

Polygamy in the Jewish and Western Tradition - Religion, Class and Tolerance

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Abstract : The question of polygamy for Moslem minorities in Western nations has often been raised in the political and social discourse. Can polygamy be tolerated as a religious or human right in the West. For example, before the 2015 election in Israel, changes were made in the electoral system, which encouraged three small Arab parties to merge into one list. This "Unity List" included the socially liberal Communist list and a socially conservative Islamist list. Two members of the Islamist list were polygamists. Some rival politicians called for the election board to disqualify these men (and even the whole list) from the election process. This request was denied by the courts, and the men were elected to the parliament. Their subsequent seating in the parliament was questioned by many on both the liberal and conservative sides of the political spectrum. Some political commentators went so far as to describe polygamy as a "mark of disgrace" (a term usually reserved for people convicted on corruption charges). There are also problems in other areas of society; these include the rights of these families for welfare and social services (public policy issues) and residence in Israel. Using qualitative methods (primarily historical and archival data), this paper will analyze at the historic and cultural processes which created the intense opposition to polygamy in Judaism (for Israel) and Christianity (for the Western world). It will look at the debate over the "religious right" of polygamy for Moslem citizens in Israel and other Western cultures. Finally, it will examine the political, cultural, and demographic pressures which encourage polygamy in these minorities. This paper will demonstrate that the debate over polygamy is more than a question of religious freedom or human rights or multi-culturalism. It is a central symbol of modernity and the Western worldview.

Keywords : human rights, Judaism, multi-culturalism, polygamy, western values

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