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Woodward | Rel. 225

**Critical Thinking Assignment #3: Contextualizing Facts**

**Instructions**

Demonstrate your ability to add proper and accurate context to potentially shocking but true church history facts by responding to all of the questions following each scenario below.

**JOSEPH SMITH’S POLYGAMY**

Scenario #1: Your friend Karley is struggling because of Joseph Smith’s polygamy. When you ask her what exactly it is about his polygamy she is struggling with, she says she’s always known that Joseph practiced plural marriage, but she didn’t know that HE MARRIED A 14 YEAR OLD GIRL!!! “That is just so wrong on so many levels!” she says.

*Questions*:

1.1 What are three points of crucial context (historical or doctrinal) that Karley should know in order to neutralize the shock factor of this fact?

* Joseph Smith was following revelation from God. He resisted the revelation for a time, but an angel visited him multiple times and taught Joseph Smith that he must follow God’s command to practice polygamy.
* While Joseph Smith had many wives, we have reason to believe that he favored Emma, his original wife, above others.
* While some women that Joseph married claimed it was for time and eternity, others stated that they married for eternity only. The practice of plural marriage was to ensure people a place in the celestial kingdom in which there can only be married men and women.

1.2 What is a trustworthy source (or sources) you could recommend to Karley where she could go to get more accurate context about this? Be very specific (don’t just say “lds.org” ☺).

In the Church History Topics on the lds church’s website, there is one article titled “Joseph Smith and Plural Marriage.”

(https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-smith-and-plural-marriage?lang=eng)

1.3 Model it! Write a brief paragraph to Karley where you put Joseph’s marriage to 14 year-old Helen Mar Kimball into its proper context and thereby neutralize how shocking this fact sounds without context (please weave in your three points from 1.1 as you do so).

Joseph Smith did marry a 14-year-old girl and practiced polygamy, but this was due to a real revelation from God. Joseph Smith resisted the revelation for a time, but an angel visited him and taught him to follow the revelation Joseph received to practice polygamy. While Joseph Smith married some women for time and eternity, he married the 14-year-old girl for eternity alone. This action was taken to ensure she had an opportunity to live with God in the celestial kingdom. As we know, only married men and women can live in the celestial kingdom, and Joseph Smith was ensuring these women a place there. Finally, even after marrying many woman, Joseph Smith favored his original wife, Emma Smith. Polygamy was not something many saints enjoyed, rather, most felt that it was a trial that threatened their families.

Scenario #2: Your brother is struggling because of Joseph Smith’s polygamy. When you ask him what exactly it is about his polygamy he is struggling with, he says he’s always known that Joseph practiced plural marriage, but he didn’t know that HE MARRIED 14 OTHER MEN’S WIVES!!! “That is just so wrong on so many levels!” he says.

*Questions*:

2.1 What are three points of crucial context (historical or doctrinal) that your brother should know in order to neutralize the shock factor of this fact?

* Joseph Smith married these wives because the women were faithful, and their husbands were not. They were married to ensure that these women would have a place in the celestial kingdom in which there can only be married men and women.
* Joseph Smith always spoke with the men and made his actions clear before marrying their wives. He ensured that the women willingly married him, and he hoped that the men would also support the decision.
* Joseph Smith was a man of God and ensured that God supported his joining with these wives every time he married.

2.2 What is a trustworthy source (or sources) you could recommend to your brother where he could go to get more accurate context about this? Be very specific (don’t just say “google it!” ☺).

In the Church History Topics on the lds church’s website, there is one article titled “Plural Marriage and Families in Early Utah.”

(https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/plural-marriage-and-families-in-early-utah?lang=eng)

2.3 Model it! Write a brief paragraph to your brother where you put Joseph’s marriage to other men’s wives into proper context and thereby neutralize how shocking this fact sounds without context (please weave in your three points of context from 2.1 as you do so).

Joseph Smith married these wives because while the women were faithful, their husbands were not. They were married to ensure that these women would have a place in the celestial kingdom in which there can only be married and faithful men and women. Moreover, Joseph Smith always spoke with the husbands and made his intentions clear before marrying their wives. He ensured that the women willingly married him, and he hoped that the men would also support the decision. Finally, Joseph Smith was a man of God and ensured that God supported his joining with these wives every time he married.

**MASONRY AND THE TEMPLE ENDOWMENT**

Scenario #3: Your cousin Stacie stumbled across a website critical of the Church which pointed out that there are MANY similarities between the clothing and rituals of Freemasonry and the Endowment ceremony performed in LDS temples. The similarities are so striking, in fact, that there is only one conclusion (according to this website), and that is: Joseph Smith secretly plagiarized the Freemason’s stuff and pawned it off on the Church as a revealed “restoration” of an essential ordinance. Stacie is floored by this information and her head is spinning. She calls you a bit upset and tells you all about what she’s learned, seeking your perspective. “Have you heard of this?” she asks.

*Questions*:

3.1 What are three points of crucial context (historical or doctrinal) that Stacie should know in order to neutralize the shock factor of this fact?

* Joseph Smith never claimed that other religions were wrong in their entirety. The early saints only said that what set them apart was the fact that they held priesthood keys that others did not, but other religions had good practices that Joseph Smith felt God supported.
* Joseph Smith was a Free Mason himself and participated in their practices. However, this doesn’t mean Joseph Smith was not faithful to his calling as a prophet of God. Similarly, there are many influential leaders who were Free Masons.
* The Mason’s practices were copied in the temple endowment, but they did not mean the same thing. In Masonry, bonds were made between men, but in the temple endowment we make bonds with God.

3.2 What is a trustworthy source (or sources) you could recommend to Stacie where she could go to get more accurate context about this? Be very specific (don’t just say “follow your heart” ☺).

From the BYU Religious Studies Center, you can read about “Freemasonry and the Latter-day Saint Temple Endowment Ceremony.”

(https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/pub\_content/pdf/Freemasonry\_and\_the\_Latter-day\_Saint\_Temple\_Endowment\_Ceremony.pdf)

3.3 Model it! Write a brief paragraph to your cousin Stacie where you put the relationship between masonry and the temple endowment into proper context and thereby neutralize how shocking this insinuation of plagiarism seems without context (please weave in your three points of context from 3.1 as you do so).

Joseph Smith never claimed that other religions were wrong in their entirety. What set the early apart was their holding of priesthood keys that others did not hold. However, but other religions had good practices that Joseph Smith felt God supported. Furthermore, Joseph Smith was a Free Mason himself and participated in their practices. This doesn’t mean Joseph Smith was not faithful to his calling as a prophet of God, but the practices did inspire how ordinances were performed in temples. There were many influential leaders who were Free Masons as well. The Mason’s practices were copied in the temple endowment, but they did not mean the same thing. In Masonry, bonds were made between men, but in the temple endowment we make bonds with God.