

## POST-CONFERENCE CRITIQUE:

### FOR SERIOUS WATCHERS ONLY!

The third semi-annual "Play-by-Play: General Conference Critique for Serious Watchers," is scheduled for Monday, April 3, 1995, from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. in the Auditorium, third floor, of the Salt Lake Public Library, 209 East 500 South.

"Serious Watchers," according to the organizers, are defined as "people who actually listen to, watch, think about, and otherwise pay attention to April General Conference." People who gave up watching conference in 1972 or those who have the television on in the living room but are debating sports statistics in the family room have spectator-only status.

This conference promises plenty of content for comment. It is automatically important as the first-ever back-to-back sustainings of new church presidents. President Hinckley's "carry on" theme, which avoided identifying his presidency from its start with a selected theme creates suspense. Will he identify one (or more?) during his conference addresses? The format will be comments from panelists and audience members on highlights, lowlights, dominant messages, significant subtexts, minute variations from preceding conferences, and a wishlist of other possibilities.

Lavina Fielding Anderson will moderate the panel with the participation of theologian Janice Merrill Allred of Orem, Utah, musician Ardean Watts of Salt Lake City, and LDS converts and business people Richard and Yvonne Williams of Billings, Montana.

"We consider general conference to be worthy of our most serious attention for both spiritual and intellectual reasons," comments Anderson. "We invite thoughtful sharing."

## "DOUBLE BETRAYAL": CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE MORMON CHURCH

An inevitable victim in any case of child sexual abuse is that child's trust in the authority figure who committed the abuse. What happens when that betrayal is compounded by the second betrayal that occurs when Church leaders fail to respond appropriately and supportively?

This was the topic discussed by a six-person panel chaired by Marion Smith, former director of the Intermountain Sexual Abuse Clinic. She stressed that many bishops have "literally saved lives" of survivors, particularly those who, as adults, recovered memories of sexual abuse and thanked them.

The panelists, however, told stark stories of "other" cases. Kristie Morton, sexually abused almost nightly as a teen during one summer when she stayed with a respected uncle who held a high ecclesiastical position, told of remaining silent for more than fifteen years. Brothers-in-law Jim Mitchie and Mark Burton related their experiences when they tried to bring the existence of child sexual abuse in their families to the attention of stake leaders. Interest and sympathy dropped to zero when they learned that the perpetrators were related to a General Authority. Martha Pierce, guardian ad litem, explained the responsibilities of an "ethical" bishop, while Andrea Moore Emmett covered a number of national cases reported in the news media of Mormon leaders who used their positions to abuse.

Marion Smith expressed the hope for more open dialogue with General Authorities about better training for bishops who work with sexual abuse victims, more information for parents, and an explicit "victims first" policy.



## 2 CHURCHWATCH

Lavina Fielding Anderson

*Note: This column contains items relevant to on-going issues of leader-member relations, Mormon feminism, and academic freedom. It continues the chronology published in Dialogue (Spring 1993). This issue provides a brief overview of events from 1993 to March 1995.*

June 1993. Two controversial BYU faculty members, David C. Knowlton, an anthropologist, and Cecilia Konchar Farr, a feminist literary critic, were informed that BYU would not grant them continuing status. Their appeals were denied. Faculty members John Beck, Martha Nibley Beck, Martha Sonntag Bradley, Bonnie L. Mitchell, Tomi-Ann Roberts, and Bill Davis left the university.

September 1993. Lynne Kanavel Whitesides, president of the Mormon Women's Forum, was disfellowed for "apostasy." Avraham Gileadi, an independent Isaiah scholar, Paul Toscano, speculative theologian, Maxine Hanks, feminist editor of Women and Authority, Lavina Fielding Anderson, chronicler, and D. Michael Quinn, historian, were all excommunicated for "apostasy."

October 1994. Steve Benson, Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist for the Arizona Republic, and his wife Mary Ann Benson resigned from the Church, partly because of official misrepresentation about the health of Steve's grandfather, Church President Ezra Taft Benson. Steve also revealed that Elder Boyd K. Packer had met with Paul and Margaret Toscano's stake president on the very day that the stake president began disciplinary proceedings against them and that Dallin Oaks, who had admitted that fact to Steve, had denied it to an Arizona Republic reporter. (In that interview, Elder Oaks also called dissidents "publicity hounds" and "wolves.") General conference was strongly themed to the need for unity and the perils of "criticism."

April 1994. David Wright, a biblical scholar at Brandeis University, was excommunicated by his stake president for his views of the Book of Mormon. Michael Barrett, an attorney with the Central Intelligence Agency in Washington D.C., was excommunicated by his stake president, the Church's local public relations person, for writing letters to the editor providing historical and doctrinal information to correct incomplete or inaccurate news stories. His stake president conceded that the letters were truthful.

March 1994. Bo Gritz, independent presidential candidate who garnered about 20,000 votes in the

Mountain West in the last election, resigned from the Church in March because his bishop linked tax payment to temple recommend.

June 1994. After President Benson's death, President Howard W. Hunter issued an invitation "to those who have transgressed or been offended, we say come back."

August 1994. Jim Harmston of Manti, where perhaps seventy conservative Latter-day Saints had been excommunicated, declared himself president and prophet of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days and announced the restoration of plural marriage.

October 1994. Janice Merrill Allred, Provo theologian and mother of nine, was placed on probation for her Dialogue article, "Toward a Theology of God the Mother" and for refusing to submit future articles to the bishop for clearance. The terms of her probation are identical to those of disfellowshipment.

October 1994. Former Seventy George P. Lee, excommunicated for "apostasy" in late 1985, came to trial for sexually molesting a nine-year-old girl from 1982 to 1985, plea-bargained, pled guilty to "attempted sexual abuse," and received 18 months probation.

December 1994. Brent Metcalfe, editor of New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, was excommunicated for "apostasy."

March 1995. BYU English Department chair Jay Fox told faculty member Brian Evenson that his Altmann's Tongue (Knopf) was "inappropriate." Evenson's second book is under consideration with a national publisher. The chair, Jay Fox, was responding to an anonymous letter sent to the First Presidency.

March 13, 1995. President Gordon B. Hinckley, succeeding President Hunter, who died of cancer, responding to a question about dissident Mormons, said: "We regret the course which some of them may have followed, but our arms are open to receive them, to encourage them, to help them to return as active and faithful and devoted members of the Church."



## ECCLESIASTICAL / SPIRITUAL ABUSE

### Definitions

Ecclesiastical abuse occurs when a Church officer, acting in his calling and using the weight of his office, coerces compliance, imposes his personal opinions as Church doctrine or policy, or resorts to such power plays as threats and intimidation to insure that his views prevail in a conflict of opinions. The suggestion is always that the member's faith is weak, testimony inadequate, and commitment to the Church lacking. We tend to use "ecclesiastical abuse" and "spiritual abuse" as interchangeable terms, but their emphases are slightly different. "Ecclesiastical abuse" focuses on the perpetrator, who is an ecclesiastical officer, and the setting, which is usually church and frequently involves procedural issues. "Spiritual abuse" focuses on the member's inner state and the consequences of the behavior, which usually involve damage to faith, spiritual self-esteem, and testimony.

### Profile of Ecclesiastical/Spiritual Abuse

Seven factors characterize most abusive encounters:

1. A difference of opinion is not simply a difference of opinion but is treated as a revelation of moral inadequacy on the part of the member. If the difference of opinion stems from scholarship on the member's part or the application of professional tools to an aspect of Mormon studies, the officer seldom has the technical expertise to discuss the point at issue. Frequently he shifts the grounds of the discussion to the dangers of promulgating any perspective but the traditional one and insists that there is something bad or wrong about holding alternative views.

2. A request for help on the part of a member is seen as an invitation to judge the member's worthiness on the part of the officer.

3. No matter what the content of the initial issue, any issue can escalate with terrifying quickness into a power struggle in which the ecclesiastical officer demands compliance because of his office and accuses the member of not sustaining his leaders and/or of apostasy. These charges, in turn, lead to threats to confiscate temple recommends, to release the member from callings, and to conduct disciplinary councils.

4. If the member protests such actions and

refuses to yield to the officer's power, then the very act of protest or the expressed desire to continue the discussion is seen as evidence of the charges. The officer feels justified in refusing to explain the reasons for taking the action and unilaterally terminates the discussion by citing his authority. The member, rather than having a problem, has become the problem.

5. If, another ecclesiastical leader, such as a stake president or an area president becomes aware of and involved in the situation, the original leader almost always controls the flow of information to this second leader. The opportunities to present biased information, reframe the issue as one of disobedience, and portray the member as a trouble-maker are legion. The first leader seldom suggests a group discussion or meeting that involves a mediator or a referee; rather, he is usually able to use the weight of the second officer's office and power to reinforce his own in the effort to force the member's capitulation.

6. The member feels unjustly treated. Feelings of helplessness, betrayal, anger, and depression frequently follow. Expressions of "increased love" seldom if ever follow "rebukes" from abusive ecclesiastical officers, only additional warnings about conformity that increase the sense of unfairness and powerlessness.

7. If the member in pain withdraws from church activity to protect himself, herself, and/or the family from this assault upon their spiritual well-being, the withdrawal is seen as evidence of the member's lack of worthiness, not as a cry for help or as a symptom of abuse in the system.

If this profile describes an experience you have had, we invite you to contact:

Lavina Fielding Anderson  
1519 Roberta Street  
Salt Lake City, UT 84115  
(801) 467-1617

Janice Merrill Allred  
221 W. 3700 North  
Provo, UT 84604  
(801) 225-4967



### SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The Mormon Alliance does not have members, but association is by subscription. A subscription runs for the calendar year--January to December--for \$30.00. If you paid your fees in 1993 or 1994, your association will continue through December 1995.

Included as benefits are this quarterly newsletter (four issues, one per season), the annual Case Reports volume (Volume 1 is scheduled for release in the summer of 1995), and other mailings. The Mormon Alliance also holds public quarterly meetings in Salt Lake City and sponsors a session at the Salt Lake Sunstone symposium.

You may be receiving this newsletter in response to a request for more information about the Mormon Alliance. If so, to receive further information and mailings, please remit \$30.00 to the Mormon Alliance, 6337 Highland Drive, Box 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Subscriptions received at any point in the year entitle you to all four newsletters and that year's volume of the Case Reports. Individual copies of the Case Reports will be available for \$20.00.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

"The Year in Review," a popular session at the August 1994 Sunstone Symposium, will be back by popular demand in August 1995. This lively, fast-moving panel-and-audience survey of the good, the bad, the moving, and the bizarre in Mormondom will again provide opportunities for in-depth and expert analysis--along with some pontificating, politicking, and plenty of chuckles.

Sunstone in Salt Lake City is scheduled for August 9-12.

### PUBLISHING SCHEDULE

Because of a late publishing start in the first quarter of 1995, your next issue of Common Consent will be mailed 15 May. Count on receiving your newsletter thereafter during the first week of each quarter: July, October, January, and April.

If you have items to be published, please send them to The Mormon Alliance, 6337 South Highland Drive, Mail Box 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121, thirty days in advance of publication.

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The Mormon Alliance  
6337 Highland Drive  
Mailbox 215  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84121

