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# BY COMMON CONSENT

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## Conference Critique

Our semi-annual gathering will be held Monday, April 6, 2009, exploring trends and topics that emerge from this year's April general conference, still shadowed by the turmoil of California's Proposition 8. We will gather from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in Conference Room A at Salt Lake City's main library downtown (210 E. 400 South). This conference room is the first on the right going west from the elevator on the lower level. Take the elevator just inside the east plaza-level entry and go down one floor. Janice Allred will lead this freewheeling and insightful exchange.

The best parking (though not free) is in the lot under the building. Enter from Fourth South going east and turn right at the mid-block entrance between 200 East and 300 East.

## The Idol of Infallibility

*Janice Allred*

It is ironic that the Church, which professes to be *the* Church of Jesus Christ, to be founded on His rock and to be led by Him, should be enticed by and seek refuge in a doctrine of infallibility. Doctrines of infallibility arise because of a perceived need to settle religious questions by ap-

pealing to an authority that cannot be questioned or disobeyed. Infallibility doctrines endow some object that is not God with God's authority. We desire such doctrines because we can use them to coerce others: You must believe that which is infallible, and you must follow the commands of an infallible authority.

Infallibility doctrines inhibit the search for truth. They prevent repentance, which requires understanding. They free us from the responsibility of discovering truth for ourselves, of weighing all aspects of difficult choices, and then of following our conscience, even if doing so leads to disapproval and discipline. Doctrines of infallibility create idols--something less than God but to which we give the worship that belongs only to God and to which we attribute the goodness and truth that only God fully possesses. God does not coerce obedience, but human beings have created various idols which can function as instruments of coercion for those who seek to control and use others.

Intrinsic authority is the ability to act, to create, to be the author of one's own actions. It is free agency. Everyone possesses it. Some, because of their knowledge, wisdom, expertise, or charisma, can influence others, provide them with resources, and lead them in informal ways.

Extrinsic authority may be either legitimate or illegitimate. Legitimate extrinsic authority comes from a position of power in a formal structure which enables a person(s) to act for a group and give laws, commands, or directions. This authority is necessary for the functioning of governments and other organizations. Although governments can be democratic, they need some kind of coercive power to be effective. Illegitimate extrinsic authority uses coercion, often violence, to compel others. One reason that church and state should be separate is because the church should never use coercion and the state requires coercive power.

Mormonism is rooted in Joseph Smith's direct revelation from God in which Christ spoke personally to him. The First Vision opened a period of many revelations, visitations, and visions that directed the founding of the Church and supplied its sacred texts.

The Church continues to use the authority of these foundational revelations both legitimately and illegitimately. Their legitimate uses are to teach the gospel and provide principles and resources for righteous personal relationships, social structures, and Church governance. The Church uses them illegitimately to invest Church leaders, especially the Church president, his counselors, and the Quorum of the Twelve, with infallible authority--that is, authority that cannot be questioned or disobeyed.

All revelation, whether it comes in a visitation from a divine being, in vision, or by the Spirit's still, small voice, is personal. Jesus Christ is a living God, a God of truth, love, and freedom. He has direct, living contact with each of us and with every part of creation. He does not employ idols in his work. In the Church of Christ every member is directly connected to Christ through

the Spirit. There are important questions about the meaning and uses of revelation in the Church community, about the role of prophets in the Church, about Church governance, and about how Church members can live together in love, truth, and freedom. These questions must be addressed in every Church community and by every follower of Christ seeking to understand and obey the gospel.

However, the doctrine of continuing revelation in the Church has developed into a kind of prophet idolatry--putting the prophet in the place of Christ. Members regard the office of Church president as conferring prophetic power through the bestowal of priesthood keys. Although priesthood keys are important, they do not confer prophetic power. Prophetic power is conferred directly through the Spirit. The process of determining truth and deciding what to do becomes mechanistic in slogans like "follow the prophet" or "when the prophet speaks the thinking has been done."

God does speak through prophets, but this does not make them infallible or give them coercive power. The most important question we need to ask in considering any revelation or prophecy is not "Did the prophet say it?" but "Is it true?" Indeed, the only way we can know if a person is a prophet is by determining if his prophecy is true. In evaluating claims of prophetic truth, we need to use all relevant methods of finding truth, then seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit for our conclusion.

The Church which professes to be Christ's Church should not coerce its members nor shield itself from sin and error behind the idol of infallibility. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of repentance. Sin, error, mistakes, weaknesses, and shortcomings are not fatal. They give us opportunities to learn. What is fatal is pride--

pride that prevents us from seeing, acknowledging, and rectifying our sins and errors, pride that closes our minds to questions that can lead us to truth, pride that hardens our hearts against charity for our fellow human beings, and pride that keeps us from believing in Christ and being perfected in Him.

### **Ain't That Simple**

*Garth N. Jones*

The editorial, "As a New Year Begins" by Lavina Fielding Anderson in *By Common Consent* (January 2009) disappointed me in its one-sided opposition to California's Proposition 8. Giving homosexuals the right to marry ain't a simple matter.

As a frightened twelve-year-old, I was almost raped by an older teenager. His stepfather's timely appearance in the farm shed allowed me to escape. When I was seventeen, I was staying overnight with a classmate who climbed into my bed in the middle of the night and tried to seduce me.

I understand that pedophiles may be either heterosexuals or homosexuals, but the sexual abuse of children cannot be tolerated. In the Eastern Carolina Islands of the Pacific, when I was an acting district administrator in 1951, I received the complaint of a Jesuit priest that an American naval officer, son of a high-ranking and popular commander, was molesting young boys. I ordered him to ship out within twenty-four hours, despite the possibility of damage to my career. I believe that I saved his life.

For much of 1957-69, I lived in Indonesia and Pakistan where female impersonators were very common as was male prostitution. My national associates, who held university degrees, explained their belief that Mohammad, when he

returned, would be born of a man, a belief that apparently legitimized homosexuality to some extent. Lahore, Pakistan, had a famous house of male prostitution known as the Diamond Market, staffed primarily by young blond boys secured from Afghanistan.

In Los Angeles (1961-64), where I held an academic position at the University of Southern California and frequently taught classes at its School of Public Administration's extension center near the civic center, I received frequent invitations, coming and going, from homosexual "pick-ups." I know how women feel when so pursued.

In New York in 1972-73, a Bengali friend whom I helped get a position with the United Nations, was a worldly fellow with intimate knowledge of brothels in East and West Pakistan, Thailand, and Hong Kong. He asked me to join him on a visit to a strip joint off Times Square. I reluctantly agreed since I was concerned for his safety. The vulgarity was disgusting to him and enraging to me. I insisted that we leave and read him a furious lecture that said, in essence: "I took an oath of office when I joined the United Nations. I'm now responsible for a major project on the world population issue which embraces family planning and the sanctity of human life. Sexual gratification should never be taken lightly since procreation is involved. Marriage should be more than a contract. I believe in it as a sacrament. Every child should be wanted. Sexually active couples should have the right to information and technology to determine the number and spacing of their children." I stress civility and mutual respect in all social relationships.

Both my wife and I have homosexuals in our extended families. We welcome them into our lives and treat them respectfully, but I fully approve of the Church's

position as expressed in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." I firmly believe that the welfare of children is the ultimate goal, best served in the traditional marriage of a loving mother and father. If loving grandparents, aunts, and uncles are around, so much the better.

### **Temptations of Leaders**

Ronald Heifetz, [author of] *Leadership without Easy Answers* (1994) . . . is a musician and a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who often explores his ideas using both governmental examples and general leadership cases like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or a local physician.

One of Heifetz's most potent ideas is that leaders must avoid the temptation--which constituents are usually quite happy to foster--that they can and must solve all problems themselves. He calls this tendency "a flight to authority." Heifetz admits that there are many problems (technical issues, he calls them) that leaders, indeed, should manage. These include situations where the problem is definable, the solution is clear, and the leader or manager is suited to implementing the solution. But Heifetz presents a second type of situation with more difficult issues that cannot, and should not, be decided or solved by one person alone. Those concerns--which Heifetz calls "adaptive" work--are cases that require learning in order to understand the problem and investigate solutions. In these adaptive situations, Heifetz argues that leaders must "give the work to the people" who are involved in both the problem and its solution.

Using the example of a father who learns he has cancer, Heifetz discusses the difference between the technical issues, where the physician should and must take control, and the adaptive questions, where the physician becomes a support to the patient and his family in their decisions about how to proceed with his care, weighing the risks and the resulting quality of life. Similarly, Heifetz examines the work of Martin Luther King, who could not

solve America's race issues no matter how prominent his persona; he could however, galvanize others to work, and he came to symbolize the need for people to take charge of changing their own thinking. --Linda Eisenmann, "Practicing What I Teach: Does a Career as a Higher Education Professor Inform My Work as a Dean?" *Review of Higher Education* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2009): 527-28.

### **Still the Only True Church?**

*Fred A. North*

I believe that a community is already in a process of dissolution where each man begins to eye his neighbor as a possible enemy, where nonconformity with the accepted creed, political as well as religious, is a mark of disaffection; where denunciation, without specification or backing, takes the place of evidence; where orthodoxy chokes freedom of dissent; where faith in the eventual supremacy of reason has become so timid that we dare not enter our convictions in the open lists to win or lose. Such fears . . . may in the end subject us to a despotism as evil as any that we dread. Risk for risk, for myself I had rather take my chance that some traitors will escape detection than spread abroad a spirit of general suspicion and distrust, which accepts rumor and gossip in place of undismayed and unintimidated inquiry. -- Judge Learned Hand, as quoted by William L. Shirer, *A Native's Return, 1945-1988, A Memoir of a Life and the Times*, 1990, 172.

I have an insatiable desire to know. I have a preference for truth over illusion, wisdom over folly, and reality over Church public relations. As one who for a time taught philosophy in a university, I recognize that it is easier to ask questions than to provide cogent answers. Perhaps in this mortal valley we will have to find some degree of contentment with questions without complete answers.

Here is my question in context. God has a billion of His children who follow Catholicism, vast numbers in Protestantism, billions striving after Eastern thought and belief, vast throngs in India following their belief, and millions upon millions who are deeply devoted to Allah. How,

then, can I explain myself as a special member of the only "true and living church on earth"? According to this doctrine, most of the seven billion humans on earth therefore belong, if they believe and attend at all, to a "false and dead church." Can I count on certain truth and holy doctrines to act as my absolute Iron Rod? Some will say that the concept of continual revelation implies that older "holy" doctrines will be discarded for newer "holy" doctrines. How can I be sure that Mormonism, pronounced by God as the "only true and living Church" in 1830 still occupies that favored status?

Here is a partial list of what I have identified as changing values in Mormonism from one generation to the next.

1. Theocracy. Joseph Smith worked ardently to combined religious and civil authority for thirteen years. He acted in great confidence that Jesus Christ would return within a matter of years in great power and glory and replace all earthly governments. However, the historical facts are these: Christ did not appear; no temple was built in Missouri at the site of His expected coming; Mormon theocracy brought down grief and persecution from non-Mormon neighbors in every locale where they settled; theocracy was inevitably seen as seditious to constituted civic authority; Joseph Smith was assassinated; the U.S. government found Brigham Young's theocracy alarming enough to send the U.S. army to Utah in 1857-58; and after the Civil War, the government took decisive action to repress the Church as a legal entity until Mormon leaders submitted to the demands of the government.

2. Polygamy. This unconventional marriage pattern, which was attached to theocracy, was presented as absolutely essential for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Now, anyone teaching or practicing polygamy is excommunicated, although men may be serially sealed to an additional wife or wives as long as the first (sealed) wife is dead.

3. Temple rituals. Over my lifetime, many elements of the temple rituals have been discarded or modified. When I first encountered these in the 1940s they were all consid-

ered "holy" and absolutely necessary. If some were considered unholy enough to discard them at present, were they truly holy at an earlier time?

5. Temple ordinances for the dead. This doctrine/activity has been identified as one of the three main objectives of the Church. If it is so important, I am amazed that so little appears on the subject in scripture. Even our modern scriptures are basically silent on this topic. The other two--perfecting the Saints and preaching the gospel--are dealt with repeatedly and at length in the Doctrine and Covenants. Where are the parallel revelations for "redeeming the dead"? Furthermore, an estimated 80+ billion souls have lived. The birth rate in Asia, India, and the Middle East, continues to be explosive. At an estimated four hours required to perform all proxy ordinances for a single dead person, how many billions of hours will be required of living mortals to redeem the dead? And why would God wish millions of the living to turn away from the needs of the living to minister to countless billions of the dead who neither desire nor are required to have this work done in their behalf?

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#### 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 last weeks of December, March, July, and September. Please send all correspondence about articles and subscriptions to Mormon Alliance, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115.

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.