

# spiritual terrorism



## what can happen when marriage is redefined

by Steve Reynolds

**C**olorado City, Arizona, is a bastion of Mormon Fundamentalism which upholds the practice of polygamy (or plural marriage) first introduced by Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism. In this remote outpost of the FLDS (Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints) church the faithful practice polygamy with zeal and fervor.

Riding the Arizona-Utah border, the city itself is home to some 1,000 people, most of whom are Mormon Fundamentalists. In a textbook example of cultic religious practice, Colorado City is, for all intents and purposes, a theocracy ruled by the town prophet. In his critically acclaimed book, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Jon Krakauer speaks of the prophet's absolute power over the inhabitants of Colorado City: "The mayor and every other city employee answers to him, as do the entire police force and the superintendent of schools. Even animals are subject to his whim. Two years ago a Rotweiler killed a child in town. An edict went out that dogs would no longer be allowed within the city limits. A posse of young men was dispatched to round up all the canines, after which the unsuspecting pets were taken into a dry wash and shot."<sup>1</sup>

Although Colorado City probably represents the largest single community of polygamists in

the United States, it is not the only place where the practice can be found. Many lone bands of polygamist families live in relative isolation from society, and their lifestyles, abuses and exploits are increasingly in the news.

One such case involved Tom Green, who after a revelation, felt compelled to show the world that "polygamists are not a threat, we are not fanatics, and we are not criminals."<sup>2</sup> Green appeared on *Dateline NBC* with his five wives and 32 children extolling the virtues of polygamy and confessing that he had married and impregnated one of his wives when she was only thirteen years old. Juab county (Utah) attorney David Leavitt was not impressed:

"...This is a man who has taken 13 and 14-year-old children, deprived them of any education, married them, impregnated them, required the state to pay the bill, and has raped a 13-year-old girl."<sup>3</sup>

Green was eventually brought up on charges of bigamy and having sex with a child. He was convicted on both counts and given five years for bigamy and five years to life for the rape of the child.

On June 5, 2002, then 14-year-old Elizabeth Smart was abducted from the Salt Lake City home of her affluent and devout Mormon parents by self proclaimed prophet Brian David Mitchell.

Mitchell believed himself to be a "ministering angel who was sent to Earth to correct the Mormon Church and restore its fundamental values."<sup>4</sup> Among the "values" that Mitchell hoped to reinstate to the Mormon Church was the long forsaken practice of polygamy.

Mitchell absconded with his young virgin bride-to-be into the hills near her home, performed a makeshift wedding ceremony with his wife Wanda Barzee and then raped Elizabeth Smart. In the

ensuing nine and a half months, the frantic family of Smart, via every conceivable media outlet, pleaded with Elizabeth's captors to return her safely. Finally, police in the Salt Lake area discovered the three on March 12, 2003. In a bizarre twist that underscores the power of psychological manipulation in cultic circles, Smart, at first, denied her true identity and later showed genuine concern for her captors.

### Polygamy and Mormonism

All 50 states have laws against polygamy, including Utah. Polygamists generally subvert the law by only legally marrying their first wife. Future wives remain single mothers in the eyes of state, opening the door for polygamous families to collect huge amounts of government welfare. "Fundamentalists call defrauding the government 'bleeding the beast' and regard it as a virtuous act."<sup>5</sup> Polygamy also violates mainstream Mormon doctrine, but this has not always been the case.

Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of Mormonism was himself a polygamist. There is evidence that he married anywhere from 33 to 48 women in his short lifespan of 38 years.<sup>6</sup> Smith laid out his theology of polygamy in Section 132 of his rambling revelation: *The Doctrine and Covenants*:

"If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him."<sup>7</sup> Under fierce pressure from the United States government the Mormon Church officially renounced polygamy in 1890. In a relatively short time, having reluctantly abandoned the ugly practice of polygamy, The



Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) has grown—from a pure numbers standpoint—to be one of the great religions of the world.

Krakauer drives home the irrefutable point that Mormonism is indeed a force to be reckoned with when he states that “at present in the United States there are more Mormons than Presbyterians or Episcopalians.” Worldwide, the LDS Church boasts a membership of eleven million.<sup>8</sup>

After mainstream Mormons abolished the practice of polygamy, Mormon Fundamentalist groups splintered from the “one true church” and set up their own “true churches,” faithful to the fundamental teachings of Joseph Smith, including the practice of polygamy. Groups such as these have existed to this day in one form or another in the United States and Canada.<sup>9</sup>

In fairness it should be stated that Mormons have a general reputation of being devout and morally upstanding people. This,

in itself, does not make them Christians any more than a moral Muslim or Buddhist would be a Christian. It is a widely held opinion among evangelical theologians that Mormon doctrine runs counter to the finished work of Jesus Christ and the grace that God offers through him.

### The Bible and Polygamy

Joseph Smith made his case for polygamy partly by claiming that God had commanded the Old Testament saint, Abraham to have two wives.<sup>10</sup> It is true that Abraham and other Old Testament saints took more than one wife. Abraham and his wife Sarah showed their lack of faith in God’s promise to give them a child by trying to fulfill the promise themselves. Sarah made the suggestion that Abraham should take Hagar, her maidservant as a wife, and he

did so. She later bore him a child, Ishmael. The practice was not unheard of at the time:

“In the legal custom of that day a barren woman could give her maid to her husband as a wife, and the child born of that union was regarded as the first wife’s child. If the husband said to the slave-wife’s son, ‘You are my son,’ then he was the adopted son and heir. So Sarai’s suggestion was unobjectionable according to the customs of that time. But God often repudiates social customs.”<sup>11</sup>

Thank God that people of the Bible like Abraham and Sarah are presented “warts and all.” It gives us hope and great peace to know that God loves his children unconditionally by his grace.

However, we should never try to condone their sin or use their sin as a license to go and do likewise. Clearly, the Bible teaches that

**POLYGAMISTS**, left to right: Brian David Mitchell, self-styled prophet, charged with kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault; Warren Jeffs, leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Tom Green, convicted bigamist, child rapist and father of some 32 children by his five wives (below).



LEFT, © SALT LAKE TRIBUNE / CORBIS SYGMA  
PHOTO OF TOM GREEN ABOVE,  
STEVE WILSON © REUTERS / CORBIS



# the lost boys

**More than 400 teenagers claim that they were driven out of Colorado City and surrounding communities to reduce competition for men who openly live with dozens of wives.**

Young boys growing up in Colorado City, Arizona can face expulsion and exile from their church, family and community simply because of their gender. Colorado City is home to the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) and its current leader, Warren Jeffs.

Jeffs is the 49-year-old prophet of the FLDS, the religious leader of between 10-15,000 people who believe in “plural marriage” (polygamy). The Mormon Church,

the church from which this group split over 100 years ago, disavows polygamy, and excommunicates any who practice it. In addition to strict opposition from its parent church the FLDS practice of polygamy is, of course, against the law. As of this writing Jeffs, reputed to have 70 wives, is on the run from civil authorities in Utah and Arizona who seek to enforce the law that he has allegedly flaunted. A \$10,000 reward is being offered for information leading to his arrest.

Teenage boys say that life is tough in Colorado City for young men because they represent competition to older married men who wish to marry additional wives, some of whom are teenage girls. The “Lost Boys”—a group of more than 400 teenagers who now live in exile—claim that they were driven out of Colorado City and surrounding communities in order to reduce competition for men who openly live with dozens of wives. Some were literally driven out—to St. George, Utah, a nearby town—by church members/families and abandoned by the side of the road like unwanted pets.

Life is not easy in Colorado City for young women either, but since many marry young, they are not banished, but remain as virtual prisoners, immersed in their sheltered cultic community. While they are not expelled as often as young boys, girls do run away to escape arranged marriages and sexual abuse. Children in Colorado City typically don’t attend school past the eighth grade, and consequently exist in a culture of ignorance and superstition.

Many of the “Lost Boys” (many of whom have received help and shelter in St. George) report that they have been singled out for ejection from both their families and the town of Colorado City for trumped up charges. They were said to have been disobedient and delinquent because they went to a movie, wore short sleeve shirts, listened to music or talked with girls.

When the FLDS expels a young boy from the church it also forbids parents from seeing them. Unless they exile their sons as ordered by their church, families who live in church-owned homes can face eviction. Families in St. George have responded to this crisis by unofficially adopting some of the boys who have been kicked out and abandoned.

Abraham and Sarah did the wrong thing in their scheme to try to have a child. Their sin also caused a great deal of pain to everyone involved and complicated their lives immensely.

There is little doubt that Old Testament saints such as Abraham, David and Solomon practiced polygamy. However, virtually everywhere that polygamy is mentioned in the Bible, it is presented in a negative light. And a valid and logical point may be made that if God intended for man to have more than one wife, he would have given Adam more than one. In other words, he would have instituted polygamy from the very beginning.

The Lord Jesus defended the sanctity of one-man one-woman marriage in the book of Matthew:

“Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’ And he said, ‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together” (Matthew 19:4-6, NLT).

Finally, perhaps the best case against polygamy for New Covenant believers is included in Paul’s instructions to the young pastor Timothy regarding church overseers:

“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2).

The words “husband of but one wife” literally translates a “one-woman man.” While this may leave some ambiguity as to whether an overseer may be divorced and remarried or not, it most certainly excludes the practice of polygamy.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps someone would make the argument that this is an instruction for only overseers. Such an interpretation would hold little water, in that an overseer is to be an example to the

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flock. The idea is that these virtues are to be the goal of all Christians.

### Is Polygamy a Victimless Sin?

Often we humans try to justify our sins by asking the question, "Who am I hurting with this behavior?" You can be assured that if polygamy is a sin, there are indeed victims who are left with deep emotional scars.

The victims of polygamy are women and children, a fact that is substantiated by the increasingly vocal victim's advocacy groups that are speaking out against the ravages of the practice of plural marriage. Flora Jessop, executive director of the Child Protection Project, is one such victim. Jessop escaped the polygamous lifestyle and now devotes her time to "exposing the church as a hotbed of child abuse" and helping the community's girls and women escape from the polygamous life she fled. "This is not a religion," she said of the Mormon church in a recent T.V. news program. "This is terrorism."<sup>13</sup> It is spiritual terrorism to be more exact.

FLDS men force unwilling girls to enter into polygamous marriages by threat of eternal damnation. It is hard for someone who has not been raised under cultic, fundamentalist, heavy-handed preaching to understand the weight that these threats carry.

Those who have experienced legalistic religion at its worst may have some insight, but chances are many of us have not experienced spiritual abuse to the degree of these women.

One victim reveals the deep-seated scar left upon her by these religious bullies: "I'm still dealing with the guilt of leaving the church...I'm afraid the Lord will strike me dead."<sup>14</sup>

### Legalized Polygamy?

Polygamy is illegal in the United States, but our traditional Judeo-Christian values concerning marriage have recently been questioned by a growing number of people. With the controversy surrounding the same-sex marriage debate, one

cannot help but wonder if legalized same-sex marriage would not open the door for polygamists to demand (perhaps with a valid legal argument) that the law protect their lifestyle as well. Margaret Somerville, writing in the *Montreal Gazette*, makes the point with laser-guided accuracy:

"The reason same-sex marriage opens up the possibility of polygamy is once marriage is detached from the biological reality of the basic inherently procreative relationship of one man and one woman, there is no longer any inherent reason to limit it to two people whether of the same or opposite sex. Once that biological reality is removed as an essential feature, marriage can become whatever we choose to define it as. In other words, if marriage has nothing to do with symbolizing the basic procreative relationship between one man and one woman, but only with public recognition of people's mutual love and commitment, why shouldn't three or more adults, just as much as two, have their love and commitment publicly recognized? And if people in same-sex relationships may do that, why not opposite sex ones?"<sup>15</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> Krakauer, Jon. *Under The Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith*. (New York: Anchor Books, 2004) pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20. Krakauer quotes polygamist Tom Green.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21. Krakauer quotes Utah attorney David Leavitt.

<sup>4</sup> Montaldo, Charles. Brian David Mitchell: Profile [http://crime.about.com/od/current/p/brian\\_mitchell.htm](http://crime.about.com/od/current/p/brian_mitchell.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Krakauer, 2004, pp. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Krakauer, 2004, pp. 5, 135.

<sup>7</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *The Doctrine and Covenants*, 132:61-62 <http://scriptures.lds.org/dc/132>.

<sup>8</sup> Krakauer, 2004, pp. 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Krakauer relates there is another outpost of Mormon Fundamentalism in Bountiful, British Columbia that adheres to the teaching of plural marriage.

<sup>10</sup> The Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 32.

<sup>11</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

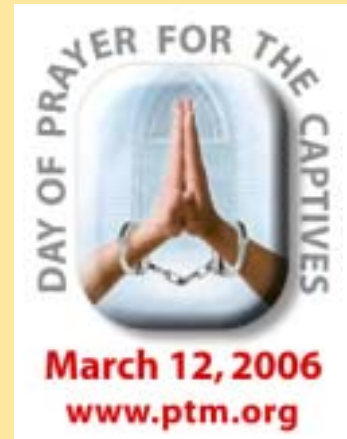
<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Heller. *Flora's War*, Los Angeles Times, August 1, 2004, p.17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Somerville. *Procreation, Polygamy and Same-Sex Marriage*, *Montreal Gazette*, February 18, 2005, <http://www.canada.com/search/story.html?id=ea6a5cdd-203e-4817-8b8b-dc8cc10340e9>.

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From the vantage point of our free Western society, it's hard to believe that people still live in slavery and oppression in some countries. Yet an even greater number—perhaps the majority of the world's population—live under some form of religious oppression. Incredibly, many of these are Christians who live under the mistaken belief that their observance of unbiblical rules, regulations and rituals will somehow make God more pleased with them. Plain Truth Ministries exists to bring the freedom of God's grace to these captives. But our work will not be successful without God's intervention.

Plain Truth Ministries invites you to join with us on *March 12th, 2006* in a day of prayer for the captives—for all those who are in the bonds of religious oppression and legalism.

What can you do? Join with Christian friends for a time of prayer. Pray for someone you know who is a slave to religious legalism. If you're in a small group, make it a point to meet on that day, and pray for religious captives. Tell your pastor. Email your Christian friends and let them know.

In the next issue of *Plain Truth*, we'll give you more details about how you can participate in this important event.