



MORMON
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BY COMMON CONSENT

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SEXUAL ABUSE A "BLIP"? MORMON ALLIANCE TELLS A DIFFERENT STORY

LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, responding to a question from CBS's Mike Wallace, told 20 million Americans in April 1996 that sexual abuse in Mormonism and inappropriate reactions by ecclesiastical leaders constituted "a blip here, a blip there."

The first volume of the Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, due to be mailed August 1, tells another story. It documents 388 separately identifiable cases of the sexual abuse of Mormons, usually children, and 183 separate perpetrators.

"And these figures are very conservative," state editors Lavina Fielding Anderson and Janice Merrill Allred. "Where a perpetrator has admitted to earlier 'victims' than the one he was caught for, but hasn't given a number, we've counted it as two. But since the average pedophile abuses about 200 children, the numbers could actually be thousands higher. And of course, this book is not comprehensive."

The book, 317 pages of tightly packed text with full index, is divided into two parts. The first part provides a context for understanding and dealing with sexual abuse in the Mormon Church including statements by General Authorities, policy guidelines and manuals, resources available to parents, Criminal Investigations of Mormons Involved in Child Sexual Abuse, Statements about Ecclesiastical Reluctance to Act on Reported Abuse, Ritual Abuse, and Considerations for a Public LDS Policy on Child Sexual Abuse.

The second half consists of the intertwined and complex stories of three families from the same Oklahoma ward. Three generations of men in one family tell how they were sexually abused by their bishops. In the second family, five children and their traumatized mother report sexual and ritual abuse

inflicted by the father and by at least two ecclesiastical officers in the ward, including one of the previously named bishops. Efforts to work "through channels" encountered what they call a stone wall. When, out of desperation they went public, two of the mothers were excommunicated. One father resigned his membership.

"Abuse is always a tragedy because it destroys innocence, which is irreplaceable," comments Anderson. "Realizing that church and home--the two places where you should feel safest--are dangerous is a nightmare. But when expectations of understanding, healing, and justice are not met, the nightmare turns into a double betrayal."

This first volume is the 1995 annual. The second volume, Case Reports, 1996, will come out in the fall. It will document a wider scope of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse: missionaries subject to capricious mission presidents, difficulties imposed on members who want to resign quietly, callings and temple privileges yanked at a leader's pleasure, violations of established procedures in the General Handbook of Instructions for conducting disciplinary councils, the experiences of gay and lesbian members of the Church struggling to balance their testimonies with the message that there is no room for them in the Church, and the steady, silent hemorrhage of members who are made to feel that they no longer fit.

Copies of Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, Volume 1, 1995, are available for \$20 each (includes shipping and handling) from Signature Books, 564 West 400 North, Salt Lake City, Utah 84116, (801) 531-1483. Copies will also be available at the Sunstone Symposium, 14-17 August in Salt Lake City.



CHURCHWATCH

Lavina Fielding Anderson

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

APRIL 1996. Glade Knight and Roger Barrus, parents of BYU students, bought Southern Virginia College, a 130-year-old school in Buena Vista, Virginia, after it slumped into financial difficulties. They plan to create a campus with BYU-style standards, though they've "tried to make it clear that this is not a church-sponsored school." *Michele Davis, "LDS Owners a 'Miracle' for College," (BYU) Universe, 16 May 1996; Associated Press, "LDS-Led College Gets Ally in Fight for Accreditation," Deseret News, 7 June 1996, B-11.*

7 APRIL 1996. Sterling M. McMurrin, genial Mormon philosopher, self-proclaimed "heretic," and former U.S. Commissioner of Education, died in St. George. His funeral service was held at Monument Park Fifteenth Ward in Salt Lake City where his former bishop spoke, biographer L. Jackson Newell reminisced about great qualities in this mentor and friend, former aide and close friend Boyer Jarvis movingly read some of Sterling's favorite scriptures, and classical music rounded out the program. Episcopal bishop and family friend Carolyn Tanner Irish gave the benediction. Seated on the stand were Elders John Carmack and Hugh Pinnock.

31 MAY 1996. Carolyn Tanner Irish was ordained and consecrated a bishop in the Episcopal Church and bishop coadjutor of the Diocese of Utah. Irish is the first woman Episcopal bishop in Utah and only the third in the nation. Irish is the daughter of Obert C. Tanner, Mormon philanthropist and theologian, and the granddaughter of Annie Clark Tanner, whose understated and candid autobiography of her life in polygamy, A Mormon Mother, has made it a classic in Mormon personal writings since its publication in the 1970's. Irish was raised a Mormon and respects her heritage but stopped attending church as a college student because, as she told a reporter, she needed to be in a place "where my questions were honored." *Program of ordination in my possession; Peggy Fletcher*

Stack, "Female Bishop Exudes Compassion," Salt Lake Tribune, 14 December 1995.

3 JUNE 1996. The LDS Church issued a statement: "Churches are dedicated for the worship of God and as havens from the cares and concerns of the world. The carrying of lethal weapons, concealed or otherwise, within their walls is inappropriate, except as required by officers of the law." The Utah state concealed-weapons permit law apparently allows license holders to take guns into churches, schools, and private businesses. The legislative committee responded to requests for clarification of the law on 15 May "coolly." The next week, Governor Mike Leavitt said he did not favor a change in the law. Now he says he will lead an effort to amend the law. He claims that the church's statement was 'totally coincidental' and that he and his staff had made their decision on Monday morning, "hours" before the Church released its own statement. However, on Tuesday, gun activists who met with the governor received no clue that he was going to reverse his position. More than 80 percent of Utah state legislators are active Mormons, holding past or present major ecclesiastical positions. *Tony Semerad, "Guns Inappropriate in Church, LDS Say," Salt Lake Tribune, for June 1996, A-1, A-6; Bob Bernick, Jr., "LDS Leaders Issue Statement Saying Weapons Have no Place in Church," Deseret News, 4-5 June 1996, A-8; Dan Harrie, "Church's Word on Guns Packs a Real Wallop," Salt Lake Tribune, 9 June 1996, B-1. B-2.*

6 JUNE 1996. Gail Turley Houston, a professor of English at BYU for six years, was fired because her "actions and words on and off campus" were "harmful to tenets held by the church and the university." Gail's department and college approved her application for tenure (continuing status), but the University Faculty Committee on Rank and Status, with the approval of President Merrill Bateman and the Provost, reversed that decision.



There were four basic charges: (1) classroom behavior: A few students reported that Houston did not offer enough "gospel insights" and was not "spiritually inspiring." But in fact, "95 percent of Houston's students gave her a positive evaluation."

(2) Houston was deemed guilty of "contradicting fundamental Church doctrine and deliberately attacking the church." She spoke with approval of "praying to Heavenly Mother as well as Heavenly Father," and publicly made statements that "seem to reject the right of prophets to proclaim doctrine and priesthood leaders to teach about the role of women." Gail spoke at the Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium in the summer of 1993, acknowledging that she prayed to both Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother and found great comfort in doing so after the death of her mother in 1992. "I did not know my Mother in Heaven until just a few years ago," she said, "and I ask why would my Church want me to forget or deny her--I cannot and I will not."

(3) Houston was accused of expressing "gratitude for and agreement with individuals who have been excommunicated or disciplined by the Church for apostasy." Gail had helped organize the "White Roses" campaign to express support both for those disciplined and for Church leaders. Robert D. Hales accepted the thousand white roses in the foyer of the Church Office Building on the Saturday morning of general conference, April 1994.

(4) Houston was also accused of not being "a good spiritual role model for students" because of statements she made in a one-page essay in the off-campus newspaper, The Student Review. "No one knows when one of life's painful experiences may, for a short or extensive period of time, seem to shatter one's heretofore stalwart faith. ...We [faculty] might offer a great service to our students by teaching them that periods of crisis of faith or mild questioning are normal."

Houston made vigorous attempts to defend herself but was "not surprised" by the decision and has accepted a tenure-track position with the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. She has appealed the university's decision. A Deseret News story reported Houston as saying that "she doesn't believe the university should be involving itself in ecclesiastical issues--particularly when she's in good standing with her own LDS ward bishop. 'I have a temple recommend. I teach the 15-year-olds. ...When

it has to do with my spiritual life, my heavens, they're on very dangerous ground. ...I've received perfect scores on spirituality in my classes. ...My whole career is coming down to a five-minute talk given at Sunstone.'" Sharon M. Haddock, "BYU Professor Is Appealing Her Termination," Deseret News, 12-13 June 1996, A-10.

9 JUNE 1996. A Salt Lake Tribune article documented efforts by Mormons in Hawaii to persuade the legislature not to validate same-gender marriages. According to the article, Elder Loren C. Dunn asked Arthur Anderson, a retired advertising executive from Salt Lake City, to "volunteer" in Honolulu with his wife, "mostly answering phones for Hawaii's Future Today," a lobbying group. A Public Communications statement said that the Andersons were simply responding "as citizens" and affirmed: "The Church is indeed, politically neutral when it comes to parties and candidates and most issues. ...However, when a political issue has moral overtones, the Church has not only the right but the responsibility to speak out and become involved." HFT was created as a cooperative Mormon-Catholic effort and has more than two thousand members.

Other evidence of official church involvement includes: (1) pamphlets circulated at Church meetings throughout the Pacific urged members to support anti-gay marriage legislation in the Hawaii Legislature. (2) Fax machines in Mormon Church facilities were used to send statements to legislative committees. (3) the Church unsuccessfully petitioned to join the same-sex marriage suit pending before the Supreme Court. (4) One HFT donation of \$1,870 came from Hano Pono Organization, "a front for direct financial aid from one or more LDS wards in Hawaii." Tony Semerad, "A Mormon Crusade in Hawaii," Salt Lake Tribune, 9 June 1996, B-1, B-2.

9 JUNE 1996. A record-breaking number of gays and supporters joined in Salt Lake City's Gay Pride march, followed by a program and picnic. Organizers attributed the interest to an "enough is enough" attitude toward the legislature's and school board's handling of gay issues.

16 JUNE 1996. Utah has more than 414,000 working women, about 63.5 percent of all women in the state. Judy Fahys, "'Fathers' Newest Investment: Family," Salt Lake Tribune, 16 June 1996, F-1.

GENERAL CONFERENCE REPORT

April general conference was characterized by a "relentless" emphasis on obeying the brethren and avoiding "criticism," agreed audience and panelists at the semi-annual conference critique in April. But reactions to it varied.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell preceded a series of touching examples of the faith and faithfulness of little children with a mocking denunciation of "the eager few who lecture the rest of us about church doctrines in which they no longer believe. They criticize the use of church resources to which they no longer contribute. They condescendingly seek to counsel the brethren whom they no longer sustain. Confrontive, except of themselves of course, they leave the church, but they cannot leave the church alone." How did the panelists respond to this characterization of "critics"?

Margaret Toscano observed that, ironically, listening to general conference as a critic, in preparation for the panel discussion, eliminated "one of the most prevalent problems with conference, which is being bored. I was thinking, taking notes, drawing parallels, and finding myself more engaged than I've been for years."

Gene Mahalko and Deborah Rossiter agreed that Maxwell's characterization of critics "stung" and Deborah added, "To have a conversation about something and say, 'I liked these things and was uplifted by such-and-such, but was troubled by such-and-such,' is the activity of a reasonable person."

Victor Gener pointed out the irony that "students of my generation are taught that critical thinking is a good skill, a plus, an educational goal. But when the message is that it's a good thing everywhere except at church, it poses a dilemma. We're asking, 'Should I stay and work it through, or are they saying there's no place for me?'"

An audience member added: "It occurred to me that general conference is highly reactive; the talks are aimed at what the Brethren fear most. They're not just repeating themselves because they lack imagination and can't think of anything new to say, but because they're trying desperately, one last time, to make people believe what they're saying. So it sounds to me as if they're admitting that people are asking questions and thinking for themselves."

The presence of a full-page advertisement in the Salt Lake Tribune on the Saturday of general conference paid for by MAP (Modern Automated Publishing) generated part of the concern. This advertisement, with dozens of signatures, declared a work of "gathering," the revelation of the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon, the "great cleansing of the earth," and a structure that does not "put one man above another," has "no appointed leader," holds "all things in common," and claims the presence of "all of the gifts of the spirit."

A lively segment of the evening's discussion focused on the "outside criticism" of Mormonism presented through the profile of Mormonism on CBS's "60 Minutes." Audience and panelists alike agreed that Mike Wallace seemed unusually "gentle" in lobbing "soft-pitches" to President Hinckley, allowing him to avoid answering or give a generalized answer, and then not asking follow-up questions. The only "dissident" voice heard was that of Steve Benson who, unlike celebrities Steve Young, Orrin Hatch, and Bill Marriott, was not identified by his credentials but rather as a Church president's grandson who couldn't "keep the rules," and President Hinckley was asked to respond directly to Steve's comments, again being given the last word.

Editorial juxtaposition was allowed to make subtle statements in the case of temple garments with Bill Marriott claiming that they'd saved his life during a fire, while Steve Young said he took them off to play bonecrushing football. One audience member hypothesized that Wallace "was genuinely charmed by President Hinckley" but also that he may have been cannily keeping the door open for "future access."

Unanimously praised were Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's pathbreaking and eloquent talk on the poor, the oppressed, and the homeless, and Sister Chieko N. Okazaki's appeal for diversity within the framework of gospel unity. Deborah mentioned how touched she was that Sister Okazaki, in giving a list of the things she had learned from women, focused on "groups that are marginalized--single mothers, divorcees, working and nonworking mothers, drug addicts."

ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are 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 mailing deadlines, which are the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Please send them to Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mailbox 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Trustees of the Mormon Alliance

Janice Merrill Allred, Lavina Fielding Anderson,
James E. Chapman, Allen Roberts,
Marti Lynne Jones, Paul Swenson

Subscription Information

Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year. At any point during the year that a subscription begins, you will receive the four newsletters of that year, the Case Reports volume for that year, and notifications about the quarterly meetings in January, April, August, and October. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge.

To report cases of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115, (801) 467-1617.

THE ALLIANCE AT SUNSTONE

The Mormon Alliance is sponsoring a three-session run of information, discussion, debate, and audience response at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, August 14-17. (Check the Sunstone program for times and places.)

The first session is entitled "'A Blip Here and a Blip There': Child Sexual Abuse in the Church."

The title comes from President Gordon B. Hinckley's assurance to Mike Wallace of "60 Minutes" that priesthood leaders who respond inappropriately to sex abuse in the Church are only "a blip here and a blip there." In the same session, Chris Rickett, who has served on the Case Reports Committee since the summer of 1994, will discuss what it's like listening to people talk through their experiences with spiritual and ecclesiastical abuse.

In the second session, Janice Merrill Allred will address the topic, "Sacrificing the Children: Why the Church Won't Fight Sexual Abuse." Janice will explore the theological connections between (1) authoritarian leadership and the perpetration and cover-up of child sexual abuse, (2) the idolatry inherent in the Church's willingness to sacrifice children to its image, and (3) how sexual abuse differs only in degree but not in kind from other forms of spiritual and ecclesiastical abuse.

In the third session, a paper-workshop, James E. Chapman, a social worker and trustee of the Mormon Alliance, will repeat his popular presentation on "Finding Your Way Through: Helpful Guideposts for Disaffected Mormons." This paper/workshop will analyze the therapeutic tasks that accompany the three phases of ambivalence, commitment, and integration/resolution, and encourage the emergence of "new Mormons."

Audience participation, response, and discussion is encouraged in all three sessions.

A Use for Friends

When things are heard
that were not heard before
and we're in doubt about
things that up to now were true--
at least we thought they were--
It's like a new, strange land
where perils and promises
are unpredictable,
where there are not charts
and much is frightening
and yet to be discovered as it is.

We need companions more
than in the days when all was certain.

--J. Donald Johnston

GENERAL CONFERENCE FANTASIES

A popular part of each conference critique is when panelists and audience members share their favorite general conference fantasy. Before April 1996 conference, Common Consent editors posted an Internet invitation on some Mormon lists for readers to share their own fantasies. Watch for more conference fantasies in future issues of Common Consent.

- I want to hear more "Pillars of My Faith" kinds of sermons. Personal essays about how true principles have brought hope and comfort, and strengthened faith. I want to hear celebrations of the Mormon experience. I want to hear sermons that "give reasons for the hope" that is in us. I want to hear more inclusion than exclusion, more tolerance and love. I want to hear harmony, not monotone, lauded. I want to hear diversity touted. We should celebrate the differentness of individuals and what makes them uniquely beautiful.
- I'd give a whole bunch to hear someone like J. Golden Kimball.
- I'd love to get the impression that leaders are speaking their own personal truth. It might be kind of refreshing to see one of those GA's in a sports jacket instead of a dark suit. It also might be disarming to hear some human error stories about what happens in their GA circles, so we can see they are human beings instead of infallible authorities and semi-deity.
- I'd like to hear some time over the pulpit just one admission of being wrong and an apology.
- I'd like to hear every speaker make a determined effort to remember that young children are being expected by their parents to try to listen, and gear their content, tone of voice, and delivery to that fact. (Make that a sacrament meeting fantasy too.)
- A 4 hour Q&A session where members are allowed to question any of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve from hidden microphones.
- Actual conferences, where people listen to papers, have round table discussions, and so on, rather than five sessions of plenary speakers and nothing else. And an announcement that the governing bodies of the church will be representative of the population of the church.
- BYU President Bateman gives a special address in which he dissolves the Standards Department and allows students to dress themselves. Then a strongly pro-intellectual statement on academic freedom is instituted, and he mentions the construction of a new paleontology museum on the site previously slated for the new FARMS building.

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