

INTRODUCTION/HEADNOTE

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Official Declaration 1 | VOLUME: Doctrine and Covenants | AUTHOR: LDS Church (Introduction authored by Church Historians/Editors; Manifesto by Wilford Woodruff)

OVERVIEW

The provided text serves as the explanatory introduction to Official Declaration 1, commonly known as the Manifesto of 1890. It frames the practice of plural marriage not as a mistake, but as a divinely instituted practice (via Joseph Smith and D&C 132) that was later suspended due to external legal pressure from the United States government. The text asserts a theological framework where monogamy is the standard, yet God may command exceptions to 'raise up seed.' It details the conflict between the Church and the U.S. Supreme Court, culminating in President Wilford Woodruff receiving a revelation to cease the practice. This text is pivotal in Mormon history as it marks the official end of authorized polygamy, shifting the church's trajectory toward assimilation with American culture while maintaining the claim that both the start and end of the practice were directed by God.

KEY FIGURES

Wilford Woodruff, Joseph Smith, U.S. Supreme Court, God

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONTINUOUS/PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

Assertion: God provides new revelation that can supersede previous commandments or adapt to political circumstances.

"After receiving revelation, President Wilford Woodruff issued the following Manifesto"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God's moral law (such as the definition of marriage in Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:4-6) is rooted in His unchanging nature and is not subject to revision based on political pressure or cultural shifts. This text presents a doctrine where God's commands are fluid; He commands polygamy in the 1840s and forbids it in 1890. This implies a God who reacts to human legal systems rather than one who establishes an eternal, transcendent law. Evangelicals hold to Sola Scriptura, believing the Bible is the final authority, whereas this text elevates the current Church President's revelation to a level that can modify scriptural practice.

2. DIVINE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

Assertion: Monogamy is the standard, but God reserves the right to command polygamy for specific purposes (raising seed).

"monogamy is God's standard for marriage unless He declares otherwise (see... Jacob 2:27, 30)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text relies on Jacob 2:30 to create a theological loophole: 'For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.' Evangelical hermeneutics reject the idea that God commands sin (adultery/polygamy) to achieve righteous ends (population growth). The New Testament reaffirms the 'one flesh' union of one man and one woman (Ephesians 5:31) as a picture of Christ and the Church, a metaphor that breaks down under polygamy.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap here is profound. For Evangelicals, God is immutable (Malachi 3:6) and His moral law is a reflection of His character, not a policy subject to revision. This text presents a God who institutes a practice (polygamy) declared essential for exaltation (in D&C 132), and then revokes it when the US Government applies pressure. This suggests a God who is reactive rather than sovereign, or a God whose moral standards are relative. Furthermore, it cements the LDS view that the 'Living Prophet' trumps dead scripture, a direct violation of Sola Scriptura.

Shared Values:

Monogamy (in current practice); Obedience to the law of the land (Romans 13)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Immutability of God – God changes His moral requirements based on human political pressure.
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – A modern manifesto supersedes the biblical definition of marriage and previous LDS scripture (D&C 132).
3. [Major] Biblical Morality – Suggests God commanded polygamy (adultery/sin in NT view) in the past.

Semantic Warnings:

"Standard"

In Text: The default setting, which can be overridden by divine command.

Evangelical: An absolute rule or measure of truth.

Example: *LDS: Monogamy is the standard, but polygamy is a divine exception. Evangelical: Monogamy is the absolute design of creation.*

"Revelation"

In Text: Ongoing communication from God to Church leaders that can alter church practice and doctrine.

Evangelical: The disclosure of truth, fully realized in Christ and the closed canon of Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Example: *LDS: Woodruff received revelation to stop polygamy. Evangelical: Revelation is complete in the Bible.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to obedience to the current prophet.

How Attained: By following the 'authoritative and binding' dictates of the Church President.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence in the Church's authority structure.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text reinforces a system where right standing with God is dependent on adherence to the shifting laws of the Church, rather than the finished work of Christ received by faith alone.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Accept the Manifesto as authoritative and binding
2. Cease the practice of plural marriage

Implicit Obligations:

1. Trust the Church President's timing and authority regarding changes in doctrine
2. Accept that previous prophets (Smith) and current prophets (Woodruff) can give contradictory commands that are both 'of God'

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. If God commanded plural marriage in D&C 132 as an 'everlasting covenant,' how can a change in US law cause God to revoke an eternal covenant?
2. Does God's moral law change based on what is legal in a specific country?
3. How do you reconcile the idea that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever with the idea that He commanded polygamy in 1840 but forbids it now?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for peace with the law – Just as the early Saints sought peace with the government to survive, we all need peace with the Ultimate Lawgiver. We cannot achieve this by changing the rules, but only through Christ fulfilling the law for us. [Romans 5:1, Romans 8:3-4]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Cognitive Dissonance [Severe] – The believer must hold two contradictory thoughts: 1) Polygamy is a holy, divine principle (D&C 132), and 2) Polygamy is currently forbidden and sinful to practice. This creates deep confusion about God's nature.
2. Uncertainty/Instability [Moderate] – If God can change the definition of marriage due to political pressure, what other 'eternal' doctrines might change tomorrow? The believer has no solid rock, only a shifting foundation of modern revelation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation validated by Church acceptance (Common Consent).

Verification Method: The text notes the Manifesto was 'accepted by the Church as authoritative and binding,' implying that collective acceptance validates the revelation.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the objective standard of the written Word (2 Timothy 3:16). If a leader claims a revelation that contradicts the Bible (or even their own previous scripture), it is rejected (Galatians 1:8). Here, truth is dynamic and mediated through the hierarchy.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1890 (Manifesto), 2013 (This specific introduction text).

Authorship: LDS Church Publication Committee (Introduction).

Textual Issues: The introduction frames the Manifesto as a revelation. However, historical analysis shows the Manifesto was drafted with legal counsel to satisfy the US government.