SOFTWARE & TECH

Molly Mormons Mormon Feminists And Moderates What Is Mormon Religion Based On

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Introduction: Understanding the Spectrum of Mormon Identity

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often colloquially called the Mormon Church, is one of the fastest-growing religious movements in the world. Yet, for many outsiders—and even some insiders—the question remains: **What is Mormon religion based on?** At its core, Mormonism is built upon a unique blend of Christian theology, modern revelation, and a distinctive set of cultural practices. However, within this faith tradition, a rich and complex spectrum of identities has emerged. Terms like **Molly Mormons**, **Mormon feminists**, and **moderates**are frequently used to describe different ways of living and interpreting the faith. This article will explore these subgroups, their relationships to the broader religion, and the foundational beliefs that unite—and sometimes divide—them.

What Is Mormon Religion Based On? Foundational Beliefs

To understand the diverse expressions of Mormonism, we must first answer the central question: **What is Mormon religion based on?**The religion was formally organized in 1830 by Joseph Smith Jr., whom Latter-day Saints revere as a prophet. Its foundation rests on several key pillars:

- The Book of Mormon: Considered another testament of Jesus Christ, this scripture is believed to be an ancient record of God's dealings with the inhabitants of the Americas. It stands alongside the Bible as holy writ.
- Continuing Revelation: Mormonism teaches that God still speaks to humanity through living prophets and apostles. The President of the Church is regarded as a prophet, seer, and revelator today.
- The Restoration: Mormons believe that after centuries of apostasy, the original church established by Jesus Christ was restored through Joseph Smith. This includes priesthood authority, ordinances like baptism by immersion, and the organization of the church.
- The Plan of Salvation: A central doctrine that explains the purpose of life, the nature of God, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the potential for eternal progression. This plan includes pre-mortal existence, mortal life, death, spirit world, resurrection, and final judgment.
- Covenants and Ordinances: Members make sacred promises (covenants) through ordinances such as baptism, confirmation, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and temple marriage. These are considered essential for returning to God's presence.
- Lifestyle and Ethics: The religion promotes strict moral standards, including the Word of Wisdom (a health code prohibiting alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and tea), tithing (10% of income), and emphasis on family, service, and education.

These foundational elements create a cohesive theological framework. Yet, within this structure, members

interpret and live their faith in varied ways, giving rise to the distinct groups we will now examine.

The Term "Molly Mormon": Stereotype or Identity?

The phrase **Molly Mormon**is a cultural label, not an official church designation. It typically describes a woman who embodies the idealized, often stereotypical, Mormon woman: perfectly obedient, consistently cheerful, dedicated to homemaking and motherhood, and fully compliant with church standards. The male counterpart is "Peter Priesthood."

For some, being called a Molly Mormon is a compliment—it signifies faithfulness and virtue. For others, the term carries negative connotations of naivety, conformity, or pressure to appear perfect. The Molly Mormon archetype emphasizes modesty in dress, purity in thought, active service in church callings (such as teaching or leading the women's organization, the Relief Society), and unwavering support of church leaders.

This identity is rooted in the traditional teachings of the church about gender roles. The LDS Church has long taught that "gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose" (from "The Family: A Proclamation to the World"). Women are encouraged to prioritize marriage and motherhood, though many also pursue education and careers. The Molly Mormon persona reflects a deep commitment to these ideals, often with a focus on external behaviors as expressions of internal faith.

However, critics argue that the Molly Mormon label can create unrealistic expectations, leading to burnout or feelings of inadequacy among women who cannot—or choose not to—fit the mold. This tension is part of the broader conversation about identity within Mormonism.

Mormon Feminists: Seeking Equality and Voice

In contrast to the traditional Molly Mormon image, **Mormon feminists**are members (mostly women, but also supportive men) who advocate for greater gender equality within the church. The movement has a long history, with notable figures like Emmeline B. Wells, a 19th-century women's rights activist and Relief Society president. Modern Mormon feminism gained renewed visibility in the early 21st century, particularly through groups like Ordain Women, which called for the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Mormon feminists generally affirm the core doctrines of the faith—they believe in the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith's prophetic calling, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ. However, they critique certain policies and cultural practices they view as limiting women's participation. Key issues include:

- Priesthood ordination: The LDS Church ordains all worthy males to the priesthood starting at age 11 (Aaronic Priesthood) and later to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Women do not hold priesthood offices, though they serve in leadership roles in auxiliaries. Feminists argue this exclusion is not doctrinally necessary and may be a product of cultural patriarchy.
- Women and authority: While women can lead the Relief Society, Primary (children's organization), and Young Women, they do not hold key decision-making positions at the highest levels of church leadership (such as Quorum of the Twelve Apostles).
- Temple rituals: Some feminists have called for more inclusive language and practices in temple ceremonies.
- Workplace and family balance: While the church officially supports women's choices, cultural expectations often pressure women to stay at home, which feminists see as limiting their agency.

Mormon feminists are not a monolithic group. Some are publicly active, writing blogs, organizing conferences (like the Sunstone Symposium), or engaging in peaceful protests. Others work quietly within their wards (congregations) to promote change. The tension between Mormon feminists and traditionalists, including some who identify as Molly Mormons, highlights the ongoing struggle to define authentic Mormon identity.

It is important to note that the official LDS Church leadership has consistently maintained that current policies regarding gender and priesthood are based on revelation and will not change. This has caused some feminists to leave the church, while many remain, hoping for gradual evolution or focusing on other aspects of the faith.

Moderates: Navigating the Middle Path

Between the poles of strict traditionalism and progressive feminism, a large number of **moderates**exist. These are members who embrace the core teachings of Mormonism but interpret them with nuance and flexibility. They may not fully align with either the Molly Mormon archetype or the feminist activist profile.

Moderate Mormons typically:

- Engage with church doctrine: They accept the Book of Mormon as scripture, attend church regularly, and strive to live by Christian principles. However, they may approach historical or doctrinal questions with an open mind, acknowledging that leaders are human and fallible.
- Balance orthodoxy with personal conscience: They follow church policies (such as tithing and Word of Wisdom) but may disagree with the church's stance on certain social issues, like LGBTQ+ rights or political involvement. They often prefer to keep their doubts private rather than challenge leadership publicly.
- Focus on community and service: For many moderates, the church's social network, support system, and emphasis on charity are the most valuable aspects. They may be less concerned with theological precision.
- Encourage inclusion: Moderates often advocate for a welcoming environment for questioning members, single adults, and those with diverse backgrounds, without necessarily seeking structural changes.

The moderate stance is not always easy. They may feel caught between the orthodoxy of Molly Mormons and the activism of feminists. Yet, they are vital to the church's resilience, providing a bridge that helps maintain unity despite internal diversity.

Intersections and Tensions: A Complex Tapestry

It is a mistake to see these three categories as completely separate. In reality, identities overlap. A woman might be a Molly Mormon in her dedication to daily scripture study and family prayer, yet also hold feminist convictions about women's roles. A moderate might strongly support the principle of continuing revelation, which is the same foundation that feminists use to argue for change. The key is understanding that **what is Mormon religion based on**provides a shared core, but individual interpretation and lived experience create a spectrum.

The official church teaches unity and discourages public dissent. This creates a cultural pressure to conform, which can be challenging for feminists and moderates who feel their perspectives are marginalized. However, the internet has given voice to these subgroups, allowing them to connect, share experiences, and find solidarity.

For example, the blogosphere and social media platforms like the "Mormon Women Stand" group represent traditionalist voices, while "Feminist Mormon Housewives" offers a space for progressive discussion. The existence of both shows that the question "What is the Mormon religion based on?" is answered not just by official doctrine, but by the lived faith of millions of individuals.

The Role of Culture vs. Doctrine

A crucial distinction in understanding these groups is the difference between core doctrine and cultural practice. The Mormon religion is based on eternal truths as taught by prophets, but many of the behaviors associated with "Molly Mormon" or "moderate" lifestyles are cultural accretions—some helpful, some potentially harmful.

For instance, the expectation that women should be homemakers is not explicitly spelled out in the Book of

Mormon but developed from a combination of 19th-century American norms and prophetic teachings about family. Similarly, the feminist call for women's ordination touches on the deeper question of whether gender roles are eternal or culturally contingent.

Moderates often recognize this distinction and choose to follow church counsel in areas they see as essential (like the Atonement and covenants) while being flexible in matters of personal preference (like style of dress or career choices).

Conclusion: A Faith for All Seasons

So, **what is Mormon religion based on?**It is based on a foundational belief in Jesus Christ, the restoration of His gospel through modern prophets, the authority of priesthood, and a plan of salvation that extends beyond mortal life. But as we have seen, the answer also involves the dynamic interplay between divine mandate and human interpretation.

The terms **Molly Mormons**, **Mormon feminists**, and **moderates**represent different ways of negotiating faith in a complex world. None of these labels captures the full richness of any individual's spiritual journey, but they help us understand the broader landscape of contemporary Mormonism. Whether one leans toward tradition, reform, or a middle path, the shared foundation remains the same: a desire to follow God and build Zion, while grappling with the very human challenge of living a religion in practice.

The beauty of Mormonism lies not in uniformity but in the sincere, if sometimes messy, effort of its members to live according to light and truth as they perceive it. And that, perhaps, is the most enduring answer to the question of what the Mormon religion is based on.

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