

What About Joseph Smith's Teachings Most Offended Others?O A. The Doctrine Of Plural Marriage.O B. The

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Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), remains a highly influential yet controversial figure in religious history. His teachings and practices, especially during the early days of the church, sparked significant reactions—both positive and negative—from the broader society. Among the many aspects of his teachings, two have historically generated the most controversy: the doctrine of plural marriage and the translation of the Book of Mormon. This article explores these teachings in depth, examining why they offended others and how they shaped perceptions of Joseph Smith and the early LDS movement.

Understanding the Context of Joseph Smith's Teachings

Before delving into specific teachings that offended others, it is important to understand the historical and cultural context in which Joseph Smith operated. The early 19th century in America was a time of religious revivalism, often characterized by fervent new religious movements, skepticism of traditional Christian doctrines, and social upheaval. Smith's revelations and teachings challenged existing religious and social norms, which led to both followers and detractors.

The Doctrine of Plural Marriage

Overview of Plural Marriage in Early Mormonism

One of the most controversial teachings introduced by Joseph Smith was the practice of plural marriage, also known as polygamy. Smith revealed to a select group of followers that God commanded the practice as part of divine law.

Key points about plural marriage:

- Revelation-Based Practice: Smith claimed divine revelation instructing him to marry multiple women beyond his first wife, Emma Smith.
- Number of Marriages: Historical records indicate Smith married at least 30 women, some of whom were already married or much younger.

- Purpose: The practice was justified as a means to build a righteous posterity, fulfill divine commandments, and restore ancient biblical practices.

Why Did Plural Marriage Offend Others?

The practice of plural marriage was deeply offensive to many during Smith's time for several reasons:

1. Violation of Mainstream Christian Norms:

- Monogamous marriage was the standard Christian norm, rooted in biblical teachings.
- The idea of marrying multiple women was seen as unbiblical and morally questionable.

2. Societal and Cultural Shock:

- Polygamy challenged the social fabric, especially concerning the roles of women and the sanctity of marriage.
- It was viewed as a threat to traditional family values and social stability.

3. Legal and Political Repercussions:

- Polygamy was illegal in the United States, leading to legal conflicts and criminal charges against early Mormons.
- The practice fueled anti-Mormon sentiment, culminating in violence and persecution.

4. Secrecy and Deception:

- Smith initially kept plural marriages secret, which led to accusations of deception and manipulation.
- When revelations about plural marriage became public, it caused scandal and damage to the church's reputation.

5. Impact on Emma Smith:

- Emma, Joseph Smith's wife, was deeply offended and distressed by the practice, which created personal and marital tensions.
- This emotional and relational conflict also contributed to broader societal discomfort.

Legacy of the Doctrine of Plural Marriage

- Official Church Policy:

The LDS Church officially discontinued the practice of plural marriage in 1890 with the Manifesto.

- Modern Perspectives:

Today, mainstream Mormonism condemns plural marriage, viewing it as a historical practice rather than a current doctrinal requirement.

- Historical Controversy:

The practice remains a point of contention among critics and historians, often cited as evidence of Joseph Smith's controversial teachings.

The Translation of the Book of Mormon

The Process of Translation

Another significant aspect of Joseph Smith's teachings that offended others was his translation of the Book of Mormon. Smith claimed that he translated the ancient record inscribed on golden plates through divine guidance.

Key points:

- The Golden Plates:

Smith reported discovering the plates in 1827, which he claimed contained the history of ancient peoples in the Americas.

- Method of Translation:

Using a Urim and Thummim (or seer stones), Smith purportedly translated the text from Reformed Egyptian into English.

- Publication:

The Book of Mormon was published in 1830 and became a foundational scripture for Mormonism.

Why Did the Translation Offend Others?

The translation process and the resulting book incited controversy for several reasons:

1. Questionable Historical Authenticity:

- Critics questioned the existence of the golden plates and the divine nature of the translation.
- Skeptics argued that Joseph Smith's claims lacked credible archaeological or historical evidence.

2. Challenging Traditional Christian Doctrine:

- The Book of Mormon introduced new doctrines that diverged from mainstream Christian teachings, such as the nature of God, salvation, and the role of ancient American civilizations.
- Some viewed it as heretical or a forgery.

3. Use of Seer Stones and Urim and Thummim:

- The translation process involved objects considered superstitious or unorthodox by outsiders.
- Critics saw this as evidence of deception or folk magic rather than divine intervention.

4. Cultural and Racial Tensions:

- The Book of Mormon contains references to ancient civilizations and peoples in the Americas, which some critics interpreted as racially biased or supporting racial stereotypes.
- These interpretations fueled accusations of racial insensitivity and contributed to societal offense.

5. Impact on Christian Supremacy:

- The Book of Mormon's claims to be another testament of Jesus Christ challenged the authority and uniqueness of the Bible.
- This doctrinal divergence offended many who viewed it as a threat to traditional Christianity.

Legacy of the Book of Mormon Translation

- Religious Significance:

The Book of Mormon remains central to Mormon faith and identity.

- Criticism and Skepticism:

Ongoing debates about its historical authenticity continue to generate controversy.

- Scholarly Perspectives:

Some scholars view the translation as an inspired religious text, while others see it as a product of 19th-century Romanticism and folk traditions.

Other Teachings That Offended Society

While plural marriage and the Book of Mormon translation are the most notable, other teachings and practices also caused offense:

- Polygamy and Race:

The LDS Church's past teachings on race, including restrictions on Black members holding priesthood until 1978, have been sources of controversy.

- Secrecy and Revelation:

The secretive nature of early church practices and revelations sometimes led to suspicion and accusations of deception.

- Political and Social Influence:

Joseph Smith's political aspirations and his efforts to establish a theocratic society alarmed many.

Conclusion: The Complex Legacy of Joseph Smith's Teachings

Joseph Smith's teachings and practices, especially the doctrine of plural marriage and the translation of the Book of Mormon, most offended others because they challenged prevailing social, religious, and moral norms of 19th-century America. These teachings sparked widespread suspicion, legal action, and societal rejection, contributing to persistent misunderstandings and controversies. Nonetheless, they also laid the foundation for a rapidly growing religious movement that continues to influence millions today. Understanding the reasons behind the offense helps contextualize the historical significance of Joseph Smith's teachings and highlights the complex legacy he left behind.

References and Further Reading

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Note: This article aims to provide a balanced overview of the teachings of Joseph Smith that caused controversy, emphasizing historical context and different perspectives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What aspect of Joseph Smith's teachings regarding plural marriage most offended others?

The most offensive aspect was the practice of plural marriage itself, which was controversial and challenged societal norms of the time, leading many to view it as immoral or unlawful.

How did Joseph Smith justify the practice of plural marriage in his teachings?

Joseph Smith taught that plural marriage was a divine commandment from God, intended to restore and practice early Christian principles, and was part of God's eternal plan for certain faithful followers.

What misconceptions about Joseph Smith's teachings on plural marriage contributed to its offense?

Misconceptions included misunderstandings about the nature of the marriages, accusations of coercion, and the belief that it was solely for personal gain, which fueled outrage and opposition.

In what ways did Joseph Smith's teachings on plural marriage affect the public perception of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?

The teachings led to widespread criticism, legal challenges, and social ostracism, as critics viewed the practice as immoral and illegal, significantly impacting the church's reputation.

Did Joseph Smith's teachings on plural marriage offend only non-members or members as well?

While many non-members were offended by the practice, some members also struggled with its implications, leading to internal debates and varying acceptance within the church.

How have modern Latter-day Saints addressed the historical teachings of Joseph Smith on plural marriage?

Modern members acknowledge the historical practice, emphasizing that it was a revelation specific to that time and context, and many focus on the church's current teachings which do not endorse plural marriage today.

Additional Resources

What About Joseph Smith's Teachings Most Offended Others?

Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, remains a figure of great historical and religious significance. His teachings, revelations, and leadership profoundly shaped the Mormon faith and its development. However, some of his doctrines and practices have been sources of controversy and misunderstanding, particularly among critics and those unfamiliar with the context of the 19th century. One of the most debated aspects of his teachings is the doctrine of plural marriage, which has often been invoked to criticize and offend others who view it as morally unacceptable or socially disruptive. This article explores what about Joseph Smith's teachings most offended others, with a particular focus on the doctrine of plural marriage, and examines the historical, social, and theological reasons behind that offense.

Understanding the Context of Joseph Smith's Teachings

Before diving into specific doctrines that caused offense, it is essential to understand the historical and cultural context of Joseph Smith's teachings.

The 19th Century Religious Landscape

The early 1800s in America was a period of religious revivalism, often called the Second Great Awakening. Various new religious movements and sects emerged, challenging traditional Christian doctrines and practices. Many of these groups emphasized personal revelation, direct communication with God, and a desire for a "restoration" of original Christianity.

Joseph Smith's Revelation and Founding of Mormonism

Joseph Smith claimed to have received divine revelations beginning in the early 1820s, which culminated in the founding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830. His teachings included unique doctrines about God, Christ, and the plan of salvation, as well as practices that set his movement apart from mainstream Christianity.

The Doctrine of Plural Marriage: What Was It?

Definition and Historical Background

Plural marriage, or polygamy, refers to the practice of a man having more than one wife simultaneously. Joseph Smith introduced this doctrine privately in the early 1840s and publicly announced it later in his life.

Key Aspects of Joseph Smith's Practice of Plural Marriage

- Revelation-based: Smith claimed that God revealed to him the principle of plural marriage as a divine commandment.
- Secretive Beginnings: Initially practiced secretly, with some wives being sealed to Smith through sacred ordinances.
- Theological Justification: Smith taught that plural marriage was essential for exaltation, eternal progression, and the restoration of ancient biblical practices.

The Role of Revelation in Justification

Smith asserted that God revealed to him the doctrine of plural marriage to restore a lost principle from biblical times, citing figures like Abraham, Jacob, and David as biblical precedents.

Why Did the Doctrine of Plural Marriage Offend Others?

Several factors contributed to the widespread offense and criticism directed at Joseph Smith's teachings on plural marriage:

1. Violation of Monogamous Norms

- Cultural Expectations: In 19th-century America, monogamy was the societal norm. Many viewed marriage as a union between one man and one woman.
- Offense to Morality: The idea of men having multiple wives was seen as morally questionable, especially by those outside the Mormon community.

2. Secrecy and Deception

- Secret Practice: Smith's early practice of secret marriages and sealed relationships fostered suspicion and accusations of dishonesty.
- Public Perception: Critics argued that the secretive nature of plural marriages was deceptive and manipulative.

3. Impact on Women

- Gender Concerns: Critics believed plural marriage marginalized women's rights, turning them into secondary spouses with limited agency.
- Social Disruption: The practice was seen as destabilizing traditional family structures and social order.

4. Legal and Social Opposition

- Legal Prohibitions: At the time, bigamy was illegal in the United States, leading to legal conflicts and criminal charges against Mormon leaders.
- Public Outcry: Anti-Mormon sentiments fueled outrage, portraying plural marriage as immoral and socially dangerous.

5. Religious and Theological Disagreements

- Contradiction with Mainstream Christianity: Many Christian denominations condemned the practice, viewing it as inconsistent with biblical teachings.
- Perception of Heresy: Critics labeled Joseph Smith's teachings as heretical, further alienating him and his followers.

The Offense: A Multifaceted Perspective

Cultural and Social Offense

The practice challenged deeply held societal norms, provoking fear and moral outrage. To many outsiders, plural marriage seemed like a deviation from accepted moral standards, leading to widespread condemnation.

Religious Offense

Mainstream Christian groups saw plural marriage as a deviation from biblical monogamy, accusing Smith of inventing new doctrines that distorted Christian teachings.

Personal Offense

For women involved in plural marriages, the practice could be emotionally and psychologically challenging, especially given the secrecy and societal opposition.

The Evolution of Joseph Smith's Teachings on Plural Marriage

Early Practice and Revelation

Smith's early teachings on plural marriage were initially kept secret, with some followers unaware of the full scope of the practice.

Public Disclosure and Controversy

In 1852, after Smith's death, Brigham Young publicly announced the doctrine of plural marriage, which further inflamed opposition and controversy.

Contemporary Perspectives

Today, the majority of mainstream Mormon denominations no longer practice plural marriage, viewing it as a historical practice specific to Joseph Smith's time.

Why Do Some Still Find Joseph Smith's Teachings Offensive Today?

Historical Misunderstandings and Misrepresentations

Many criticisms stem from misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the practice and its context.

Cultural Bias and Moral Judgments

Cultural differences and moral perspectives influence how critics perceive Smith's teachings, often leading to moral condemnation.

Ongoing Religious and Social Debates

Debates over religious freedom, morality, and historical accuracy continue to influence perceptions of Joseph Smith and his doctrines.

Summary: What About Joseph Smith's Teachings Most Offended Others?

In conclusion, the doctrine of plural marriage remains the most controversial and offensive aspect of Joseph Smith's teachings in the eyes of many critics. Its introduction challenged societal norms, religious orthodoxy, and legal statutes of the time, leading to significant social, cultural, and religious backlash. The secrecy surrounding its early practice, perceived threats to traditional family structures, and theological justifications all contributed to the widespread offense.

While today, plural marriage is largely absent from mainstream Mormon practice, understanding the historical context and reasons for the offense helps foster a more nuanced view of Joseph Smith's teachings and their impact. Recognizing that many criticisms were rooted in cultural and religious differences can promote respectful dialogue and appreciation for the complex history of this influential religious figure.

Further Reading & Resources

- "Joseph Smith and the Practice of Plural Marriage" - Historical accounts and scholarly analyses
- "The Mormon Experience: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" - Broader historical context
- Official Church Statements on Historical Practices - For perspectives from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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