

THE MORMON PURGE

H Saturday, August 8, 1992

Besieged LDS Intellectuals to Fight Back

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE
Mormon intellectuals have been feeling besieged for the last year. Feminists, environmentalists, anthropologists, historians and journalists have all felt the heat from LDS headquarters. Now one more...

LDS Official Acknowledges

Continued from

Verdict in Trials of 6 Mormon Scholars: Guilty

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE
In the summer of 1984, Salt Lake educator and self-proclaimed heretic, Sterling M. McMurrin, was told by his LDS leaders that he might be excommunicated. David O. McKay reached then...

By Paul Brinkley-Rogers
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
SALT LAKE CITY — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is an American original, and one of the most successful global...

BENSON LEAVES CHURCH:
Republican cartoonist, grandson of LDS prophet, quits the Mormon Church. Story, A22.

Cartoonist Says Oaks Lied To Protect Fellow Apostle

By Vern Anderson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
The grandson of Mormon Church President Ezra Taft Benson contends that a church apostle lied in order to cover up a more senior apostle's role in the excommunication of a Mormon dissident. Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson said Monday his decision last week to resign from the church was based on the revelation that Daffin H. Oaks stated that Elder Boyd K. Packer had helped...

Benson's Grandson Accuses LDS Apostle of Lying
Continued from B-1
Packer to meet with Heinz and... mistake for Heinz to ask... Benson also... further... later...

SATURDAY, October 16, 1993

More Stories Point to LDS Leaders As Source of Dissident Crackdown

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE
It was the week that was. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints steadfastly had insisted disciplinary actions taken recently against six dissident members were initiated locally.

meeting was false. The church's crackdown on public dissidents has been the talk of Utah this fall. It culminated this week with those unusual admissions. The questions now being asked: What's happening and what's next? Church leadership declined to...

Toscano, Avraham Gileadi, D. Michael Quinn, Maxine Hanks and Lavina Fielding Anderson were excommunicated. Lynn Kanavel Whitesides was disfellowshipped. It is accurate to say such actions were not "directed" by LDS general authorities, but sources told *The Tribune* that church leaders indirectly initiated some of the actions.

erated the mission of the church. "The Council of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve are united in their responsibility to maintain doctrinal purity of the church," said Arnold R. Augustin, director of media relations. One way the church is discovering impure doctrine is by reading newspapers. In an Oct. 2 interview in the church-owned *Deseret News*, Elder Oaks described how the church's Strengthening the Members Committee pours over newspapers and other publications to identify members accused of crimes, preaching false doctrine and criticizing leadership. That information is "forwarded" to local leaders "as a way of keeping busy bishops informed." Though technically not a directive from church headquarters, most stake...

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

The Story of How Mormon Leaders Moved to Repress Rebellion By Church Historians, Feminists and Other Dissidents

Discloses Secret Memos About Suppression of Church History

THE MORMON PURGE

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

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The Mormon Purge

While the Mormon Church continues to grow at a rapid rate (close to 9,000,000 members in 1993), it is obvious that internal problems are also beginning to mount. Consequently, church leaders have decided to take an uncompromising stand against Mormon historians and other dissenters within the church who wish to tell the unvarnished truth about church history and other issues.

Five Excommunicated

In an apparent show of strength just before the October, 1993, General Conference of the Mormon Church, six prominent church members were summoned to stand trial in church courts for apostasy. On October 2, 1993, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported the results of those trials:

Three men and three women have been charged with apostasy for their writing and speaking about Mormon subjects. Paul Toscano, Avraham Gileadi, D. Michael Quinn, Maxine Hanks and Lavina Fielding Anderson were excommunicated. Lynne Kanavel Whitesides was disfellowshipped. . . .

Ms. Whitesides' council was a ward rather than stake group. Her judges were the bishop, his two counselors, a clerk and the ward executive secretary—all men.

Her bishop, Virgil Merrill, had said she could have a friend and her husband with her during the hearing.

But on the night of her Sept. 14 council, Mr. Merrill forbade even her husband to accompany her.

"You are thinking of dissolving this woman's temple marriage. Don't you think he has a vested interest in participating in this council?" said Ms. Whitesides' friend, Martha Pierce.

During the council, Ms. Whitesides was accused of "creating friction" with her Mormon feminist statements on television. She also was charged with failure to support church leaders by saying, also on TV, she couldn't "find any evidence of Christ in [Elder] Packer's last speech."

She was disfellowshipped that night for "conduct contrary to the laws of the church." . . .

Lavina Fielding Anderson was excommunicated for a single article in the independent Mormon journal, *Dialogue*. *The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership* chronicled episodes of intimidation against Mormon thinkers for the last 20 years. . . .

On Sept. 23, she was excommunicated.

LDS historian D. Michael Quinn has had three such councils within the last four months. . . .

While he didn't attend the council, he wrote a defense.

"I vowed I would never again participate in a process which was designed to punish me for being the messenger of unwanted historical evidence and to intimidate me from further work in Mormon history," he wrote.

But he did reaffirm his faith that "Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was God's prophet of the Restoration and that Ezra Taft Benson is the prophet, seer and revelator on the Earth today."

The council was kind. They put him on probation. But in July, the punishment was upgraded to disfellowshippment. This week, while he was in California, his stake leaders excommunicated him. . . . Avraham Gileadi, a conservative theologian and writer, was excommunicated for his writings about the Apocalypse and the Book of Isaiah. He attended his council but declined to talk with the press about his experience.

Some of those who were excommunicated used to write articles for the church's official publication, *The Ensign*. D. Michael Quinn, for instance, has written at least six articles for *The Ensign*, and about the same number for *Brigham Young University Studies*. It seems ironic that this man, who was once held in high esteem within the church, is now considered to be an "anti-Mormon." Lavina Fielding Anderson, who was also excommunicated, used to be an assistant editor for the church's *Ensign* magazine.

A decade before the present purge began there was another attempt by the church to silence intellectuals. Lavina Fielding Anderson, who was recently excommunicated, gave this information about the matter:

Sunday, 22 May 1983. Dawn Tracy publishes an article in the *Provo Daily Herald* reporting that she talked to fourteen Mormon writers in four states who "had been questioned" by local ecclesiastical leaders. All had contributed to *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, or the *Seventh East Press*. Roy Doxey, former BYU dean of religious education, says that Apostle Mark E. Petersen "ordered

the investigations.” Elder Petersen, whose assignment has long been the investigation and suppression of fundamentalist Mormons [those who encourage the practice of polygamy and the Adam-God doctrine], has apparently expanded his mandate to include other individuals whom he defines as enemies of the church. In 1962 he told a conference of seminary and Institute faculty, “In teaching the gospel there is no academic freedom. . . . There is only fundamental orthodox doctrine and truth.”

Three of the writers who were investigated are faculty members at BYU. . . .

Scott Faulring’s stake president chastised him for his writings but admitted he had never read the offending articles. This stake president also “warned him to be cautious in his writing” and refused to tell him “who asked him to talk to me,” said Faulring. Gary James Bergera of Provo, also interviewed, commented: “My stake president told me . . . what I had written was anti-Mormon because it wasn’t uplifting.” . . . Other writers questioned are Armand Mauss, Thomas G. Alexander, David John Buerger, Lester Bush, Edward A. Ashment, Jeff Keller, and Richard Sherlock. Carlos Whiting, a Mormon writer . . . is quoted as saying the writers who were interviewed are upset and adds, “Anti-intellectualism being manifest in the church is contrary to basic doctrine. . . . More serious, however, seems to be the inept approach of the various leaders involved in the inquiries.”

J. D. Williams denounces the proceedings as “an inquisition” and adds, “Passing ecclesiastical judgment on writers who have conducted serious, historical research is a denial of everything the church stands for.” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1993, pages 20-21)

A Sleeping Crisis?

The Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith maintained that on May 6, 1833, he had a revelation in which God told him that, “The glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth” (*Doctrine and Covenants* 93:36). Consequently, the church has stressed the importance of education. While this emphasis on the quest for knowledge has helped the church to gain respect throughout the world, there is a downside to the matter: the more informed people become, the more likely they are to question the church’s teachings.

Many years ago Thomas F. O’Dea, who was professor of sociology at the University of Utah, predicted that a crisis may be developing in the Mormon Church:

The Latter-day Saints have successfully created a Mormon community with its own values and social structure, although it is no longer a separate entity but is rather very much a part, both geographically

and sentimentally, of the larger secular society of the United States. Yet Mormonism retains much of its old peculiarity, and Mormondom remains in many respects a society in its own right and, as such, has been subject to a number of stresses and strains within its own structure. These sources of conflict have created grave problems for the Mormon movement, and some of them are even now capable of severe threats to its welfare. . . .

Perhaps Mormonism’s greatest and most significant problem is its encounter with modern secular thought. This encounter presents itself in terms of a specific dilemma that may be phrased, “education versus apostasy,” and has created an unhappy intellectual group among the Mormons today. Closely related to this fundamental problem are two other dilemmas. Mormonism’s insistence upon reason and the implicit rationality of its tenets comes into conflict with its equally emphasized belief in the miraculous and give rise to what we may call the dilemma of “rationality versus charisma.” In addition, Mormonism’s concern with both authority and individualism presents another problem.

This third dilemma of “authority and obedience versus democracy and individualism” leads into the whole problem of Mormonism and the governing of men. . . .

A Salt Lake City Mormon intellectual once remarked to me that the Mormon religion has provided the basis for a satisfying life to the great majority of its followers. He added: “Only the questioning intellectual is unhappy.”

The situation of the intellectual is likely to be somewhat ambiguous in any society, and he is generally the object not only of esteem but also of suspicion. . . . The intellectual in his creative aspects is necessary to the maintenance and progress of society, for it is he as creator who produces widely shared and appreciated benefits, ranging from the realm of values to that of physical comforts. Yet the intellectual is also given to reflection and criticism; he also questions. As a questioner and critic, he not only annoys conservatives but may come to threaten, or at least appear to threaten, cherished beliefs, values and institutions. As creator and preserver, the intellectual is esteemed; as critic and questioner, he is suspect. . . . Mormonism succeeded in evolving an intellectual group from its own native roots, an accomplishment of note, doing credit to its tradition, but one that introduces the ambiguity of intellectual conflict into the Mormon society. . . . the return of Mormonism to full participation in the general life of the American republic would, of necessity, involve an encounter with modern thought. Such an encounter would bring peculiarly Mormon beliefs and values into touch with critical ideas and approaches that would test the former’s viability in a way different from that of any previous challenge. The Mormon attitude toward education and learning would make this challenge even more important and increase the difficulty in meeting it. From their earliest beginnings, the Latter-day Saints have placed great emphasis upon education. . . . Little did they realize that in placing their

hopes in education they were at the same time creating the “transmission belt” that would bring into Zion all the doubts and uncertainties that, in another century, were to beset the gentile world. . . .

The church was based upon the idea of modern revelation, upon the belief in the restoration in our time of what had been lost through the sinfulness and apostasy of man. . . . From a new revelation so explicit; from a modern scripture so timely, whose translation was a divine work and therefore uncorrupted; from scriptures given by God himself to chosen people in the latter days, a literal reading of the word would certainly offer solution to any important religious problems.

Therefore, despite Joseph Smith’s recognition that the Bible need not necessarily be taken literally in all cases, the modern scriptures were certainly to be so understood. Literalism became and has largely remained characteristic of the Mormon approach to the text of modern revelation. The Bible . . . may be unclear, may even be seriously corrupted, but the scriptures presented to the world in our own time by a man who talked with God, translated by a modern prophet through divine inspiration and miraculous assistance—these scriptures must be literally true, or the very foundations of Mormon faith are threatened.

Thus it was a very literalist kind of religion . . . that was placed in close relation to and communication with modern thought by the reincorporation of Mormonism into secular American life. This confrontation contained the great possibility that acquaintance with modern learning by thoughtful Mormons would lead to apostasy. Quite obviously, by encouraging education and giving it a central place in both its own activities and its world view, Mormonism exposed itself more vulnerably to the danger. . . . The Mormon youth, who usually comes from a background of rural and quite literal Mormonism, finds that his entrance into the university is an introduction to the doubt and confusion that his first real encounter with secular culture entails. He has been taught by the Mormon faith to seek knowledge and to value it; yet it is precisely this course, so acceptable to and so honored by his religion, that is bound to bring religious crisis to him and profound danger to his religious belief. The college undergraduate curriculum becomes the first line of danger to Mormonism in its encounter with modern learning.

The church has not been unaware of this threat, nor has it failed to respond to the danger. The most striking of its efforts in this direction is the Institute and Seminary system. This highly organized and generously financed program has included the building of L.D.S. institutes near colleges and seminaries near high schools, where religion is taught . . . For the Mormon student to come directly to a college or university without the possibility of seeking help at these institutes would be for him to come from a high-pressure chamber to the open air without passing through a series of decompression chambers.

The Institute system provides able teaching, most often by men who themselves are intellectuals and who are aware of the kind of problem the student faces and the sort of help he needs. . . . While the institutes and seminaries have been manned by people who often tend toward a liberal position or at least have a conservative-liberal attitude in theology, the Division of Religion at Brigham Young University has of late years been conservative. . . . Yet Brigham Young University has not been free from those currents of modern thought that we have characterized earlier, and a few years ago such opposition led to open conflict. . . .

The Institute system is the way the church has developed to meet the threat of apostasy involved in Mormonism’s encounter with secular education. . . . Can the church make the accommodation to modern thought necessary to satisfy the concern with truth that its own teachings have created in its more intellectual members and, at the same time, maintain the basic articles of faith without which it will certainly cease to survive in its present form? . . . It will be recalled that the government of the church, though marked by strong authoritative characteristics, is a government by laymen. There is no clergy in the professional sense of that term. . . . this preponderance of non-professionals affects the church’s formation of its basic outlook and creates added difficulties in connection with the present problem. Despite the fact that the small group of the General Authorities do receive a stipend, the church leaders are not professionals in the sense of having received the special educational formation and training in philosophy and theology that the education of a clergy would involve. . . . Members of the higher councils may be educated men, but they are usually not educated in those subjects that would be helpful to religious leaders facing these problems. . . .

If we add to this the general policy of promoting in the higher reaches of the hierarchy on the principle of seniority, we see that older and therefore usually more conservative men tend to get into these influential positions. . . . The one group of men who could come near to meeting the challenge of secular learning are those involved in the Institute and Seminary system and others like them in education and related professions. But the present basis of selection and promotion make the possibility of many of these men advancing to membership in leading bodies and especially in the General Authorities a very slim one indeed.

The conservative, literalist, fundamentalist group seems now to control the church, and these principles of church organization . . . make the advancement of liberals into church leadership very unlikely in the next several years. Yet it is these very liberals, shut out from leadership, who in the church’s educational system are saving many of the youth from apostasy. *Can the church remain in this kind of halfway house*, and, if so, how long? . . .

Moreover, it must not be overlooked that the church leadership needs the intellectuals. It needs them not only to man the church's educational institutions but, perhaps more importantly, to prevent the kind of open rift between the Mormon church and modern learning and higher education that would involve intellectual embarrassment and loss of respectability. Thus it must seem wiser to many among the church leaders to seek unvoiced compromises and to avoid embarrassing confrontations. . . . When these developments are considered against the background of the intellectual atmosphere in the country today . . . we are impressed by the possibility of a *slow drift toward a dilution of belief*. Such a drift, which may be well started, is certainly far from the flood. It could issue in a victory for religious and theological liberalism without any crisis or showdown. Although age and conservatism control the top bodies, youth, as is often tritely remarked, possesses the future, and the youth incline away from the older literalism to the extent that they become intellectuals or are influenced by the intellectuals in the church's educational system. There is no reason to suppose such a drift will not continue.

Such a slow infiltration of liberal notions may, in its own undramatic way, prove as fatal to Mormonism as a religious system as would a severe crisis. Mormon beliefs and their ability to answer the needs of men today may be put to the test and found wanting without any outer signs of controversy, although the inner crises and conflicts . . . remain an important aspect of private lives. Moreover, a new generation may be able to discover new compromises and find that it can make compromises more easily than did an older group. . . .

The possibility of a crisis must not be completely written off, however. Certainly a reversal of the present trend that mildly favors the liberals, or at least a serious challenge to it, is quite possible. The order of succession to the presidency makes it likely that the next man to hold the First Presidency of the church will be a conservative. Should that happen, a crisis may well develop. Yet the fact that the Mormon intellectual has accustomed himself to living in a prolonged and normalized state of crisis in relation to literal Mormon beliefs and to church authority as their embodiment seriously qualifies any dramatic prognosis.

Unquestionably, there is a tendency privately to accept more liberal views—or something several degrees more liberal than the old conservative and literalist Mormonism—on the part of many who support and sustain the General Authorities and defend the Mormon tradition. . . . The structure of the church is such that it is difficult to meet the problems posed by apostasy in any way except in terms of suffering slowly festering discontent, or a slow drift to liberalism under the cover of orthodox phrases and genuine loyalty to the organization, or some combination of the two. . . .

Mormonism . . . was the child—the stepchild may be more accurate—of nineteenth-century American

Protestantism. Its early appeal lay in the fact that its restoration of divine revelation in the latter days answered the problems about which the older denominations could only quarrel. Thus the church must hold to its latter-day revelations literally or lose the theological and charismatic basis of its legitimacy. . . .

As this theology is literal and fundamentalist, the liberal can choose only between submission and personal disquietude or apostasy and suffering the guilt of deserting the tradition in which he has been reared and to which he feels great attachment. The church was founded upon a new opening of the heavens in our day, and it cannot easily, a mere century later, refuse to accept literally the words spoken by God himself to its founders. . . .

The position of the church, to recapitulate, is briefly this: With its fundamentalist theology, it faces the threat of apostasy on the part of its intellectuals, who cannot accept such a position. . . .

Clearly, the dilemma of education versus apostasy is one to which Mormonism has as yet found no genuine solution. . . . Mormonism as a way of life has to its credit that it has created a genuine intellectual group of considerable proportions in relation to the general size and rural composition of the community as a whole. But these intellectuals find themselves very often in a condition of inner conflict. Torn between a loyalty to the Mormon tradition and a commitment to modern thought. . . .

In frank discussion, their profound difficulties come to the fore. I was told by one that "a day of reckoning is coming, because of the church's insistence on fundamentalism." He compared the church to a train rushing down the track without an engineer. Another declared that the liberals in the church were "doomed to defeat," that the liberal idea of a Mormon church that gave up certain theological tenants, such as uniqueness of the Mormon people, modern revelation, and the like, and embraced instead social idealism was unworkable, as it would destroy the motivation of the rank and file. This man stated that the destruction of orthodox theology would mean the destruction of the church. He added that the leadership knew this and hence fought liberalism. . . . one man . . . spoke very seriously of the danger of being cut off from the church if he published a book to which the church objected. Another man who spoke favorably of the church to me and urged me to get close to the Mormon people and see the Mormon point of view from the inside said to me later, "We are priest-ridden and we are politics-ridden."

In these remarks we begin to get the feel of the intellectual's predicament and of his attitude toward authority and theological orthodoxy. His objections are usually held within the context of strong loyalty to Mormon institutions and values. There is much pride in the accomplishments of Mormon settlement, and, despite the fact that its theological foundations have vanished for

End of sample pages.
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