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AAUP Critiques BYU's Academic Freedom Record

On Monday, 15 September 1997, the October issue of the AAUP's publication, *Academe*, reported that "infringements on academic freedom [at BYU] are distressingly common and that the climate for academic freedom is distressingly poor." The twenty-page report asserted that Gail Houston did not receive adequate warning of limitations, that she did not attack fundamental doctrine, and that BYU violated its own policy by the information it included in her file. "The administration's efforts to protect the orthodoxy of the institution hinder faculty members from scholarship and teaching that is current within their disciplines," the committee wrote. "Much more than an isolated violation of academic freedom, the investigating committee's inquiries into complaints at BYU have revealed a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals."

AAUP investigator Linda Ray Pratt commented, "I was surprised by the number of cases that came to our attention [when she and another investigator interviewed about 120 respondents during a two and a half day site visit in January]. . . Usually when AAUP comes to a campus, we know about one or possibly two very troubling cases, but with BYU there was just a flood of them."

At sharpest issue were BYU's grounds for denying Houston tenure: a brief mention of the comfort she received from developing a relationship with Mother in Heaven in a Sunstone talk and in an off-campus newspaper, *Student Review*, and her part in organizing the "White Roses" campaign, which purchased a thousand white roses and presented them to the General Authorities after the September 1993 excommunications. Bishop Robert D. Hales accepted the roses on behalf of the Church. Houston said that she received no reaction to the *Student Review* article and "didn't understand" when it suddenly became part of her third-year review. She explained that the White Roses campaign was "to express our love for the church leaders and for the people who had been excommunicated." The administration "has characterized the presentation as a protest against the church's actions in the form of a highly publicized media event." She considers her statements about Mother in Heaven to be a "personal vision," not advocacy, a position which the administration dismisses as "implausible."

The AAUP report summarized: (1) BYU "fails to give adequate guidance to the faculty. The university cannot validly invoke the limitations . . . on the stated grounds of publicly contradicting Church doctrine and deliberately attacking Church leadership." (2) "To the extent that the . . . University administration acted . . . because of displeasure with [Houston's] positions on feminism and gender construction," it violated her academic freedom. (3) Appeal procedures did not allow Houston an "adequate hearing" about violations of her academic freedom.

BYU, not unexpectedly, disagreed sharply with the report, claiming that it contained "so many serious misstatements and omissions that it is impossible to address them." James D. Gordon III, associate academic vice president, denied that BYU violated Houston's academic freedom, accused the AAUP of having a "goal to impose a secular model on religious universities," and affirmed, "We're going to be true to our intellectual and spiritual mission."

Alan L. Wilkins, academic vice president, circulated memos to the faculty on 12 and 15 September. He pointed out that the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges reaccredited BYU and found that its academic freedom statement was "adequately explicit," that if BYU's statement is faulty, then so is Gonzaga's, to which it is "strikingly similar," that Houston "publicly endorsed the practice of praying to Heavenly Mother" after receiving proper notice, and that Houston's assertion that she could not and would not forget or deny Mother in Heaven meant that she "publicly opposed and deliberately attacked the Church." The memo also asserts that the university followed correct procedures in dealing with Houston's case, and concludes, "If a religious university cannot limit a professor from publicly endorsing prayer to a God other than the God to whom we are commanded to pray, then it cannot limit anything."

Wilkins's memo asserted: "We endorse time-honored principles that protect the need for honest seekers of truth to use the best methods available in their disciplines to pursue their questions rigorously. As our Academic Freedom Statement provides, individual academic freedom is presumptive, and limitations necessary to preserve our religious identity are exceptional. Those minimal limitations derive from our aspiration to provide an environment in which we can enjoy the guidance of the Holy Spirit and prophets in our search

for truth."

Gail Houston said Monday that "she considered the AAUP report to be a 'vindication,' and . . . denied that her actions had violated church doctrine. 'I always felt that BYU never heard me.'" She also felt that university officials had unfairly painted her as 'some sort of heretical monster in the Mormon religion.' . . . BYU has been terrified of feminism and of postmodernism, and hasn't really handled these new approaches very well. . . . It hasn't been able to deal with women as professional colleagues and equals." She "hoped that "instead of being defensive and paranoid, (BYU officials) would listen carefully and allow this information to help them."

The AAUP investigating committee read "hundreds of pages of documentation," tried unsuccessfully "to mediate between BYU faculty and administration," interviewed "more than 120 people, including the members of the relevant advancement and appeal committees, and [met] twice with the BYU administration." Its draft report, submitted to BYU, was corrected "where there were errors of fact and interpretation." The final draft was accepted by the AAUP's committee on academic freedom as "substantive and understated." In addition to the Houston case, the report includes the cases of Cecilia Konchar Farr (English), David Knowlton (anthropology), Brian Evenson (English), Steven Epperson (history), and others.

"BYU administration would not discuss the issues," wrote BYU AAUP directors in a statement released on 15 September. "Accusations of disloyalty were the only answers to reasoned arguments. . . . The response of the BYU administration has been deeply disappointing to us. Where we had hoped for a productive discussion of academic freedom questions at BYU, administrators have denied that there is any problem. Instead of addressing the issues, they have attacked the messenger. The BYU administration has painted the national AAUP as an enemy of religion and the local members, by implication, as disloyal citizens. This is not a positive approach to problem solving." BYU's AAUP members felt that denying Houston tenure "on the grounds that with two or three public statements she had 'enervated the moral fiber of the University,'" was "an unfortunate and perhaps uninformed decision."

BYU administrators also noted that BYU has only twenty dues-paying AAUP members, that only about 5 percent of the national professoriate are AAUP members, and that the AAUP has the goal of imposing "a secular model on religious colleges and universities." President Bateman asserted this theory at the university faculty conference at the beginning of the school year and Wilkins repeated it in his memo. Gordon told the *Daily Universe*, "The AAUP is not an accrediting body, it is an advocacy organization and has an history of antipathy toward religious institutions." The BYU AAUP statement pointed out that the November/December

1996 issue of *Academe* focused on religion in contemporary academia and included articles by such noted scholars as Martin Marty and David A. Hoekema that "uniformly argue for the place of religion in American higher education." BYU declined an invitation to make a presentation on academic freedom at religious universities at an AAUP-sponsored conference in Chicago in October. "We have no desire to be contentious," Gordon said. "We just want to be free to be who we are." Speakers at the conference, according to BYU AAUP officers, include Martin Marty, George Marsden from the University of Notre Dame, and Douglas Laycock of the University of Texas Law School. Marsden and Laycock are "cited by President Bateman and AVP Wilkins in support of BYU's academic freedom document."

Wilkins's 12 Sept. memo announced: "It is doubtful that further discussion with the AAUP will be helpful. Issues like academic freedom are addressed more productively through collegial discussion than through attempts to apply external pressure by an association whose intentions are antagonistic to the University mission." This dismissal of the national AAUP, the implied threat to BYU members of AAUP, and the administration's avowed intention not to enter into a discussion outside the university suggests that discussions within the university are unlikely to be productive.

BYU's AAUP officers also cited a "forthcoming book on liberal education," by Martha Nussbaum, who "contrasts the attempts by BYU and Notre Dame to integrate the sacred and the secular in a university setting. Notre Dame, she argues, fosters the virtues of academic freedom and open inquiry as integral to its religious mission. The result . . . is a viable and vigorous Catholic university." BYU, on the other hand, has "lost sight of those aspects of its religious mission that would require and benefit from freedom of thought and conscience" and consequently has "lost its way as a genuine university."

The next step that the AAUP may take is to censure the university at its June meeting.

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Guest Editorial

In the Heavens Are Parents Equal?

Janice Alfred

BYU's response to the recently released report of the American Association of University Professors, which criticized BYU for academic freedom violations in the firing of English Professor Gail Houston, states that Houston was fired for advocating praying to the Mother in Heaven. BYU administrators claim that in doing so she contradicted a fundamental doctrine of the LDS Church.

Have BYU administrators forgotten the well-known Mormon hymn, "O My Father?" This hymn, written by Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, is actually a prayer to both the Father and Mother in Heaven:

Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high? . . .
In the heavens are parents single?
No; the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a Mother there.

Thinking about Eliza R. Snow's prayer to the Father and Mother in Heaven and BYU's response to the AAUP inspired me to add some new lines:

In the heavens are parents equal?
Just the thought makes th' Brethren fear;
If they're equal in the heavens,
Then they should be equal here.

There is something odd and offensive about a church that encourages its members to think of God as their literal, anthropomorphic Father and to regard their relationship to him as a father-child relationship, yet discourages them from thinking about a literal Mother in Heaven and punishes those who speak publicly about her, even though it acknowledges her existence.

BYU's response cites two public statements by Gail Houston which, it claims, were "endorsements" of praying to the Mother in Heaven. Gail

Houston did not advocate praying to the Mother in Heaven. In the first, an article in the *Student Review*, she never mentions the Mother in Heaven or advises anyone to pray to her. She talks about "communication with my heavenly parents." Her point is not to advocate a particular kind of prayer but to share her own experience of finding that her heavenly parents accept her with her all her doubts and problems.

The second, a speech given at the 1994 Sunstone Symposium, describes her practice of meditation and tells how she visualizes Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. She uses the words "meditations" and "visualize" to describe her experiences. Although she does say in one place that this kind of meditation is prayer for her, it is clearly not prayer as the Church defines prayer and she never suggests that others adopt her practice. Her concept of the Mother in Heaven as she presents it in this speech reflects the orthodox Mormon understanding of the Mother in Heaven. She sees Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother together and herself as their child, being embraced by them and then encouraged to become like them.

Clearly it is not Houston's concept of the Mother in Heaven that is offensive to BYU and the Brethren. They had to fabricate the charge that she advocated praying to the Mother in Heaven in order to present some kind of argument that she had contradicted fundamental Church doctrine, which BYU's Academic Freedom Statement does not allow. Calling the prohibition against praying to the Mother in Heaven a fundamental Church doctrine shows an appalling lack of knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the scriptures and reveals the political motivation behind Houston's firing.

Jesus Christ states very clearly in the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 11) and the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 10) what the doctrine of his Church is; it is faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Christ declares that anyone who adds to or takes away from this doctrine is not of him. Does Gordon B. Hinckley, who as the First Counselor in the First Presidency pronounced the prohibition against praying to the Mother in Heaven in a speech given in 1991, have more authority to proclaim doctrine than Jesus Christ? Do BYU administrators?

They call the prohibition against praying to the Mother in Heaven a fundamental Church doctrine.

A fundamental Church doctrine that wasn't given until 1991? A fundamental Church doctrine for which there is only one reference? A fundamental Church doctrine given without revelation and as a personal opinion, as President Hinckley clearly stated? A fundamental Church doctrine that the members have been given no opportunity to accept or reject?

Clearly there is something going on here besides a serious attempt to understand and protect fundamental Church doctrine. The "fundamental Church doctrine" being protected is the idea that the current Church president is infallible (dead ones may have made mistakes) and Church authorities must be obeyed without question even if their directives are based only on their opinions and violate one's own connection to God. And these men accuse Gail Houston of worshipping a false god? Her offense was not contradicting fundamental Church doctrine but failing to give unconditional and absolute loyalty to the institutional Church. The list of offenses cited in BYU's response can all be interpreted in this way.

BYU's response says that the Mother in Heaven is "a God other than the God to whom we are commanded to pray." This is equivalent to saying that she is not God or she is a false God. To recognize an entity as God is the most fundamental form of worship and prayer. The Church's Proclamation on the Family says we worship God because he is our Father, but it does not even mention Mother in Heaven explicitly. This same document and Church rhetoric assure us that men and women are equal partners, but it seems that somewhere along the path to godhood Father in Heaven became superior to Mother in Heaven. He is God, a being we worship and pray to, but she is not.

After I was excommunicated in 1995 I was told that when the women in my former ward in Michigan read in the *Detroit Free Press* that I had been disciplined by the Church for writing that Heavenly Mother is equal to Heavenly Father, they were incensed and couldn't believe it. "But haven't we always been told that men and women are equal?" they asked. "Isn't Heavenly Mother equal to Heavenly Father?" What will happen when the women in the Church figure out that their leaders don't really mean it when they say that men and women are equal?

On the earth are parents equal?
Tell us, Brethren, for we see,
If on earth they're equal partners,
Why not in eternity?

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THEIR NAMES

E. Ann Warner

I keep to the edges
But the skylight calls my name
Stand here and look into me:

The covenanted wombs, they
Round to be filled--
Give me sons and daughters
Not just sex, you begin to see
But progeny
They are mothers.
Even as girls they are mothers
The dark earth soft in their hands
Anyone, anyone
Longs for their arms

The mother speaks to their feet
She finds her way through their soles, she
Finds them through asphalt
And library floors, she
Remembers them, she
Calls their names

THE NEXT VOICE YOU HEAR . . .

. . . will be a reminder to renew. This newsletter is the fourth and final newsletter for 1997. After the *Case Reports, Vol. 3*, is mailed in November, subscriptions for 1997 will have expired.

If your mailing label says 1997 (or earlier), please renew sometime before the end of the year and avoid all those nagging reminders.

Subscriptions are \$30 for a subscription to both the *Case Reports* and *By Common Consent*. Send checks to Mormon Alliance, 6337 Highland Drive, Box 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Conference Critique

Amid rumors that the Young Women's presidency will follow the Relief Society presidency in being reorganized, the semi-annual spring Conference Critique will convene in the third-floor auditorium of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 8, 1997. This is a change from the traditional time of the Monday after conference.

The panel will be moderated by Janice Allred, a trustee of the Mormon Alliance, and the format will consist of responses by panelists to their observations of conference, interspersed with responses and comments from the audience.

Two of the four panelists are Joel Allred, a college junior majoring in physics who served a mission in Chile, and Loraine Wilkins, who cohosts the Mormon Women's Forum half-hour talk show on KRCL radio, 91 FM, at 12:30 p.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. The third panelist prefers to remain anonymous and fourth had not been chosen, as of press time.

"This fact highlights a steadily intensifying problem," comments Marti L. Jones, a trustee of the Mormon Alliance and the organizer of the panel. "It's getting increasingly difficult to find panelists for two reasons. Many astute observers decline because they simply can't face the thought of watching ten hours of conference. Other potential panelists are fearful about possible ecclesiastical punishment." It is true that at least two former panelists have been questioned by their ecclesiastical leaders after their participation.

As a result, the trustees of the Alliance have decided to stop holding the conference critiques, at least for a time and possibly permanently, with hearty thanks to all those who have participated in the past. Observations about general conference will be welcome as letters to the editor for *By Common Consent*.

Uncommon Dissent

Gene Mahalko

I was recently reading a news story about the new priesthood and Relief Society combined lesson manuals. It gave a list of topics that were to be covered. Since Brigham Young's teachings are a source for lesson material, I was looking for some really juicy topics.

There was little there to appeal to my theologically prurient interests, but one topic did catch my eye: "How to Recognize and Avoid Apostasy." I suppose it is an interesting and useful topic, but it seems to me that there are a goodly number of fellow Saints who have their apostasy detectors already cranked up a quarter-turn too high.

What we really need is some lesson material on how to recognize and ignore *non*-apostasy. We do pretty good with what is classified as conservative non-apostasy. If Sister Brown gets up and rattles on about the evils of evolution, bears a testimony about time-share condos at Adam-ondi-Ahman, herbal face creams or multi-level marketed fruit punch, her particular brand of the faithful perk up, and everyone else pretty well ignores it, even though it's well beyond Church doctrine.

However, let Sister Stone read from modern-English scripture, cite original sources in Church history, or wonder why, if women are so important to earthly families, so little has been revealed about their importance in heavenly families, and those apostasy detectors start to glow. If she suggests that "many great and important things" are yet to be revealed about such topics as Mother in Heaven, apostasy detectors light up like Christmas trees among some people. Funny, that used to be one of our Articles of Faith.

As far as I'm concerned, reading "you" instead of "ye" is right up here with herbal face creams on the scale of important Christian principles. And both are examples of non-apostasy. "Recognizing Non-Apostasy"--maybe it will be in next year's lesson manual.

Mark your calendars for this January meeting...

Listening to the Children's Voices

LIBERTY PARK

Marilyn Jones

*Old man, you were drunk under my tree.
At least you talked with me
smiled and called me sweetie.
When you took my hand in yours
leading me toward the bushes
I knew what I must do.
Father taught me to obey
pull my panties down
lie upon my back, open.
We leave the body there
mind-ride our painted ponies
carousels go round and round
callopes whistle music.
You fumbled a shiny quarter
patted my cheek, "thanks sweetie"
stumbled away with your beer breath.
I knew how much a quarter was worth,
ice cream, a real carousel ride.
I threw it in the wishing pond.
Next morning, when I came back
my quarter was gone with my wish.
We did not die in the night.*

Marilyn Jones, a psychiatric R.N. therapist in Mention, Utah, as part of her recovery from suppressed memories of childhood sexual abuse, wrote poems, memories, and fragments of text to give voice to the "children"--the multiple personalities split off to deal with the trauma of her abuse.

She will present a "reader's theater in many voices" at an evening sponsored by the Mormon Alliance, 14 January 1998, in the third-floor auditorium of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. She will also answer and respond to audience comments, based both on her experience as a survivor and on her professional training.

Marilyn will read another set of writings dealing with Satanism and ritual abuse at the Counterpoint Conference sponsored by the Mormon Women's Forum, Saturday, 15 November 1997, at Utah Valley State College. For more information, contact the Mormon Women's Forum, P.O. Box 58281, Salt Lake City, UT 84158.