

Vol. 5, No. 3

July 1999

Case Reports 1 Placed in Libraries

Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, a copy of *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 1995, Volume 1*, were placed in approximately one thousand university and public libraries across the United States. Volume 1 has become a classic compendium of sources on Mormon policy and the behavior of Mormons (not always the same thing) related to child sexual abuse.

Each volume was accompanied by an introductory letter that explained: "The Mormon Church, widely known for its pro-family activist stance, has taken a firm stand against child sexual abuse in its public statements, yet Mormon families are not invulnerable. Many Mormons are victims of abuse. Many Mormons are perpetrators. The policies and doctrines of the church can be immensely helpful in providing support for survivors, yet its emphasis on hierarchy and male authority mean that it can, like most conservative religions, inadvertently foster a climate that perpetrators can take advantage of."

In addition to describing the book's contents, the letter also suggested cataloging headings.

The volumes were sent to each public library in Utah, to every women's college, to each public university with an enrollment over more than 2,000, to each county library in the twenty states with the highest percentage of Mormon population, and to the state library and four or five largest-city libraries in the remaining states.

"We hadn't really expected to get much feedback," according to Trustee Lavina Fielding Anderson, "so we were very gratified to receive a response from about two dozen recipients including the University of Chicago, University of Washington, Georgia Southwestern State University, Fort Valley State University of Georgia, Ball State University, Southern Utah University, Montana State University, Dixie College, Norfolk State University, Brandeis University, Alabama State University, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Albany State University, University of Illinois, and others.

Most of them were form letters or cards ac-

knowledging the gift and expressing appreciation, but others included a more specific message:

"We appreciate the candor and information about the Mormon Church as it relates to child abuse within the semi-closed religious Mormon society."

"Gifts such as yours help us provide materials that would not otherwise be available to [our] students, faculty, and other library users."

"We appreciate your contribution towards enhancing the educational resources on women's issues [in our] library."

"A bookplate inscribed with 'Gift of . . . the Mormon Alliance' will be placed in the volume."

"Thank you very much for sharing this with us. We do have a considerable Mormon collection, and this will be a very nice addition."

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Mark your calendars now for:

1. Our semi-annual conference critique, Monday, October 4, in the second floor meeting room.
2. 12 January 2000, Wednesday, 6:30-8:30 p.m. "The Proclamation on the Family: Who Gets Left Out." This meeting will be in the "Story Room" on the second floor in the children's library. (Sorry! This room assignment was the library's idea.)
3. 3 April 2000, Monday, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Back in the second-story conference room for our conference critique.

HAVE YOU HEARD THIS ONE?

The *Case Reports, Vol. 4*, is still plodding toward its distant deadline but should be at press this fall. It will deal with the 1993-97 excommunications and firings. The first part will provide narrative overview of dates, events, places--basically a summary of what happened. The second part will consist of personal accounts talking about these events "from the inside." More than the "September Six," these reports will include departures from BYU and other disciplinary actions since September 1993.



A News Item I Wish I Were Reading in the Ensign...

Although the Church has impressive facilities for satellite transmission of BYU firesides, general conference, missionary firesides, etc., these events all have the same format: Someone (usually male) is speaking while everyone else sits and listens. Communication is always one way. In contrast . . .

W. Grant McMurray, president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, reported in the July 1999 issue of *Saints Herald* (p. 4) on a leadership teleconference held in May. Twenty-four sites in North America received identical materials, and a member of the World Church Leadership Council worked in person with local planners to adjust and personalize the information. Then on 1 May, the 2400 participants listened to opening remarks from President McMurray while computer operators at each site logged on to an Internet chat room. From that point on, the format was questions transmitted from each location, while the responses, also transmitted from many sites, appeared live on their television screens.

RLDS World Conference has always been more interactive than LDS general conference—with genuine debate and floor votes. In addition to applying interactive technology to increase international representation and participation at conference, McMurray commented:

"We are on the brink of truly being able to establish a sense of global community across the miles. . . . The May event was done with easily acquired technology and at comparatively small expense. How far are we from being able to worship interactively with brothers and sisters of other cultures, each of us viewing the other in our homelands? When might we begin to truly utilize the capabilities of instant communication to confer together, to dialogue about issues of importance, or to share significant news in the life of the church?"

Guest Editorial

THE GRANDEUR OF THOUGHT

Arthur C. Wiscombe

One of the most magnificent things to observe in our corner of the mortal universe is a human being thinking. A solitary individual having the courage to think an original thought. Do we understand how rare, and how difficult, that is? When the person is very young that makes the event that more glorious to contemplate.

It is not that the thought itself is original, be-

cause, as Goethe has reminded us, all grand thoughts have been thought by others before us. However, the moral imperative, the very grandeur, is to think them anew—for ourselves—for the first time. Why is this so difficult to pull off? It is as though our entire mortal environment conspires against us doing so. The octopausal tentacles of woe and vicissitude conspire against such an achievement. The forces of mass conformity are at work on us before we can walk. The powers of indoctrination seem to engulf us from our very beginning. It has often been said that we are born originals, but we die copies. To the extent that this is true is this not the very essence of human tragedy? Would not the Gods wish, for their own, the very opposite? Camus valued freedom of thought and reminded us before his tragic automobile death that man is the only animal that refuses to be what he/she is.

I do not suggest that thinking is the only beauty that abounds. Acting on the noble impulse is still more beautiful. However, the two should walk the mortal gauntlet hand in hand. Our challenge is to think with brilliance and to act with courageous resolve. Does this not begin to define what Christ did and what He is? Is this not what Joseph Smith was doing when he announced the necessity of a Restoration? Did not each give his life for his thought and for his act, for his resolve, and for his indomitable will? So we muster the strength to couple mind with heart and we go forth into the mortal battle. Should not responsible thought and the noble act be a primary goal for all?

For citizens to survive they must establish goals. To implement goals they must organize. To organize is to create institutions. Institutions, by necessity, spawn bureaucracy. In time bureaucracy, operated by and for mass culture, destroys the very goals the citizens originally set out to achieve. Corrupt means inevitably corrupt the ends themselves. Bureaucracy becomes, in the end, more interested in maintaining power and control, while becoming less and less interested in Truth, Justice, or the Good. Thus is the nature (and the motives and the behavior) of wretched mortal humankind, and the circular nature of paradox and bureaucracy.

I believe the real enemy to freedom and to thought and to the noble act is *fear*. Fears that well up from within. Fears that come from vindictive onslaught from without. Why should any institutional leader fear freedom of thought? Why should the led, in any organization, fear freedom of thought? Thought, of course, seems subversive to the tranquility of the religiously assembled. Thought

is always a threat to those more concerned about their privileges of power than they are about justice, progress, and the human good.

Yet thought and moral resolve are the only antidotes I know against our propensity over time to pervert holy universal principles into stale and impotent dogmas and absolute doctrines that, in the end, kill the very spiritual life and growth we seek. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was correct when he observed that, all through history, we have been cocksure about a multitude of things that were never so. Worse than ignorance is the illusion of knowledge.

I believe thought is at the very heart and core of what it means to be human. I love every man and every woman who exhibits the courage to exit from the Platonic Cave, where, by personal and communal policy, we so often adore, coddle, and cradle our illusions at the expense of freedom, truth, and human dignity.

Guest Editorial

Heaven's Real First Law

Lew W. Wallace

I keep hearing in Church meetings speakers intoning, "Obedience is the first law of heaven."

The present free-standing call for "obedience" (to whom or what unspecified) carries the not too subtle implication of "obedience to *me*, for I know the will of God in heaven and *I'm* going to tell you what commandments he wants you to obey."

New Bible translations prefer the word "hear-ken" (instead of "obey") since it implies agency. Quoting James 2:8, you "fulfill the royal law according to the scriptures" when you "love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus' message is basically: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:36-40; see also Lev. 19:18; D&C 59:5-6. Love for one's neighbor occurs eight times in the New Testament).

At five places in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord urges us to "reason" with him. This doesn't sound like a five-star general talking to a buck private. The implication here is one of convincing by persuasion (D&C 121:41)—a far cry from the military imperative "(you) obey!"

"Obey" has a malodorous degree of implied compulsion. Such manipulation or domination is incompatible with freely exercised agency, where "patience," "long suffering," and "love unfeigned" are the watchwords. Doctrine and Covenants

121:39 warns that "it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority . . . to exercise unrighteous dominion," How much is "almost all"? 95 percent? 98 percent? 99.9 percent?

When someone has a position of authority in the Church, exercising unrighteous dominion is an "occupational hazard." His title, position, office, desk, handbook, etc.—all tilt the psychological playing field in his favor against the person he is advising, counseling, reproofing, or teaching.

Jesus admonished, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Both the commandment (love one another) and the reason for keeping it are the same—loving relationships. One litmus test of keeping the commandment is whether or not the other person feels loved. If he or she feels intimidated, coerced, or punished, then we need to rethink what we are communicating.

The Lord called his brightest ones "little children" (D&C 50:40-41), which may be why we still struggle to become mature enough to accept and act upon divine instruction to obtain compliance through our love unfeigned.

"Love" is the "first law of heaven," not "obedience."

Good News, Bad News: April's Conference Critique

A lively group that frequently overrode Janice Allred's plea to have only one discussion at a time generally agreed with her assessment that "the good was getting better and the bad was getting worse" at general conference. Among the high points were:

1. The explicit concern for the war in eastern Europe, with General Authorities praying by name for peace in Kosovo. One participant claimed that the Church has shunned by-name mention of current events since the Korean War, with the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and even the assassination of presidents being alluded to only in generalities.

2. The Church's involvement in humanitarian efforts to relieve suffering both among the refugees, in the wake of the natural disasters in Honduras, and in general. The group split, however, on the explicitness of the report. "I can't help thinking that it's really missionary work, not humanitarian service," commented one, "because President Hinckley reported on how many tons of stuff we

were sending out and then immediately talked about how it was making friends for the Church." Another participant countered, "But we're always complaining that they never tell us how they're spending money. Isn't it better to get some statistics on some aspects of Church spending than nothing?"

3. Elder Stephen A. West's talk about his experiences in a Mormon branch among the urban poor. "When was the last time you heard anybody say that people who were mentally ill and who smelled bad belonged in Church meetings?" asked one. "I never have, and in most wards, I think the answer would be that they don't have a place."

4. The group split on Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's Easter address on Christ's atonement. Some praised its clear focus on Christ, Holland's eloquent intensity, and the focus on the Father/Son relationship as adding conceptual depth to the more usual "retelling of the Easter story without any attempt at exegesis or interpretation." Another, however, found repellent the presentation of "the ideal relationship as being total submission" and, furthermore, that the model for relationships was that of a father and son. "Where is Heavenly Mother in this relationship?" Another pointed out that this relationship actually countered the otherwise near uniform emphasis on "the family" as a couple with dependent children.

5. If there had been an award for Creative Reading between the Lines, it would have gone to one serious listener who found in Elder Neal A. Maxwell's address an appeal to members of the Church to abandon the "blind obedience" model. This listener found it "profoundly encouraging" that the model of cultural decline he used also fit the Church and that he laid responsibility for problems equally on "leaders and followers." "This was about the best he could do in general conference, but I think he was talking about the Church when he was talking about culture," insisted this analyst. "He didn't quote any Mormons and he didn't once refer to the Church."

Skeptics of this interpretation pointed out that the entire talk could have just been a coded denunciation of Bill Clinton politics, that he may have just been assigned to throw a bone to the intellectuals, and that it's merely guilt-producing to make followers equally responsible to leaders when leaders have all the power. Still, conceded other listeners, this talk was lucid and clear, unlike many muddled Maxwell messages of the past. "I think that confusion may have represented his own internal conflict," argued one listener. "I think he may have

repented."

6. Marlin Jensen's substantive talk on friendship, Sheri Dew's insights into the atonement, and Joe J. Christensen's call for less materialism drew applause.

7. The announcement that the Nauvoo Temple will be rebuilt. While the announcement is an exciting one, another listener predicted that it would be "a perfect symbol of what the Church does to history: the facade will look authentic down to the last detail, and the interior will have nothing to do with it."

This comment reflected a general malaise among listeners with the heavy (and heavy-handed) emphasis on and near-equation of temples and families, themes that reappeared in a monotonous number of talks. One listener hypothesized at least four reasons: (1) the sheer number of temples, thanks to President Hinckley's insistence on their creation; (2) the obvious appetite of contemporary Mormons for a "pilgrimage" experience even if it turns into ersatz history like the trek reenactment; (3) the temple as a substitute for the lack of contemporary Mormon doctrinal uniqueness ("doctrine changes every time President Hinckley gives a press conference"), and (4) the conceptual simplicity of pointing to a building and being able to say, "This is what makes us special" -- especially since there's no way to determine whether that statement is true as long as people don't talk about what goes on inside.

Another listener expressed uneasiness for another reason: "What *does* get said about the temple trivializes it." Another agreed, "Carol Thomas's talk turned it into a matter of dress standards from infancy on." Another pointed out that the temple had displaced Jesus as the source of salvation. Still another was irritated by the ancient "sacred, not secret" explanation for silence; "it's obviously both." Quipped another, "unless you know where to look on the Internet."

The dreary mapping of temple-marriage-motherhood that dominated the Young Women's fireside was very bothersome to most listeners. One college-age woman noted, "They used to at least say there was a place for education so that you'd be a well-rounded woman as a mother, but now, all you need is motherhood." One young man poignantly said he felt "trapped" growing up with an equally constricted male model. "I asked my parents: I'm supposed to go on a mission and get an education so I can get a good job to support a wife and children and spend all my spare time being a good father so that my children will grow up to be



responsible adults who will be good parents who will raise children who'll do the same thing. Is this all there is?"

Elder Robert D. Hales's free-associational laundry list of everything parents should be doing with/for/to their children drew strong expressions of weariness, as did his citation of Orson F. Whitney's often-used but bizarre quotation about continuing to pray for wayward children because the "tentacles" of the Holy Ghost will "feel" after them. Elder Richard G. Scott's advice to men not to make all the decisions even if the local culture allowed such a style was cancelled out by his instructions to women to get educations but only for the purpose of being better mothers, not for careers. Another listener was made uneasy by his mentioning the deaths of two of his children, but only in the context of how they inspired the reactivation of his father. "He didn't deal with his own feelings at all," she pointed out. "And by implying that serene assurance is the right way to feel when a child dies, he just made every Mormon parent who is struggling with the same circumstances deal not only with grief but also with guilt."

When it came to conference trends, Janice identified a sharp dip in the number of speakers who quoted and/or praised President Hinckley--only nine compared to almost all of last conference's speakers. She also found "more than ever" talks on doctrine--seven, up from two or three in last conference, while Christian living dropped to eight and "institutional" instruction of a program or principle clearly topped out with fifteen. Several participants found her classifications overly optimistic. Elder Eyring's talk, for instance, was not really about doctrine as much as it was about teaching doctrine, argued one. Elder Oaks's talk was not really so much about the doctrine of witnesses as it was about rehabilitating his kinsman, Martin Harris.

For conference fantasies, one participant wished that the moving plea for patience and tolerance toward those of other faiths could also be extended to those within Mormonism. Another wished that the audience could be expanded beyond minority (approximately 19 percent) of LDS households that consist of two parents with dependent children. Another thought it would be refreshing to hear a real prophecy instead of a statement introduced by "this is not a prophecy."

Joining in the discussion by e-mail was Edward L. Jones III of Utah County:

My observations on conference were a little different. I saw a lot of sexism. I was disappointed with Carol Thomas' talk, which was basically a

string of quotes from male General Authorities without a lot of original thought.

Elder Holland raved on about fathers and sons (and the corresponding divine model), but only mentioned daughters in passing. I thought the talk would have been more appropriate for priesthood session.

Speaking of the priesthood session, Elder Nelson explained that, as per tradition, the women of his family were home baking doughnuts, anxiously waiting for the men to come home and share the inspired counsel they had received. When I heard that, I said a little prayer in my heart: "God, please bless that when Elder Nelson goes home tonight, he'll find a note from the women of his family that says 'We've found a vintage convertible, we're going to Las Vegas, and we don't know when we'll be back, if ever. Make your own doughnuts.' While I'm sure that Sister Nelson doesn't feel oppressed making doughnuts, it seems to me a dangerous model to hold up for the men of the Church, lest there be some LDS woman who has interests that extend beyond the kitchen.

I was proud of Sister Dew's talk. She obviously doesn't depend on anyone else for her relationship with Christ.

One GA (I forget which now) lamented that too few young people go into marriage with valuable life skills like cooking and sewing. Hmmm. I can think of a few life skills that would be slightly more valuable, like the ability to use the telephone effectively in ordering take-out.

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, published in January, April, July, and October. Please send contributions and changes of address to the Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, PMB 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

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 and the Case Reports volume for that year. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge. Copies of earlier Case Reports, 1995 and 1996, are available from Signature Books for \$20 apiece (price includes shipping) at 564 W. 400 North, Salt Lake City, UT 84116. The order line is (801) 531-0164.

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



PARADISE NOT YET LOST

Rita Bowles

Before you whispered my name on the wind
I came to circle the orchard with song, pick
purple damsons soaked in nature's perfume,
poked from a tree high-gilded by late-morning
fire of sun, shining cloud-free and strong
into and through all creeping things.

Holding two not-quite-ripened plums
I came guilt-free to you, blessed by ignorance
of bright-light afternoon, and found delight
rendered in small bites of fruit shared
in tender moments before full ripening;
a taste never to be forgotten.

Later, an amber sun cast a length of glory
on fruitful seed, on bone and flesh
in the cool of days dressed in trees
keeping thorn and thistle in deep sleep
with bewilder of guilt, bruise of heel.
We came together desiring knowledge, love.

Even as the sun begins to sink, I find
(fresh and whole as a snake's new hide) desire
to taste of darkening plums; a wanting to savor
the last of fall's distilled juices. Should I be
surprised to find the full flavor of dusky fruit
still sings resolutely under wrinkling skins

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Churchwatch

8 March 1999. The Desert Book Club newsletter advertised a taped speech by Hyrum W. Smith, "Goal Setting and Moral Values" and another by George Pace, described as "a popular Education Week speaker," titled "A Perfect Brightness of Hope." In a page headed "Recent Bestsellers" appeared Avraham Gileadi's The Last Days: Types and Shadows from the Bible and the Book of Mormon, (publisher not identified) described: "Avraham Gileadi explains hard-to-understand scriptural phrases and clarifies the meaning of scriptural prophecies concerning our days" (13)

17 June 1999. In a sarcastic letter to the editor, Richard Barnes thanked the administration for closing the health center during devotionals, meaning that he could not pick up a prescription for his pain-racked eleven-month-old daughter. "I hope I never have to make any important decisions myself," he wrote. "After all, it was God's plan to make all of our decisions for us. Or was that someone else's plan?" Richard Barnes, "Bad Idea," (BYU) Daily Universe, 17 June 1999, 7.

23 June 1999, Wednesday. Chris Gellenick, a non-Mormon legal scholar and religious historian from Germany has recently published Christ in Amerika?, the first Mormon history written in German. He considers that his book is "clearing some fog" about Mormonism, including its status as a Christian church, and not a sect. He apparently finished his research at BYU. However, despite the enlightenment he claims his book will bring about Mormonism, based on "years of reading and research on his own" plus material drawn "from LDS colleagues," he explained to a reporter that Germans would not easily talk to missionaries on the street although "you might treat them to coffee." Amber Blair, "Visiting Prof. Writes Book about LDS," (BYU) Daily Universe, 23 June 1999, 5.