrines and societal norms. The elevated status of polygamy as the holiest doctrine in Mormonism has not only influenced the dynamics of their community but has also triggered conflicts with the State, unveiling the ongoing tension between religious freedoms and legal regulations.

Several issues in Mormon polygamy arise due to the lack of a clear concept in the Doctrine of the Mormon Church. The Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, intended as life guidelines for followers, present confusion with contradictions between the two books regarding the practice of polygamy.<sup>3</sup> For example, Jacob 2:27<sup>4</sup> states that the practice of polygamy is not allowed. However, this verse draws a lesson from the actions of their past religious leaders, David and Solomon, who had multiple wives. This becomes an

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy a History*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1989), ix.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p86. In Utah polygamy-related problems arose both from the federal government's opposition to the practice and from the belief that Utah's territorial government was controlled by Mormon despots."

<sup>3</sup> See Jacob 2:27 and Doctrine and Covenant 132: 1.

<sup>4</sup> "Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be bone cwife; and concubines he shall have none; (Jacob 2:27)", The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, (Salt Lake City, Utah, AS: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2010) Jacob 2:27. 121

excuse to reject polygamy, as it appears to position women in a role of chastity without the need for polygamous relationships.<sup>5</sup>

While Doctrine and Covenants 132:1<sup>6</sup> provides information justifying polygamy, initially, it seems to apply only to previous prophets. However, towards the end of the verse, after permitting polygamy for Solomon, it states 'My servants,' extending the allowance beyond prophets to include other servants. These contradictions have created confusion among members of Mormonism regarding the status of polygamy.<sup>7</sup> The practice of polygamy among Mormons involves not just one or two wives, but dozens. This has led to the perception that Mormon polygamy is primarily driven by the satisfaction of worldly passions. Additionally, it's noteworthy that women in this context also have the option of practicing polyandry.<sup>8</sup>

Examining the concept of polygamy in Mormonism is significantly important as it reveals historical and doctrinal intricacies surrounding this practice. As a controversial issue for centuries, especially in the context of Mormonism, polygamy has sparked conflicts between religious doctrines and societal norms. The persistence of polygamy as the holiest doctrine in Mormonism not only shapes the dynamics of their community but also triggers conflicts with the state, depicting ongoing tension between religious freedom and legal regulations. Furthermore, the contradictions in the concept of polygamy within the Mormon Church, seen in the differences between the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, add to the importance of examining this topic. Concerns among Mormon members regarding the status of polygamy,

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<sup>5</sup> The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, *Jacob 2: 24-28*, p.121.

<sup>6</sup> "Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that because ye have inquired from my hand to know and understand where I, the Lord, have confirmed my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Moses, David and Solomon, the My servant, regarding the principles and teachings of their possession of many wives and concubines. " (Doctrine and Covenants 132: 1)", Doctrine and Covenant, (Salt Lake City, Utah, AS: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2010) p.355.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Hayward, "Utah's Anti-Polygamy Society", 1878-1884. Thesis in Brigham Young University Department of History 1980, p.51.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*.....p.85.

reflected in conflicting verses, emphasize the need for a comprehensive understanding of its theological and practical implications. The extensive practice of polygamy among Mormons, involving dozens of wives, raises questions about underlying motivations and societal impacts, challenging existing prejudices and demanding in-depth exploration of this complex facet of Mormon doctrine. So the researcher assesses that the research problem and importance of studying polygamy in Mormonism lies in uncovering the historical, doctrinal, and societal complexities surrounding this practice, highlighting its implications for religious freedom, legal regulations, and community dynamics.

### The Definition of Polygamy

The term “*polygamy*” originates from the Greek word “*polygama*,” signifying plural marriage derived from “*polygamos*.” This marital structure involves a man having multiple wives. Precisely defined, polygamy encompasses both polyandry (multiple husbands) and polygyny (multiple wives).<sup>9</sup> Another source clarifies that the term “*polygamy*” is of Greek origin, composed of “*poly*” or “*poli*,” denoting numerous, and “*gamie*,” signifying a man. When amalgamating these components, polygamy is construed as “a man marrying more than one woman.” In terminological precision, polygamy denotes a matrimonial arrangement wherein one party concurrently engages with multiple individuals of the opposite sex.<sup>10</sup>

In his article, Abdur Rohman wrote polygamy is delineated as a matrimonial arrangement wherein one party concurrently forms marital bonds with more than one individual of the opposite sex. This definition retains a sociable character, indicating its applicability to both men and women. However, for a more precise characterization, it is imperative to distinguish between polygyny and polyandry. Polygyny refers to a marital scenario where a man

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<sup>9</sup> Bedru Hussein, Polygamy: an Ethical Case Study, *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Vol. 10 2002, p.81.

<sup>10</sup> Reza Fitra, et al, Poligami dalam Hukum Islam dan Hukum Positif Indonesia Serta Urgensi Pemberian Izin Poligami di Pengadilan Agama, *Jurnal Privat Law*, Vol.3, No.2, Desember 2015, p.100

simultaneously forms marital unions with more than two women.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, polyandry, etymologically derived from the Greek roots “Polus” denoting negative and “Andros” signifying men, is terminologically construed as women having multiple husbands. Within the context of polygynous communities, the term Polyandria is more commonly recognized.<sup>12</sup>

In light of these definitions, it can be inferred that polygamy represents a marital arrangement where one individual, either a man or a woman, is involved with more than one individual of the opposite sex. However, the term “polygamy” is commonly employed to specifically denote the form of marriage where one man is married to multiple women, a configuration referred to as polygyny.

### An Exposition on the Mormon Ecclesiastical Institution

Mormonism identifies itself as the “Church of Latter-day Saints”.<sup>13</sup> Established by Joseph Smith the Prophet on April 6, 1830, in New York, Joseph Smith, the third son and fifth child, was born in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, on December 23, 1805. Raised in Yankeeland, Smith's family faced economic depression and financial setbacks.<sup>14</sup> On September 21, 1823, at the age of 18, Joseph reported a visitation from an angel named Moroni. The angel disclosed the existence of gold plates on a hill near Manchester, New York, instructing Smith to retrieve and translate them.<sup>15</sup>

Smith's inaugural visionary encounter aligns with the notion that the ecclesiastical body resides in a condition of apostasy from the authentic Christian religion, thereby manifesting primitivist perspectives. However, Smith's theological framework transcended

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<sup>11</sup> Abdur Rohman, Poligami, *Jurnal Analisis Gender dan Agama (Agenda)*, Vol.2, No.1, Desember 2019, p.26.

<sup>12</sup> Robet Rifa'I, *Analisis Terhadap Praktik Poliandri (Studi Kasus di Desa Kerangkulon Kecamatan Wonosalam Kabupaten Demak)*, Thesis in University of Walisongo, 2017. p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Bushman, “Mormonism, A Very Short Introduction”,.....p.1

<sup>14</sup> Danel W. Bachman, “A Study Of The Mormon Practice Of Plural Marriage Before The Death Of Joseph Smith”, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.1.

<sup>15</sup> The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, (Salt Lake City, Utah, AS: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2010)

this premise. He deduced that the secularization and disintegration of religious tenets not only fostered rivalry but also constituted a fount of discord. Pluralism, in his perspective, emerged as a cardinal transgression within the religious domain.<sup>16</sup> The crux of this sect revolved around the establishment of the terrestrial kingdom of God, with the foundational underpinning of Mormon polygamy.

In the decade subsequent to the inaugural vision, Joseph Smith accomplished the divinely guided translation of the plates he acquired in the vicinity of Palmyra, New York. These plates constituted the Book of Mormon, narrating the chronicle of diverse groups under providential guidance, migrating from the old world to the western hemisphere.<sup>17</sup> The allure of Mormonism intensified as individuals sought solace in this sect during times of distress, despondency, profound solitude, and misfortune. Consequently, the influx of adherents persisted, culminating in a membership tally of 16,000 by 1840. Remarkably, by the conclusion of the 19th century, the Church witnessed a substantial expansion, boasting a membership of 283,000.<sup>18</sup>

### Definition of Mormon Polygamy

Daniel W. Bachman, in his thesis, precisely delineates polygamy as a "marital relationship existing between an individual and several living spouses." Additionally, Bachman addresses polyandry, noting that it is one form of polygamy wherein women have two or more husbands. He underscores that the Mormon Church has consistently maintained the position that a woman should not have more than one living husband simultaneously, advocating for the avoidance of this imprecise term. In the realm of Mormon polygamy, both polyandry and polygyny coexist, signifying that men can have more than one wife while women can concurrently have more than one living husband. Despite the acknowledgment of polyandry within Mormonism, the actualized practice of polygamy within the Church predominantly aligns with

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<sup>16</sup> Bachman, *A Study Of The Mormon Practice Of Plural Marriage.....*, p.27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>18</sup> Jon Woronoff, *"Historical Dictionaries of Religion, Philosophies, and Movements"* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press) p.xxxi.

polygyny, denoting the scenario where a man has multiple living wives concurrently, without extending the same privilege to women.<sup>19</sup>

Bachman's conceptualization of polygamy aligns with Kathryn's, as articulated in his work, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith." According to this definition, polygamy is characterized by the marriage of two or more women to one man. Bachman further posits that within the Mormon context, polygamy represents the highest echelon of marital unions due to its divine command originating from the revelation recorded in Doctrine and Covenant 132, denoting polygamy as "celestial marriage."<sup>20</sup> This concept amalgamates eternal marriage with polygamy, signifying that polygamy, as a form of celestial marriage, has the potential to unite partners in the afterlife.<sup>21</sup>

Mormon Polygamy distinguishes itself from plural marriages in other cultural contexts by its rapid growth and absence of a well-defined long-term cultural framework. The lack of stipulations on the permissible number of spouses<sup>22</sup> has led to instances where several men have entered into marriages beyond their practical capacities.

## Chronicles of Polygamous Customs within Mormonism

### 1. The Pre-Manifesto Era of Polygamous Practices in Mormonism

Smith received revelations mandating "plural marriage," but this revelation was not publicly disclosed until 1852, subsequent to the Mormons' settlement in Utah. The initiation of polygamous practices by Mormon leaders commenced in Illinois, but it was on the western frontier,<sup>23</sup> particularly in Kirtland and Nauvoo in the early 1840s, that the practice gained prominence. The introduction of the doctrine of polygamy into the church preceded its formal introduction, with Joseph Smith having practiced it since 1833. Polygamy constitutes a novel addition to the Church, and adherents,

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<sup>19</sup> Bachman, "A Study Of The Mormon Practice Of Plural Marriage.....p.19.

<sup>20</sup> Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One.....* p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Richard S.Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy.....*p.43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90.

<sup>23</sup> Laura Parson, *Polygamy, Women, and Higher Education, Life After Mormon Fundamentalist*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).....p.26.

covert or overt, perceive it as a divine prerogative.<sup>24</sup> The revelation on marriage, documenting the permissibility of plural marriage or polygamy, was recorded on July 12, 1843.<sup>25</sup>

On the 27th of June 1844, Joseph Smith met his demise. Following this event, Zina D. H. Young was subsequently sealed by proxy to Brigham Young on the 2nd of February 1846, thus establishing a more intricate triangular polyandrous relationship. The complexity arose as Zina, alongside her legal husband Henry Jacobs, cohabited as husband and wife. This arrangement persisted until Henry received counsel from Brigham Young, who asserted that the woman Henry considered his wife was, in fact, the spiritual wife of Joseph Smith. This circumstance was due to Joseph Smith's demise. Consequently, Zina D. H. Young was then sealed to Brigham Young, acting as a proxy for Joseph Smith.<sup>26</sup>

The early practice of Mormon polygamy, as previously delineated, remained clandestine. It was never publicly acknowledged until after the assassination of Joseph Smith in 1844, under the leadership of Brigham Young.<sup>27</sup> The public proclamation of Mormon polygamy occurred on August 28, 1852, in Utah, and it was subsequently openly endorsed in Mormon teachings as a superior way of life.<sup>28</sup> Notably, Joseph Smith's son, young Joseph, initially refrained from acknowledging the existence of polygamous teachings due to their perceived contradictions with the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the church's revelations.<sup>29</sup>

Following the official announcement, adherents of Mormon polygamy engaged in more open discussions on the subject. They felt liberated to express their beliefs, attributing their newfound freedom

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<sup>24</sup> Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One*.....p.17-18.

<sup>25</sup> Jon Woronoff, *Historical Dictionaries of Religions*,..... p.xvi.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> In this same year, polygamy was publically announced at a missionary conference in Salt Lake City by Apostle Orson Pratt. David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1987): 293–314. p.294.

<sup>28</sup> David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt.....p.293.

<sup>29</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*.....p.78.

to divine sanction.<sup>30</sup> The public disclosure of Mormon polygamy in Utah, however, precipitated numerous challenges, including opposition from the federal government, skepticism about the influence of the Mormon-controlled territorial government in Utah,<sup>31</sup> and heightened public criticism.<sup>32</sup>

Criticism and conflicts arose between Mormons and other citizens, primarily revolving around circulating issues related to polygamy. One prevalent concern was the perceived degradation of women through polygamous practices. However, empirical evidence contradicts this perception, as polygamous wives often lead lives comparable to those of other women.<sup>33</sup> Initially deemed a grave sin and crime by Christianity and municipal authorities, the practice of polygamy by Mormons was considered contrary to both heavenly and earthly laws, as articulated by Orson Pratt in his sermon recorded in the Journal of Discourse.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.The Post-Manifesto Evolution of Polygamous Practices in Mormonism

Despite the initial divine command to adopt polygamy, subsequently rescinded, as the Lord giveth and taketh away, the cultural and social values associated with polygamy have been frequently misconstrued. This poses challenges for church leaders and members who initially adhered to the directive to engage in plural marriage and later endeavored to discontinue it after the issuance of the manifesto<sup>35</sup> on September 25, 1890. This inspired statement, issued by Church President Wilford Woodruff, marked the cessation of the practice of plural marriage in the church. All

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86.

<sup>32</sup> David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt....p.302.

<sup>33</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*.....p.89.

<sup>34</sup>Is a 26 volume collection of public sermos by early leadersof the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day-Saints (LDS Church).

<sup>35</sup> announcing that the church would submit to the laws of the land. was accepted by vote at the church's semiannual conference on October 6. Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One*..... p.50.

Church leaders and members aligned with God's will as be outlined in the manifesto.<sup>36</sup>

The issuance of the manifesto by Wilford Woodruff was prompted by grievances from polygamous individuals who faced coercion to abandon the practice, coupled with threats of exclusion from American society.<sup>37</sup> Woodruff aimed to avert conflicts between the Saints and the government regarding plural marriage.<sup>38</sup> Despite the manifesto's attempt to terminate the public practice of polygamy, the LDS Church continued to clandestinely engage in it. This led Prophet Joseph F. Smith to craft a second manifesto, a more stringent declaration against polygamy, stipulating excommunication for those involved in or entering into new polygamous relationships.<sup>39</sup>

In the year 1900, a paradigm shift transpired in the instantiation of polygamy, marked by Mormons ceasing its endorsement and eventually relinquishing the practice. Those persisting in polygamous unions distanced themselves from the ecclesiastical body under the influence of the Wilford Woodruff manifesto.<sup>40</sup> Simultaneously, the church fortified its stance against polygamy, mandating adherents to renounce the practice for continued affiliation.

While the manifesto compelled many Latter-day Saints to reluctantly embrace the cessation of polygamy as a prerequisite for Utah's integration into mainstream American society and the church's legitimacy, some, notably those in pivotal church leadership positions, exhibited resistance.<sup>41</sup> The emphasis on discontinuing polygamy faced challenges, with many church members compelled to renounce polygamy for societal acceptance, while the upper echelons of church leadership clandestinely adhered to the practice.

In 2012, Mormon fundamentalist polygamy permeated popular culture, sensationalized and fictionalized, exemplified by the

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<sup>36</sup> Laura Parson, *Polygamy, Women,.....*p.22.

<sup>37</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy.....*p.139.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Parson, *Polygamy, Women, and Higher Education.....*p.22.

<sup>40</sup> Jon Woronoff, "*Historical Dictionaries of Religions,.....*p.xxxii.

<sup>41</sup> Lu Ann Faylor Synder, *Post Manifesto Polygamy, The 1899-1904 Correspondence of Helen, Owen, and Avery Woodruff*, (Utah: Utah state University Press) 2009, p.22.

HBO series "Big Love," depicting the life of an independent polygamous man and his multiple wives and children. New media discourse concerning polygamous women varied, often virulent, and seldom narrated by the women themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Numerous legal plural marriages transpired during the initial three years following the Manifesto. Some church members found it arduous to forsake polygamy, believing it pivotal for their exaltation. They approached President Woodruff seeking an exception, but the First Presidency could not accommodate their requests. Consequently, individuals resorted to relocating to Mexico,<sup>43</sup> where they could practice polygamy without hindrance.

The cumulative tally of church-approved polygamous marriages between 1890 and 1904 amounted to at least two hundred and fifty, with the annual figure not surpassing the thirty-three recorded in 1903.<sup>44</sup> The covert practice of polygamy persisted until 1904<sup>45</sup> when the Church clandestinely sanctioned it despite the manifesto. This numerical evidence underscores the enduring adherence to polygamy among Mormons who deemed it an integral religious ritual.

Until 1989, polygamy persisted in clandestinity, its discovery resulting in arrests. The church imposed a prohibition on publishing articles or writings on polygamy, with practitioners facing swift excommunication. Anti-polygamy sentiments emerged from within Mormon ranks.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, a contingent of 30,000 Mormons staunchly upholds polygamy, identifying it as a true and sacred tenet. Termed Fundamentalist Mormons, they endure economic and social crises spurred by state intervention but continue their way of life, mostly shunning public scrutiny and opting for anonymous existence.<sup>47</sup> As of now, practitioners of polygamy predominantly constitute Fundamentalist Mormons.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, (in the introduction).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, (in the introduction).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, (in the introduction).

## The Juridical Framework Governing Polygamous Traditions in Mormonism

The adherents of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Latter-day Saints) engaged in the practice of polygamy with a foundation rooted in the preservation of Joseph Smith's revelation regarding celestial marriage. The primary source of this revelation is encapsulated in the document known as Doctrine and Covenants, specifically in Section 132:<sup>48</sup>

Chapter 1. Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines.

In the inaugural chapter, the divine bestowal of marital privileges akin to those granted to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses is documented for Mormons. Subsequent chapters delineate God's directives to Joseph Smith for the preparation, reception, and implementation of forthcoming revelations. Chapters five through six reiterate a stern warning emphasizing the imperative execution of the revealed guidance to attain divine glory. Non-compliance with these directives is underscored as leading to divine condemnation. The seventh verse underscores the requirement for all rituals incorporating covenants or oaths to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, ensuring their eternal efficacy.

This revelation, imparted to Joseph Smith on the subject of plural marriage, served as the basis for his proclamation to adherents that plural marriage represented a righteous principle. To adhere to it was construed as obedience to God's will, grounded in the belief that ancient figures similarly espoused multiple wives. Smith postulated that the faithful, including his contemporaries, would be commanded to uphold this principle.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt,....p.302.

<sup>49</sup> Bachman *A Study Of The Mormon Practice Of Plural Marriage Before The Death Of Joseph Smith,....*, p.56.

Upon the revelation's transcription in the year of its disclosure on polygamy, not all Mormons uniformly embraced its tenets. Church officials even sought its annulment, yet Smith steadfastly maintained that God had ordained him to enact the revelation. His conviction rested on the belief that disobedience to this divine commandment would elicit divine condemnation upon him.<sup>50</sup>

### Regulatory Parameters and Criteria for Polygamous Engagements within Mormonism

In an exhaustive exposition, Orson Pratt delineated the intricacies of establishing a harmonious polygamous family. The second stipulation pertains to the criteria for selecting a wife, emphasizing the importance of evaluating her character rather than fixating solely on physical beauty. This elucidation underscores the Mormon focus on the prerequisites for polygamy, centering predominantly on the judicious selection of prospective wives. In contrast to Islamic emphasis on the just conduct of a prospective husband prior to engaging in polygamy, Mormons accentuate the meticulous criteria for choosing a prospective wife, given the quasi-mandatory nature of polygamy within the Mormon community.

Pratt also prescribed guidelines for maintaining amicable relationships among multiple wives, stressing the imperative for husbands to dispense justice equitably among their wives and children. His writings meticulously detail the mechanisms for fostering harmony within a polygamous family structure.

Joseph Smith's stance on polygamy, articulated in the *Elder's Journal*, was unequivocal. When queried about whether Mormons endorse having two or more wives, his emphatic response affirmed the permissibility of polygamy, albeit not concurrently.<sup>51</sup> This elucidates that one condition for engaging in polygamy is refraining from conducting multiple marriages or sealings simultaneously.

Of particular interest is the stipulation allowing a woman to enter into a union with another man without formal divorce from her husband, contingent upon the remarriage being sanctioned by a man

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<sup>50</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....p.66.

<sup>51</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....p.11.

of elevated authority. This condition aligns with the divine prerogative for a man of high<sup>52</sup> standing to take another woman in such circumstances.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, it delineates a gendered asymmetry whereby only a man of elevated authority possesses the agency to facilitate a woman's remarriage under these circumstances. Notably, in instances where Joseph Smith married several women subsequent to Emma without seeking her consent, it becomes evident that the practice of polygamy within Mormonism does not necessitate the prior approval of the first wife.<sup>54</sup>

### Intentions and Ideological Underpinnings of Polygamous Customs within Mormonism

Primarily, the practice of polygamy within Mormonism is perceived as a means to comply with divine revelations received by Joseph Smith. The Latter-Day Saints aspire to dwell in the presence of God alongside their family members, as marriage in Mormonism is intricately linked to a covenant within the Holy Temple, rendering it an eternal union that persists beyond mortal life. The sanctity of this marital covenant is underscored by its witnessing by celestial beings, ensuring the everlasting union of the couple.<sup>55</sup> Richard, in his work "Mormon Polygamy, a History," accentuates polygamy as the most sacred and pivotal doctrine within Mormonism, positing that the fullness of exaltation in the afterlife is unattainable without its practice.<sup>56</sup>

Beneath the facade of Mormon polygamy lies a divine purpose – the multiplication of progeny, which, in turn, results in the liberation of numerous spirits<sup>57</sup> and the perpetuation of familial bonds into eternity. The framework of the "kingdom of God" is shaped by polygamy, aligning with the overarching mission of

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<sup>52</sup> Hight man is who have the high position in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....p.45.

<sup>53</sup> Provided in conference by Young on statement on divorce. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....p.45.

<sup>54</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....p.59.

<sup>55</sup> "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo." accessed November 4, 2020

<sup>56</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*,.....(the introduction).

<sup>57</sup> Intellectual Reserve, *Asas-Asas Injil*, (Salt Lake City: LDS, 2009) p.233.

Mormons to establish a nucleus of heaven on Earth.<sup>58</sup> This pursuit emphasizes their responsibility to forge the earthly Kingdom of God, and the practice of polygamy<sup>59</sup> is deemed instrumental in fulfilling this grand objective.

Orson Pratt, a distinguished figure in the Mormon Church, contends that polygamy affords every Mormon woman the opportunity to assume the roles of wife and mother. Pratt argues that monogamy invites immorality, such as prostitution, and asserts that polygamy is the pathway to heavenly exaltation when a woman is sealed to a worthy man.<sup>60</sup> Pratt's assertion supplements Young's perspective, elucidating that polygamy also serves to provide opportunities for women in a world where their numbers exceed those of men.

For Mormons, the practice of polygamy is regarded as a conduit to attain the Celestial Kingdom of God, with the principle of Celestial Marriage serving as the apex of the Mormon religious doctrine. Only through its practice can one achieve the highest exaltation within the Celestial Kingdom of God.<sup>61</sup>

The aforementioned elucidation echoes the arguments of Pratt and Young concerning the reformation and establishment of the kingdom of God on Earth. However, David's emphasis adds another layer to the discourse, positing that Mormon polygamy transcends mere ordinariness. Instead, it constitutes a fundamental endeavor to reorient society onto the righteous path. Polygamy, framed as a biblical practice integral to the restoration of all things, signifies,<sup>62</sup> for Latter-day Saints, the embodiment of a truly virtuous woman.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

Mormon polygamy is regarded by adherents as the apex of marital unions, representing a divine commandment and the holiest doctrine within Mormonism. Believing it to be a directive from God for the establishment of His earthly kingdom, Mormons view

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<sup>58</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*.....p.47.

<sup>59</sup> David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt....p.300.

<sup>60</sup> Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*.....p.85.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.90-91.

<sup>62</sup> David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt..... p.xxxi.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

polygamy as a means to proliferate progeny, thereby solidifying their commitment to this practice. Despite efforts to curb polygamous unions following Wilford Woodruff's manifesto, adherence persisted, notably among groups like the Mormon Fundamentalists, continuing into the 21st century. While polyandry is permitted, polygyny remains the predominant form of polygamy within the Mormon Church, where a man may have multiple wives simultaneously. Unlike Islamic practice, Mormon polygamy lacks stringent eligibility criteria, potentially facilitating its widespread adoption. Consequently, polygamy is perceived by Western societies as a departure from societal norms, contrasting with Christian monogamy, thus adding an intriguing dimension to Mormon religious identity. This phenomenon has rendered Mormon polygamy a subject of sensationalized and pervasive discourse within contemporary society.

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