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Polygamy Dominates the News in Utah

Something New in 2000

Each year, in mid-December, editors of Utah's daily newspapers and news directors of the television and radio stations with full-time news operations vote on what they think to be the most important stories of the year. The Associated Press tallies the ballots. In 1998, the top two stories were:

- 1). Polygamy in Utah
- 2). The Olympic Scandal.

In 1999, the Olympic Scandal remained the top story and Polygamy was pushed to #4. But Polygamy continues to dominate the front pages of the Salt Lake Tribune. In fact, the number of Tribune stories containing the word "polygamy" is steadily rising. In the years 1990 through 1995, the word appeared in an average of 5 stories a month—sixty stories a year. In 1997 it rose slightly, it was mentioned in 70 stories that year. It was mentioned in 238 stories in 1998 and 264 stories in 1999.

HISTORY

Polygamy was once the bane of Utah. Its practice nearly prevented Utah from becoming a state. In 1890, Mormon President Wilford Woodruff issued the famous "Proclamation," declaring that the Church would cease to practice what it had called "The New and Everlasting Covenant." His proclamation cleared the way for statehood.

Polygamy was never eradicated in Utah. First of all, it is "The New and Everlasting Covenant." Joseph Smith received what has become a very famous prophecy just a year before his death. That prophecy continues to be Mormon Scripture—Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132. (Published in its entirety on my web site—<http://www.mazeministry.com/new>)

Section 132 says the covenant is for-

ever and that you can't be saved if you reject it. That puts Mormons (those in the main Utah church) in a very interesting position. They have not officially practiced polygamy for more than 100 years. Most Latter-day Saints don't think about it at all. Occasionally they will become uncomfortable when a priesthood leader or some other speaker at Sacrament Meeting alludes to the fact that they will practice polygamy in heaven.

But the fact is Mormon Scripture says: *For behold, I [God] reveal unto you a new and everlasting covenant; and if you abide not that covenant, then are ye damned, for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.* (Doctrine and Covenants: Section 132.4)

So can we believe current Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley when he says—on national television—"It's behind us, I condemn it as a practice. It is not doctrinal. It is not legal." (On CNN's *Larry King Live*, September 8, 1998) We agree it is not legal. But how can he say it is not doctrinal in light of the preceding quotation from current Mormon Scripture? And how can he say "It is behind us," without adding "and it is also *in front of us?*"

ITS B-A-A-A-K...

Two things thrust polygamy into the public spotlight in 1998. The first was the realization on the part of the Utah Department of Welfare that polygamy was a huge drain on state coffers. According to Benjamin Bistline, a non-polygamous resident of Hildale, "There are people here with 15 wives on welfare." Hildale is a polygamous town which borders Utah and Arizona. It

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The story on polygamy in this issue of "Through the Maze" signals something of a new direction in our ministry. For twenty years our ministry could be described using two concepts: "doctrinal" and "Church directed." I believe in the opening years of the new millennium, Through the Maze will become more "conceptual" and "external." Now let me describe what I mean.

For twenty years I have preached in Evangelical churches throughout the country. My style is very much a preaching style. Most of you know I pastored for ten years. I am an unapologetic Pentecostal and I have always used the word "preacher" as a job description.

Two things have changed in the Church (the Body of Christ) and in the world during the last two decades. The Church is less respected than it was and the world is less interested in truth than it was. You may say, "Them's tall words, partner!" I realize that and I won't defend them at length here. I hope to do so in these pages in the future. But let me do a paragraph on each of these changes to help clarify what I am saying.

I don't think I have to expand on the concept that the Church is less respected than it once was. Evangelicals are now the "Religious Right." Evangelical doctrine and values have not changed in the past twenty years, but they now are openly scorned by our society. We have lost our authority in the world, we have lost our vocal weight.

The world has grown less interested in truth. Today "relativism" rules. Terms

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Polygamy. . .

was the site of an infamous government raid in 1953, remembered as the Short Creek raid. At that time Arizona Governor Howard Pyle sneaked a \$50,000 appropriation through the Arizona legislature under the label of “grass-hopper control,” to pay for a massive police raid on the town. Children were stripped from their parents arms and men sent to prison. The scheme backfired because the public, regardless of its abhorrence of polygamy, detested the roughshod treatment of the wives and children.

Hildale which straddles the Utah/Arizona state line is a community of more than 5,000 people—nearly 100% polygamous. On the Arizona side of the line it is known as Colorado City. The town is the headquarters of the largest polygamous sect in the United States, The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is presided over by Rulon Jeffs a 90-year-old patriarch.

Hildale ranks among the top ten communities in the Intermountain West when it comes to receiving medicare, and it is dead last in the payment of income taxes. Only some American Indian reservations have a higher level of poverty.

On paper, Colorado City is full of unwed mothers who do not have to report their husband’s income as their own. It is part of the local tradition, husbands marry only their first wives in a binding civil ceremony so polygamous marriages never can be traced through public documents. Additional wives are married “spiritually,” but the union never is legally registered. “It’s a way of life,” former Hildale resident, Deanna Beagley (who was raised in a polygamous family) “You get married, you go on welfare, and that’s it.” Beagly escaped from the family when she learned, at age fifteen, the church leadership had received a revelation that she was to be the fourth wife of a middle-aged man. Two schoolmates came up to her and said, “We hear you’re going to be our new mother.”

BELT WHIPPING

The second incident which refocused attention on polygamy in Utah occurred in the wee hours on the morning of May 23rd, 1998. It came to light later that day when the sixteen-year-old daughter of John Daniel Kingston dialed 911 from a pay phone in a convenience store 80 miles north of Salt lake City. She told investigators her father had belt-whipped her because she refused to live with her uncle to whom she had been married for seven months. It was her husband’s fifteen marriage.

The first time the girl ran away, her father simply took her back and told her to

“think about it” before she ran away again. But in May of 1998, he drove her north almost to the Idaho border and took her into a barn along Interstate 15 where he belt whipped her. The barn is a familiar landmark along the interstate. I have seen it many times. It is of very nice construction, painted red with a giant steer painted on the side. It is the Washakie Salers ranch. She reported that when she woke up in a nearby farmhouse, she walked seven miles to a pay phone and dialed 911.

Kingston is a leader in the infamous Kingston polygamous clan which was founded in 1935 by Chales Eldon Kingston. Today it has 1,500 members and business holdings totaling \$150 million. Some men in the clan have as many as 15 wives.

Kingston eventually was tried in Brigham City, Utah on charges of second-degree felony child abuse. But before the trial was over, he copped to third-degree felony child abuse. A second-degree conviction could have carried a fifteen year prison sentence.

His brother, David Ortell Kingston, the husband from whom the 16-year-old fled, was sentenced to two 0-5 year terms for having sex with his niece. He was also fined \$10,000 and ordered to pay for the girl’s counseling.

When all of this furor broke in the news, Utah Governor Mike Leavitt made the mistake of saying the reason polygamy was not rooted out in Utah is because it may be protected by the First Amendment. Over the ensuing months he came to renounce that position repeatedly and loudly.

US Senator Orin Hatch was befuddled. On August 28, 1998, *The Salt Lake Tribune* headlined a story this way: “Hatch Joins Leavitt In Game of Twister Over Polygamy Issue; Polygamy Issue Has Politicians In Verbal Tangles.” Perhaps Hatch best typifies the untenable Mormon position regarding polygamy. “My bottom line would be that polygamy is against the law. It is against the beliefs and teachings of my church . . . and I agree that it is wrong,” the Republican senator said. “I wish nobody would practice plural marriage *but I don’t condemn those that practice it.*”

Either polygamy is an acceptable practice or it is not. Hatch, Leavitt, Hinckley, and other Mormons need to decide if it is *wrong*. They are merely saying it is *illegal*. If they believe it is not wrong, they should lobby to make it legal. But if they believe it is wrong they should publicly admit that it was *never right!* They should admit that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and all the Mormon leaders who practiced it were

wrong in doing so. They should say that God never told men to practice it. That the Mormon Church was *wrong* about it and they should repent of ever having practiced it.

Until they can say that, they confirm that the 132nd Section of the Doctrine and Covenants was, *and is*, the *everlasting* word of God. ■

Something New. . .

like, “acceptance,” “openness,” “non-judgmental,” “affirming,” are in vogue. Terms like “wrong,” “sin,” “doctrine,” “judgement,” and “righteousness” are not. “My truth may not be your truth,” is a phrase that even sounds weighty today. That is not because we are more sensitive today, but because we are more insecure.

So, how do we talk about Mormonism, for example, in public when we really won’t talk about it in the Church? Hence, seminars in churches on the cults are a fraction of what they were ten or twenty years ago. I don’t like it and I don’t think its right, but I believe in playing the cards that are dealt.

With that in mind, I have sought the Lord asking for direction. I have been open to either subtle changes or radical changes. I have been willing to move out of Christian ministry altogether if my time is over, if my calling is completed.

Here is what I have concluded. First, I will continue to do everything I have been doing: seminars, newsletters, radio, television, writing—all within the Christian venue. However, this year I am going to attempt to add to all that an excursion into the secular media. I am going to attempt to write for secular publication.

That brings us back to the main article in this newsletter. As you read it, you will see that it could easily be read by a non-Christian. It could (and may be) published in a secular magazine or newspaper with very few changes. It is a story that conveys the message, “Something is wrong in Zion,” to those who might not already know that.

Will that reach an unsaved person? Perhaps. Could it prevent an unwary unsaved person from becoming a Mormon? I think so. Are both of those legitimate goals? Absolutely.

I do not know that this idea will bear fruit. I can say I am excited about it. I will continue to pray about it. Will you pray with me? And, as always, I need your financial support for the ministry. You make it possible for me to do the research and writing. You make it possible for me to do the radio interviews. You make it possible for me to send tapes and books and literature to all who request it, whether or not they can afford to pay for it.

Perhaps at the end of the year 2,000 I will be able to report that this idea was not “pizza,” but the genuine leading of the Lord. ■

