

# Mormon Meet to Hear Psychiatrist's Report Analyzing Joseph Smith and Polygamy

By Dawn Tracy  
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Traumatic experiences caused emotional disturbances that played a part in Mormon Church founder Joseph Smith practicing polygamy. But at the same time Smith had deep personal conflicts about the multiple liaisons, says a psychiatrist who will present a paper analyzing the church prophet at a gathering of LDS intellectuals later this month.

"I know a lot of people aren't aware of historical research findings about Joseph Smith's relationships with young and married women," said C. Jess Groesbeck, a Woodland, Calif., psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and Mormon. "I just hope people don't take the material out of context without hearing me out first."

The Sunstone Foundation's eighth annual Theological Symposium will be held Aug. 20 to 23 at the Salt Lake Sheraton Hotel. Second in Mormon attendance only to official LDS Church conferences, the foundation will feature Mormon thinkers such as Dr. Groesbeck, Hugh Nibley, Leonard Arrington, Sterling McMurrin and Rex E. Lee, as well as RLDS historian Paul Edwards.

Sessions will include discussions on controversial subjects such as the historicity of the Book of Mormon, evolution of the temple endowment ceremony, and how Mormons can respond to homosexuals in the church. Also, Mormon writer Carol Lynn Pearson will make her first public appearance before a national tour to discuss her book, *Good-bye, I Love You*, relating the story of her ex-husband's AIDS-related death. CBS has bought rights to the book for a made-for-television movie.

Many of the more than 100 authors, poets, history buffs, historians and educators participating in the symposium represent a growing number of Mormons who are examining subjects that take into account non-Mormon — sometimes unfriendly — sources heretofore outside the purview of the faithful.

Dr. Groesbeck said he was prompted to examine Smith's polygamous relationships after reading *Mormon Enigma*, a book co-authored Linda

Newell said resulted in LDS church authorities banning her from speaking in church. Mrs. Newell, a devout Mormon, said that ban has now been lifted. Dr. Groesbeck said two other publications also influenced his analysis of Smith. *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, by Provo audiologist Richard Van Wagoner, a Mormon, examines the early Mormon adherence to polygamy before the period LDS faithful believe God commanded its practice, and after the time church leaders went on record prohibiting it. In *Religion and Sexuality*, Lawrence Foster looks at the Mormon marriage experiment as part of a 19th century re-examination of families, marriage and sex roles.

"I wrote the paper for those who are aware of what appears to be sound, historical research," said Dr. Groesbeck, a former LDS missionary to Central America and former branch president who regularly visits the temple, where the most faithful Mormons attend. "I'm saying, 'okay, here's the information, now what are we going to do with it?'"

Using controversial methods developed by C.G. Jung and other psychoanalysts, Dr. Groesbeck analyzed the church prophet's recorded childhood and early adult experiences as well as little-known dreams. A painful leg infection that left Smith with a limp throughout his life and an attempted castration by a mob that suspected Smith's involvement with a young woman, profoundly affected the prophet's relationships with women. Both traumas played into fears of castration, and may have left the prophet unsure of his manhood and dependent upon his mother and then his wife.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints refuses to release figures on the number of wives Smith had during his lifetime (women also were sealed to Smith after his death). Estimates on the former range from 11 to 60 women.

Extreme castration fears should have kept Smith from multiple liaisons, but God, placing Smith in a "Job-like" position, commanded him to take other wives — even women married to

other men — placing Smith at a terrible risk with angry, hostile men.

"I believe Joseph believed God commanded him to practice polygamy," said Dr. Groesbeck. "He was confronted with a commandment to do what he feared most at the same time he had tendencies toward multiple relationships, complicated by a dependence on a wife who opposed it all."

The prophet may not have been able to break from the dominance of his mother, made even stronger because of a loving but weak father, according to Dr. Groesbeck. Consequently, Joseph Smith may have had a strong "mother complex" that prevented him from firmly committing himself to a single relationship with a specific woman.

Yet Smith had a monogamous nature as well, said Dr. Groesbeck. The church founder may have had an emotional dependence on his wife that would somehow shield him from hostile men, as his mother had done in his childhood. Emma also played an intricate part in the translation of the golden plates, the development of Mormonism, and the evolution of Smith's spiritual nature. Emma supported her husband in all things except polygamy, unequivocally opposing it to her death. The Smith's son, Joseph Smith III, who assumed the presidency of the RLDS Church, condemned polygamy and insisted his father had never practiced it.

"RLDS Church members believe Joseph Smith was a monogamist, the LDS insist he was a polygamist, and in a historical sense, I believe they're both right," said Dr. Groesbeck. "There were two facets to Joseph Smith, a commitment to both polygamy and monogamy. The dilemma remained unresolved until his death."

Dr. Groesbeck said Smith's final resolution came in a dream a few days before his murder: the prophet saw himself victorious over his enemies and in heaven with his family. "Polygamy got Joseph Smith killed," he said. "There was no reconciliation during his lifetime because his family couldn't accept polygamy, and it caused havoc for the people he cared most about."