

Plain Talk:

OK folks, let's cut the baloney. Let's stop with the rationalizations and revisionist makeovers that loyalists have been using to explain or condone the behavior of those nineteenth century nuts in Texas. I'm talking about the Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints and their practice of ritualized child abuse called polygamy.

Institutionalized rape is still rape. The fact that persuasive, abusive, clever old men are able to convince female children that their prison is the will of god does not alter the fact that what they are doing is flat out wrong. Period.

The prophet, Joseph Smith, was a philandering egomaniac who couldn't keep his business in his pants. He was a snake oil salesman (literally) who was so driven by his compulsion for sex that he invented a sect and a scripture out of whole cloth simply to justify his behavior. Utter nonsense penned by a borderline psychotic who, as many nuts do, had a way with words.

Imagine the prophet sitting under a tree cooking up the big one. "Let's see now. Last night God himself came to me and told me to take as many wives as I need. Yes, that's it! God came to me and said I should have my way with dozens of girls, force them to do whatever I want, and call it religion." He must have sat back for a minute and thought.

"I've sold some mighty potions in my day but nothing as big as this. This is going to take some real fancy stepping for me to convince those mothers and fathers out there to hand over their daughters." Well, it was a struggle and he died doing it, but the big rascal pulled it off didn't he? He connected with enough folks who were disenfranchised, longing for a land to live in, needing a spiritual center that was missing from their lives. He found a crew and cultivated it and created a core of resilient, resourceful, talented people who built a world all their own. Theirs' was a remarkable story of strength and vision and focus.

It was also (and still is for the Fundamentalists) a story of ritualized, rationalized, codified sexual abuse. Rape is not justifiable. It's time to stop worrying about treading on someone's toes. We're not threatening religion here, we're pointing out criminals.

The laws of the State exist to protect the State and its citizens. A great many laws are in place particularly to protect citizens who are not able to take care of themselves. There are laws on the books everywhere to protect children from predatory adults. It is in the interest of a society to protect its children from dangerous adults. Sexual predators are dangerous adults whose targets are not savvy enough, yet, to see what's being forced on them. These targets are also far too weak physically and emotionally to defend themselves even when they do recognize an attacker.

Predators delude and insulate themselves with all manner of justification for what they do. Talk to any therapist who works with abusers and she'll tell you that the excuses range from "the kid egged me on" to "the voice on the radio told me to do it". Following the imagined instructions of one's deity is on the list too. Laws for protecting children can not be ignored; children can not be harmed simply because the predator is listening to a god who smiles down on lecherous men.

Laws are on the books to protect religious freedoms too. These rights are constitutionally guaranteed. The State has an interest in making sure that you are free to worship and believe as you choose. A theologically diverse State is healthier than a monolithic one. A State that protects minority (as in religious minority) rights is a healthier State than one which recognizes only the rights of the dominant culture.

But this protection ends when a religious practice breaks the laws of the State. It must be this way. The alternative is nonsense and chaos. Forced "marriage" of teenaged girls is against the law. And it should be against the law, no matter what the book or the radio voice or the bearded old man tells you to do.