

## FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH

"Finding Your Way Through: Helpful Guide-Posts for Disaffected Mormons," is the first of the Mormon Alliance's public quarterly meetings for 1996, a presentation-workshop conducted by James E. Chapman, a therapist and social worker.

The meeting will be held in the auditorium, Salt Lake Public Library (209 E. 500 South), Thursday, January 25, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

"Sorting out" what happens when faith encounters religious circumstances that require a change in the relationship will be the focus of Jim's presentation. He will discuss three stages--ambivalence, commitment, and integration/resolution--and the therapeutic tasks required at each stage. He has identified twenty-two, a flexible list that is open to expansion and discussion during the workshop portion of the meeting.

Jim is a graduate of Brigham Young University and has his master's in social work from the University of Utah. A fourth-generation Latter-day Saint and the father of nine, he served a full-time mission in Great Britain (his mission presidents were A. Hamer Reiser, later secretary to the First Presidency and Clifton Kerr, speaker of the Utah House of Representatives), and also a stake mission in Provo. He was assistant professor of sociology at Southern Utah University and is former Arizona state director of Community Mental Retardation Services. For the past ten years, he has been a social worker at Project Reality where he works with heroin addicts, many of whom are also dying of AIDS.

In 1992, he became a charter member and charter trustee of the Mormon Alliance, a position he has held ever since.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Another quartet of experienced conference watchers will interact with the audience to critique April general conference on Monday, April 8, 1996, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at the auditorium of the Salt Lake Public Library, 209 East 500 South.

This conference's panelist are Norma B. Ashton, Devery Anderson, Thomas Cam, and Deborah Rossiter.

Informed commentary from the audience is welcomed and planned for. "In addition to attending or listening to the four Saturday/Sunday sessions," comments moderator Lavina Fielding Anderson, "we really want to encourage the men to attend priesthood sessions on the Saturday night of general conference and the women to attend the women's broadcast which takes place the weekend before general conference." For instance, in October the important "Proclamation on the Family" by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve was read only at the Relief Society general meeting.

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Members who paid dues for 1995 will receive their copy of the Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, Vol. 1, due off the press on 20 March. (Check the label on this newsletter. The number in the upper right hand corner is the year through which your dues are paid.)

Membership dues for 1996 are now due, but it's a little confusing because the case reports haven't been mailed yet. Membership runs for the calendar year. The newsletter, meeting information, and the annual Case Reports volume are benefits of membership.

## Questions

Christopher B. Rickett

When did the questions start coming into my mind? I can't remember when they didn't.

I had questions about all subjects. As a small child while my mother was washing my hands, I asked her why we had fingernails. She seized upon the readily available answer and said, "So that we can hold soap." I was satisfied for the moment.

I was naturally as curious about religion as anything else. How come Grandfather does not take the water at sacrament meeting?

*He thinks it is wrong.*

Why does he think that?

*Grandfather believes some things that we mustn't talk about.*

For the moment I accepted that answer too. But why was Grandfather not asked to do any jobs in the Church? Why was he never asked to speak at church especially since he obviously knew so much about the Church and loved the gospel so much? Why did family members and others sometimes speak about Grandfather in hushed tones? I loved my grandfather and we had many good discussions on religious subjects. Why was he treated differently in the Church?

Years later, after my mission, he told me the story. No one else would or did. In the mid-1940s he wrote to Apostle Ezra Taft Benson asking, "Why do we not use wine in the sacrament as Jesus instructed?" He got a letter back from Elder Benson himself with an explanation including a reference to D&C 27:2. Grandfather wrote again pointing out, among other things, that D&C 89:5-6, which was given after Section 27, specifically allows for wine to be used in the sacrament.

This time there was no return letter. Instead Grandfather was called in by the stake president and released from all of his church callings. Leaders in the stake were instructed not to call him to any positions or to speak. There was no excommunication, no disfellowship

ment, no court or disciplinary council. But Grandfather carried the burden of being a marginalized Mormon for the rest of his life. He asked too many questions.

I have an orientation similar to my grandfather's. As a teenager I asked myself questions like: What is the nature of God? Does he exist at all? I shared these questions with good friends from Church, people I had known all my life. One young woman said that she had never had these kinds of questions come into her mind. For as long as she could remember she had known there was a God and had never questioned his nature. We were both surprised at this difference between us.

I envied her. I, not she, was the one who did not fit in. I wondered, Is there a place for me in the church of my birth? A great comfort to me at this time of soul-searching was D&C 46:13-14: "To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" but to others, like me, "it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful." What comfort this scripture gave me!

Today the questions continue for me. Why did the Church treat my grandfather as it did? Why is it necessary for the Church to punish people who ask questions or disagree? In view of the excommunications of 1993-95, who can feel secure in their membership in the Church? I believe that the Mormon Alliance's goal of documenting cases of spiritual and ecclesiastical abuse in the Church may influence the Church to reconsider its approach to discipline and, in a broader sense, to start asking questions again. The Church owes its rebirth in the latter days to the scriptural promise that we should ask questions freely--and Joseph Smith's compelling need to do so. Perhaps it will owe its continued survival to the same promise, the same need.



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## LETTERS

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**Common Consent** welcomes short contributions to this column. We reserve the right to edit for length.

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### Participate in Development

Your newsletter has become the last remnant of what is left of my institutional Mormon connection. I am therefore renewing my subscription, not only to keep contact, but to watch and participate in the newsletter's development. My hope is that together we can succeed in embracing what is most worthwhile in our Mormon culture. After reading the last several issues, my wife Birgitta, who is from a different Christian tradition, commented that she has not seen such an intense and thorough pursuit of understanding by lay people in any other Christian community.

Katie Stanton's insightful guest editorial on the "small beginnings of apostasy" corroborates my own long-term personal struggle to understand and relate to the Church. Her view of the current mission statement of the corporate Church with its three grand purposes illuminates the problems of institutional membership as it often tries to substitute for a personal relationship with Christ. I felt that her three-fold alternative statement was wise and refreshing.

Also, I was glad to read a Mormon Alliance statement of goals in the editor's comment to a letter about newsletter tone. In rereading those goals in light of Stanton's editorial, I realized (with relief) that I had incorrectly assumed that they were explicitly tied to formal Church structure. Might not that clear, succinct statement of Alliance goals be permanently imbedded like a beacon somewhere in future newsletters?

*Eugene Kovalenko  
Los Alamos, NM*

*By Common Consent welcomes not only this letter but also the generous willingness to participate in the newsletter's development. We invite such participation in the form of letters, guest editorials, news items, commentary, and suggestions, like that about a permanent goals statement. —Lavina Fielding Anderson*

### Faith of an Idealist

I'm an idealist. When I first heard the gospel as a teenager, I was thrilled with it. With great enthusiasm, I measured the rest of my life against its purity. I could recount many spiritually potent experiences and can testify to the strength of the scriptures.

I can also testify to severe tests that have given me knowledge and insight in the crucible of experience. The most difficult challenge was an episode of ecclesiastical abuse inflicted by my bishop and stake president that still leaves innocent people in jeopardy. The experience was devastating, a ripping asunder of faith and trust. I felt so alone with my pain and suffering —alone with no place to go.

It has taken me years, but I have dealt with this damaging situation within myself. Still, I have a long way to go toward complete healing, and my spiritual innocence is gone forever.

I feel deep compassion and understanding for those who have suffered similar experiences. I know that ecclesiastical abuse is more widespread that we'd like to acknowledge and far more destructive than any outside challenge to the Church.

When I learned that the Mormon Alliance planned to publish the stories of those who have also suffered ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, I greeted the news with excitement and hope. I know that many can be strengthened by it. Sharing our experience is a door opening on improvement. We must never be afraid of the truth, for that is what can set us all free.

To others who have had similar experiences, I say: Your experience is not unique, not some accident that was never supposed to have happened and will never happen again.

It means that others have suffered what you feel and have coped with it. It means that the knowledge and understanding you have gained through your suffering may help others. It means that there is hope for healing, hope for calling this spiritual darkness by its name, and hope for preventing so much suffering in the future. It means that there is a place to go to sort out the confusion, anger, hurt, guilt, and despair.

To ecclesiastical leaders, I urge: hear these stories with your heart. Empathize with the pain and suffering. Recognize that you may need education in how to use the power you possess. Realize that the Church structure needs accountability.

Those who are bringing this problem to the surface should be commended for their courage and fortitude.

I'm still an idealist. I thirst for excellence in every aspect of my life. I think that reading the stories of others with empathy and a willingness to learn is a great step toward that goal.

*Roberta Giese  
Beaverton, Oregon*

#### ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was organized in July 1992 to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance. Comments, articles, and items for inclusion are welcome, if they are submitted thirty days before the printing deadlines, which are the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Please send written contributions to the Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mail Box 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Subscriptions are \$30 a year, payable at the same address, and include an annual volume of case reports.

#### TRUSTEES OF THE MORMON ALLIANCE

Janice Merrill Allred  
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To report cases of ecclesiastical and/or spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115, ((801) 467-1617, e-mail Lavina@utw.com.

## Surviving the Terror

*Eugene Kovalenko*

Eugene England once remarked to me that the best thing he thought could happen to the Church would be the conversion of large numbers of Russian intellectuals. I burst out laughing; but when Gene did not join in, I realized that he was serious. In later reflection on Gene's comment, especially in light of the recent excommunications, including my own, of serious thinkers, I have pondered this idea much more seriously.

My father, a Ukrainian sailor, jumped ship in Boston in 1922, became a refugee, then a citizen, and then a Latter-day Saint. He died in 1964. He told us stories of his family as though they were from another world, a world we would never be able to visit. It was as if they were already dead.

In 1987, when the Soviet Union was just beginning to unravel, my brother Virgil and I began planning to visit the Ukraine. I wrote this poem in anticipation. ("Rodina" is Russian for "homeland.")

#### Rodina

We of your exiled sons  
come seeking roots  
beyond our Celtic ones  
and older silent fears.

Like Viking guests  
with Slavic souls  
we seek now whole new worlds  
to heal our blindness.

We would learn of you  
and sing new songs.

In the summer of 1995, my brother met four generations of Russian-speaking relatives in our father's hometown. It was the first contact with any relatives since my father fled the Revolution. The oldest still remember him. I want to learn how they survived the decades of terror, their present lives, beliefs, and hopes. Perhaps also they can learn from us.



## RELIGIOUS GUILT: A THERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE

*James E. Chapman*

Conversion, fear, despair, or other reasons may turn individuals to Mormonism, but it is guilt that the Church uses most effectively to encourage passive and obedience subservience. On one level, Mormonism is legalism. It is a system of codes, formulae, do's and don'ts. All too often, Mormonism is prescribed and bound up in an elaborate concept of duty. Indeed, the whole restrictive system abounds in subtle aggressiveness toward any member who deviates only slightly.

One cigarette smoked publicly, for example, will brand a member for years. That person is viewed as a betrayer, as guilty of not performing his or her duty. And duty is taught as the necessity of doing what the Church tells you to do. Of all Mormon devices of social control, the expert manipulation of guilt is probably that most widely employed by leaders. Guilt is the carefully laid device, the snare, the trap, the chains, and the whip. It is the driving force of Mormon life.

Guilt is an evil instrument in the hands of Church leaders. It is harmful because it gives people a negative image of life, fosters hostility toward others, prompts self-destructive behavior, and creates distance and alienation between individuals. The person who is made to feel guilty about himself or herself cannot reach out in love to others. Guilt is burning self-hatred. You cannot love others while hating yourself. You cannot give a self that you regard as sullied and tarnished. You cannot accept others if you are unaccepting of yourself. Strong feelings of guilt, behavioral scientists tell us, are probably the single most universally destructive human element.

Where guilt rules, religion becomes an impersonal affair, an institutional loyalty. The Church survives and prospers on the level of obligations and contracts, rather than in the steadfastness of loving commitment. Reality becomes that which can be demonstrated,

rather than that which forms in the intimacy of the heart. Religion is "done" and reported. What doesn't show, doesn't count. The chief religious virtue is outer social affiliation, rather than quiet inner conviction.

Perhaps some stay away from church activities to save themselves from oblivious by guilt. Perhaps they know that a deep religious awareness depends heavily upon appreciating their delicate inner life, upon the splendor of thought and solitude, upon the dignity of wonder and reverence. True spirituality must be individually discovered through inward experience and cannot be imposed from the outside.

The ultimate effect of guilt in Mormon life is that conformity and passivity replace independent behavior. From a bureaucratic perspective, this result is desirable. Therefore, where guilt is weak, Church authorities foster it by criticism, labeling, threats, and more intensive indoctrination. The Church, in fact, facilitates the creation of guilt by labeling certain thoughts and behaviors as bad (like growing a beard at BYU). It then promises to "heal" us of guilt through repentance, prayer, righteous activity, and ritual. It becomes a magnified parent who enters our conscience to punish and reward, to encompass us in motherly arms of mercy and guard us in fatherly omnipotence. Thus, the Church, by utilizing the pressures and stresses of guilt, makes us eager to passively accept the communal obligations and restrictions which it believes necessary for a stable and subservient membership.

It does not take a long excursion into history to discover that religious guilt underlies much despair, illness, cruelty, intransigence, suicide, and even warfare. It does not seem unreasonable for some to feel insulted, offended, and mutilated by these behavior of Church leaders. It does not seem unreasonable for them to want to escape.

# CHURCHWATCH

Lavina Fielding Anderson

*Note: This column contains reports events relevant to on-going issues of leader-member relations, Mormon feminism, and academic freedom.*

10 October 1995. President Hinckley, in honoring outgoing BYU president Rex Lee, warned, "Not even the most brilliant among us is smart enough to comprehend the majesty and wonder of [God's] ways or to understand the depth of his love for us," and termed the quest for secular knowledge, though worthy, as "primarily 'a selfish pursuit.'" He advocated "simple honesty," which he defined as being "straightforward, unequivocal, in walking the [strait] and narrow line of what is right and true. . . . Better a poor grade than a dishonest act." Robert Kirby, "Hinckley Urges 23,000 to Shun Pornography," Salt Lake Tribune, 19 October 1995, B-1; Sharon M. Haddock, "26,000 Hear LDS Prophet Honor Lee," Deseret News, 18 October 1995, B-1.

10 October 1995. The First Presidency announced that Elder Lance B. Wickman, called to the Second Quorum of the Seventy on April 2, 1994, will become managing director of Church Legal Services beginning January 1. The announcement left unclear whether Church Legal Services is a new entity or, if not, whether it already has a managing director. Wickman was a partner in the San Diego office of the international law firm of Latham and Watkins, specializing in business litigation. He has also been judge pro tem of the San Diego Superior and Municipal courts. "Elder Wickman Named Director of Legal Services," Deseret News, 10 Oct. 1995, B-1.

December 1995. Newly appointed Episcopal bishop for Utah, the Rev. Carolyn Tanner Irish, is the granddaughter of Annie Clark Tanner and the daughter of philanthropist Obert C. Tanner. Currently on the staff of the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., she will be Utah's first female bishop and only the third in the nation. She left Mormonism when she went to college: "'I needed more room. I needed for my questions to be honored,' she said. 'But my social and moral formation was in the LDS Church and I have never regretted that.'" Divorced after twenty-eight years, she comments, "Being a single mother 'can be a lonely place. . . I hope our church reaches out and makes a family of all families and all churches.'" Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Bishop Returns Home," Salt Lake Tribune, 16 Dec. 199, C-1, C-2.

9 Jan. 1996. Incoming BYU president and Seventy Merrill J. Bateman invited students "uncomfortable" with dress and grooming standards to "have the intellectual courage and integrity to live the standards or depart peacefully." He assured faculty, "If applied, the gospel framework will keep us from gathering like flies hovering over the dead carcasses of secular error." Apparent "limits on academic freedom" at BYU will actually provide "additional freedoms." Teonei Salway, "New University President Reiterates BYU's role in Fostering Secular as Well as Spiritual Excellence," Universe, 10 Jan. 1996, 1; Joan O'Brien, "Bateman Stresses BYU Fills Dual Role," Salt Lake Tribune, 10 Jan. 1996, B-1.

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