

Mormon Women's Forum

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1

* AN LDS FEMINIST QUARTERLY *

SPRING 1995

MY CONTROVERSY WITH THE CHURCH

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Editor's Note: *Janice Allred gave the following presentation at the Counterpoint Conference on November 4, 1994. It details the actions and communications with Church leaders that led to her bishop's decision to call a Church disciplinary council and place her on probation. Since that time, her bishop, claiming she had not complied with the "mutually-understood" conditions of her probation, excommunicated her on May 9, 1995. Her summary of the events that occurred between her Counterpoint presentation and her excommunication will appear in the MWF Quarterly, Volume 6, Number 3. Allred's bishop and stake president were invited to comment but declined.*

IN SEPTEMBER 1993 when the disfellowshippment and excommunications of six Mormon scholars, feminists and intellectuals took place, my family and I were in Mexico while my husband, David, was on a semester sabbatical to do research. I had known that my friend, Lavina Fielding Anderson, was in trouble for several months before I left, and my sister, Margaret Toscano, and her husband, Paul, had also been undergoing interviews with their bishop and stake president about their writing and speaking. Not until we were leaving did I learn that another friend, Lynne Whitesides, had just been summoned to a Church court. It was several weeks before we were able to make contact with our family and friends again, and I learned that Lynne had been disfellowshipped and Paul and Lavina had been excommunicated. I felt heartbroken.

What did it mean that these people whom I loved and knew to be good people, who were deeply committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and faithful members of his Church, had been cast out of it? I had some sense of what it meant for them, but what did it mean for the Church and for me? Lynne had been disfellowshipped for the forthright feminist statements she had made as president of The Mormon Women's Forum. I was her vice president. Paul had been excommunicated for his speech, "All Is Not Well in Zion" (published in *The Sanctity of Dissent*, Signature Books, 1994). I loved that speech and agreed with everything in it.

Lavina had been excommunicated not only for publishing an article in *Dialogue* which documented cases of ecclesiastical abuse of intellectuals in the Church ("The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology," Spring 1993), but for refusing to repudiate it and promise to stop collecting more stories of spiritual abuse. I was working with her in collecting these stories, and I was not planning on stopping either.

I later learned of the excommunications of Maxine Hanks, Michael Quinn and Avraham Gileadi. Again I was stunned. Maxine Hanks was also a friend, and I knew her to be a good person and ardent feminist. I loved her book *Women and Authority* (Signature Books, 1992) and felt that the Church would benefit if every member would read it. I also had a short piece published in it. I knew and had read much of the work of Michael Quinn and Avraham Gileadi. I felt they were both scholars of integrity and intelligence with a strong commitment to the Church. I had learned a lot from them and appreciated their contributions to Church history and scriptural studies. What did it mean that the Church was calling such people apostates, saying that they were dangerous and expendable?

One night in Mexico City in late September, I dreamed that I received my own invitation to a Church court. It was a beautiful invitation on exquisite white paper, embossed with white roses. The handwriting was elegant, the language formal and polite. But on the inside was a crudely drawn mimeographed map showing the homes where all those who would attend my court lived: the stake president, his counselors, and the twelve men who were members of the high council. One of them was a Brother Cannon, then on the high council in our stake, and his home was represented by a cannon. Over the next year I came to understand the symbolism this invitation had for me. Those who asked me to come and be judged by them were polite and correct on the surface, but underneath, where they lived, they were as crude and violent as a military weapon.

Just over one year later my bishop, Robert Hammond, handed me a long, white envelope with the anticipated summons in it. It was polite, but I felt that I had been kicked in the stomach when I read it:

The stake presidency is considering formal disciplinary action against you, including the possibility of disfellowshipment or excommunication, because you are reported to have been guilty of apostasy. You are invited to attend a disciplinary council to give your response . . . The disciplinary council will be held at 7:00 p.m. on October 12, 1994 at the Provo Edgemont Stake Center.

Since the fall of 1993 I had had lengthy, repeated conversations with my stake president and bishops about my beliefs, and I had known for some time that this moment was inevitable, yet this knowledge had often seemed strange, bizarre and unthinkable. I had known this moment was inevitable when I recognized that my Church leaders would act in authoritarian, abusive ways because their understanding of Church government was authoritarian; I had hoped it might be avoided when I saw them as caring human beings trying their best to listen to the voice of the spirit. A good friend said to me, "It has always been your choice, no matter what a bishop or stake president does." She meant I could have avoided it, and I could have if I had valued my Church membership above everything else and acted pragmatically to protect it. But I put my relationship to Jesus Christ first; I have a vision of his Church as built on his gospel, characterized by freedom and grace. I had acted according to that vision and defended myself according to that vision, and now I was facing a Church court and wondering if I could keep my membership without violating my integrity.

A few weeks before the summons my bishop had said to me that he wished we could settle this without everyone else looking on. He felt that if it were only him and I we could work something out. Who were all the people looking on? The general authorities? The stake president and his counselors? My friends the dissidents? Ward members? All the people who had read about it in the newspaper or seen me on TV or heard me on the radio? Not only did each of us have to struggle to define our own meaning in this situation, but we also had to deal with the meanings that all these other people found in it.

Bishop Hammond was very distressed because I had chosen to make my controversy with the Church public. Like me, he is a rather shy, introverted person, but my decision to talk publicly about my troubles had not been made lightly. One of the problems I see in the Church is its discouragement of open, honest discussion. There is no forum where disagreements, dissent, negative responses, doubts, questions and criticism are welcomed or encouraged; but without them, agreement, consent, positive responses, beliefs, an-

swers and creative insight become meaningless. I believe that engaging in open discussion is a vital part of our truth seeking and that telling the truth about our feelings and experiences is the foundation for building loving relationships. It seems to me that the Church should help us as we search for truth and learn to love others by encouraging open, honest discussion. Instead it increasingly equates disagreement and criticism with disloyalty and reduces all acceptable feeling to sentimentality. It was because of my belief in the importance of free speech that I chose to make my story public.

The other issue involved in my case which I felt needed to be made public was the abuse of ecclesiastical power. I believed that my leaders were abusing their power when they threatened to punish me if I didn't follow their counsel.

My decision to tell my story and talk about the issues involved in it required me to give a lot of time, energy and thought to talking to people. I tried to make myself available to whomever wanted to talk to me. Because I believe the process of dialogue calls us to open ourselves to change, this meant that I also had to listen to people who desperately wanted to change my mind. I had to question again and again my interpretations, assumptions, motives and actions. As I tried to understand the meaning my actions and situation had for other people and help them understand the way I saw them, I realized that each of us creates our own meanings—not from nothing, of course, but from our experiences, our ways of thinking, our emotional needs and other complex processes. Just as I told my leaders again and again that I would choose according to my own best judgment and what I believed the spirit of God inspired me to do, I told my friends that I had to act according to my own understanding. I tried to be open to exploring different ways of looking at the issues, but finally I had to rely on my own understanding. Similarly, I do not expect others to see the issues the same way I do or make the same kinds of choices I did. We must each find our own way. During one interview one of the bishop's counselors said to me, "Do you want every one to think the way you do?" My answer is, "No, I want everyone to develop her own way of thinking and be willing to share it with me, as I am willing to share mine with her."

As I tell the story of my controversy with the Church it will be necessary for me to describe the words and actions of some of the people involved. Some of them I will name by name, others I will not. I am recounting these events from my memory, notes of conversations and letters, and with the help of the memories of others involved. I will not try to judge other's motives or reasons, although I may occasionally speculate about them. Please remember that I am recounting this according to my understanding and others involved have different viewpoints.

In May of 1992 I was trying to decide whether or not to

submit a proposal for a paper to the Sunstone Symposium that would be held that August in Salt Lake City. I had presented a paper at the symposium each summer since we had moved to Provo in 1987 except for the summer that my eighth child was born. I had an idea for a paper I wanted to work on, but I was pregnant with my ninth child, due late in July, and I was not feeling very well. I finally decided to submit a proposal because of the anti-symposium statement issued by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in 1991 after the August symposium in Salt Lake City that year. I wanted to make it clear that I supported the symposium. Participating in the symposium had always been a positive experience for me, and I felt that the vitality of Mormon thought depended upon such free and independent forums for the expression of varying viewpoints about Mormon theology and experience. My proposal was accepted, and I finished writing "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother" a few days before my baby was born. I presented it at the symposium two weeks later.

I knew that I was taking a risk by choosing to write about God the Mother. Gordon Hinckley, then First Counselor to Church President Ezra Taft Benson, had given his speech counseling members not to pray to the Heavenly Mother in September 1991 ("Daughters of God," *Ensign*, November 1991), and I knew of several women who had gotten in trouble for talking about her. However, this was a topic I very much wanted to write about. My most fundamental belief is that Jesus Christ is God. I believe that his gospel mandates equality. He makes no distinction between male and female when he asks us to have faith in him, repent of our sins, be baptized and receive the Holy Ghost. In the atonement he makes himself equal to every person. If female and male are equal, then God must also be female. I do not believe in a godhead that does not include God the Mother. I do not believe in a godhead where one of the gods is superior to the others and gives them commandments. To me the clearest and most important teaching of the Book of Mormon is that God himself will come down to earth, become a man and redeem his people, that Jesus Christ is both the Father and the Son. From these ideas and a thorough analysis of the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants on the names of God, I developed an interpretation of the Godhead which I presented in my paper, "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother." In this interpretation the Eternal God is both a man and a woman, the Eternal Father and the Eternal Mother. The Father becomes the Son, Jesus Christ, who redeems us from our sins, and the Mother becomes the Holy Ghost, who is with us to comfort us, teach us the truth and sanctify us. They both sacrifice to be with us, they both play a vital part in our salvation, and they are both equally God.

I presented my paper, and, after three months passed, I

decided that the newly revealed Strengthening the Members Committee had let it slip by. Then Sunday morning, November 8, my husband David and I got a call asking us to meet with our stake president, Carl Bacon. My first thought was that the committee had done its work, and President Bacon wanted to talk about my speech. Then I had another thought. There were rumors that our bishop would soon be released. Perhaps David would be called to the bishopric. That was the last time I have thought or will probably ever think that either of us would be called to a position of any prominence in the Church or even any position at all. President Bacon said that he had been asked by Malcolm Jeppsen, our area president, to investigate me because of a talk I had recently given on praying to the Heavenly Mother. I told him that I had given a paper on God the Mother, but I had not advocated praying to her. I did not, however, tell him that I had given ideas that could be used to justify praying to her. We talked about Sunstone. President Bacon had never heard of it, and I explained why I participated in it. In this meeting President Bacon was very concerned that we might be offended by his calling us in. He had delayed calling us in for over a week, but now he had to report back. He was not sure what Elder Jeppsen wanted him to do. Our bishop at the time, Robert Lowe, was present at this meeting, but he didn't say a word. We left with the problem unresolved. President Bacon told us he would get back to us after talking to Elder Jeppsen.

Our next meeting was on December 17, over five weeks later. At President Bacon's request, we brought along a copy of my paper. President Bacon had again been contacted by Elder Jeppsen to find out what he had done about me. We talked about President Hinckley's talk on not praying to the Mother in Heaven. In this meeting it became apparent to me that making distinctions and appreciating subtleties were not President Bacon's strong points. He believed that President Hinckley's talk was a commandment to the Church: not only should Mormons not pray to the Mother in Heaven, they should not even talk about her. I pointed out that President Hinckley was clearly giving his own opinion since he discussed his reasoning and research. Perhaps President Hinckley had been soft with the sisters, but he really wanted to stop this thing, President Bacon said, striking his palm with his fist. President Bacon wondered if I would be willing to make some kind of promise about not publishing or speaking if I were asked. I pressed him for details about where this directive came from and exactly what he wanted me to do. I told him I would have to think and pray about any promises I might make. He told us that two apostles were concerned about this matter. He said that he would talk to us again when he knew more.

Our next meeting was on January 27, 1993. President Bacon asked that I not speak publicly or publish anything

on God the Mother. I asked him, "Who is this from?" and he answered, "Me and the Lord." I then asked him if this was a request "forever," and he said that it wasn't. I told him that I didn't have any plans at that time to speak or write about the Heavenly Mother, but that if I decided to do so in the future I would tell him. President Bacon said that this was acceptable to him.

David came to all of these interviews at President Bacon's request, and he and President Bacon did most of the talking.

In the summer of 1993 I learned that *Dialogue* was planning a women's issue. One of the editors, a friend of mine, asked me if I had anything they could use in it. I told her about my article on God the Mother, and she asked me if I would submit it. We were getting ready to go to Mexico for the fall, and I was very busy, so I decided to submit it and postpone the difficult decision of whether to publish it until after I knew whether the editors were interested.

When we returned from Mexico in the middle of December, I found a letter from *Dialogue* accepting my article for the summer 1994 issue. Given the aftermath of the excommunications, I deliberated for some time about whether to let them publish it. I also prayed about it. Although there were pragmatic reasons for not publishing it, I really wanted to. It contains my deepest beliefs about God and an interpretation of the Godhead which could lay a foundation for equality in the Church. I believe such a foundation is desperately needed. I know that many Mormon women and some men are deeply concerned about the topic. My paper is an attempt to put the concept of the Mother God in a Christian context and give it a scriptural foundation. I felt that *Dialogue's* audience as a rule understands the premises of scholarship and speculative theology and that readers would either find it unpersuasive or helpful. Since the article is based on the revelations in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and assumes that they are from God, I did not think it would challenge anyone's faith. Indeed, I hoped it would strengthen faith in the richness, complexity and harmony of these scriptures. I felt good about my decision and was assured by the Spirit that God was pleased with my efforts to serve him.

Although I realized that President Bacon would probably expect me to confer with him before making such a decision, I did not consider myself under any obligation to do so. I thought I had made it clear to him that I intended to act on my own responsibility. I knew that he would tell me not to publish my article and that he would have no reasons to offer except that the general authorities didn't want me to. I intended to inform him that the article was being published before it came out, and I felt doing so would fulfill my promise. Perhaps I acted in a cowardly way by not informing him when I made the decision, but I was trying to postpone the unpleasantness as long as possible.

In January of 1994 David and I needed to renew our temple recommends. We were told that Scott Runia, our new bishop, wanted to talk to both of us together first. While we were in Mexico we had been invited to sign the Olive Branch, an advertisement that appeared in *The Salt Lake Tribune* (November 28, 1993) on behalf of Church members who were being disciplined and suffering spiritual abuse. The ad called for "greater love, respect, harmony, and understanding between Church members and leaders."

We had gladly signed it as we agreed with what it said and strongly desired love and reconciliation in the Church. Bishop Runia told us that some ward members had seen the ad and been quite disturbed by seeing our names on it. We asked him who they were so that we could talk to them and help them understand our point of view, but the bishop said he didn't think that he could tell us. Although he agreed with me that people ought to talk to whomever offends them rather than complain to the bishop, he still refused to tell us their names. We tried to convince him that there is a place for scholarship and intellectuals in the Church, but he seemed to be uncomfortable with the term intellectual. Bishop Runia knew that we were committed, faithful members of the Church who would serve in any way we were asked, so he couldn't understand why we would sign an ad with a lot of dissenters protesting Church actions.

We tried to help him understand our point of view, and finally he said that he would sign our recommends, but before he could, we would all have to meet with President Bacon. He told us that when people had come to him with the ad he had gone to President Bacon to ask his advice, and President Bacon had said something like, "Oh, them. We've had trouble with them before." He told Bishop Runia that he would have to meet with us before Bishop Runia could sign our recommends.

A few days later we met with President Bacon and Bishop Runia. After a long discussion they finally signed our recommends, but it was clear that President Bacon now thought of us as dissenters who had connections with "those apostates" who were giving the Church so much trouble in the press.

In April 1994 our ward, the Edgemont 20th Ward, and another ward were divided so that a new ward was created. My family was placed in the newly created Edgewood Ward. As I realized that most of the people that I knew and loved would remain in the 20th Ward, I felt very sad, wondering if I would have an opportunity to get to know the people in my new ward after my article came out. Would they even want to know me if I were disciplined? I had been serving in the nursery of the 20th Ward, and a few weeks later I was called to serve in Edgewood's nursery.

During the evening of Sunday, May 15, I received a telephone call from Scott Runia, my former bishop. He told

me that before the ward division President Bacon had asked him to talk to me about an article that I was planning on publishing. President Bacon had just contacted him for a report, and he'd had to admit to him that he hadn't held the meeting with me. Bishop Runia was obviously embarrassed and told me several times he was sorry that he'd "dropped the ball." I told Bishop Runia that I owed President Bacon an explanation of what I'd done and that I would call him. Bishop Runia said "No, let me report back to President Bacon, and then I'll call you again." He called back a few minutes later to say that President Bacon wanted him to handle it, and he then set up an appointment for me to meet with him and my new bishop, Robert Hammond, in two days. I realized, of course, that someone must have shown President Bacon the page in the spring issue of *Dialogue* which listed titles from the upcoming issue. I immediately sent him a letter informing him of my decision to publish my paper on God the Mother and apologizing for not telling him sooner.

At the appointed time I walked over to the meetinghouse and knocked on Bishop Runia's office. No one answered so I walked over to Bishop Hammond's office and knocked on his door. Again there was no answer. For fifteen minutes I walked between the two offices waiting for someone to show up. Finally, I called David from the hall telephone and asked him to see if he could find one of the bishops. He called back a few minutes later and said he'd located Bishop Runia at a neighbor's house. He'd told David that Bishop Hammond was unable to meet that night. Apparently both bishops thought the other one was going to call me. He apologized profusely for the misunderstanding and said that he'd call me when he got home.

I went home and waited for an hour for him to call. Finally I called him. He apologized again and wanted to set up another appointment. I told him that this entire procedure was quite upsetting to me and asked him if we couldn't just talk right then on the phone. I questioned him about what President Bacon had asked him to do. He said that President Bacon was very upset because someone had told him I was going to publish a paper I had promised not to publish. I told Bishop Runia that there must have been a misunderstanding. I had never made such a promise. I told him what *had* happened. President Bacon had asked me not to speak or write on the topic of the article. I'd told him that I didn't have any plans to do so at the time and that I would let him know if I did decide to do so. The *Dialogue* in which the article was to appear was scheduled for publication in June. I had written to President Bacon, and he should have received my letter by then telling him the article would be published.

"I feel that I have kept my promise," I told Bishop Runia. "Well," he said, "President Bacon told me that I had to stop

you from publishing this article."

"It's already at press," I told him. "I couldn't stop it even if I wanted to."

Bishop Runia then said that he would tell President Bacon that I couldn't stop publication of the article. "I'll tell him that he shouldn't get upset with you because it was my fault for not telling you sooner," he added. Bishop Runia called me back later and said that President Bacon wanted to talk to me and David on Sunday at 11:00 a.m.

That Sunday, May 22, we met with President Bacon and both bishops. The meeting lasted an hour and a half. Although President Bacon had another appointment at 11:30, he completely forgot about it. The first thing that President Bacon told us was that he couldn't remember who had told him that my article was going to be published. There was some disagreement about what had happened in our previous meetings and exactly what I had agreed to. President Bacon said that I had disobeyed him by publishing my article. David and I both remembered that I had told him that I didn't have any plans to speak or publish about the Heavenly Mother at that time, and that I had not promised to never publish my paper but had only agreed to inform him if I decided to speak or publish on that subject again. I told him that I felt I had kept my promise. He agreed that I had done what I said I would, but he still felt that I had disobeyed him. "You knew I didn't want you to publish that article," he said.

David tried to get President Bacon to tell us where the directive not to publish the article came from. Finally President Bacon admitted that he had been told "by Salt Lake" that my paper was never to be published. When David tried to press him for more details, he started to get angry. He said that it didn't matter whether it came from Salt Lake or him; he was my stake president, and I should obey him. He spent a long time talking about what it means to "sustain the brethren." For him it means doing whatever they ask and believing whatever they say. At one point I felt I had to interrupt him to tell him that my faith was in Jesus Christ, not the brethren, and that since my primary connection to Jesus Christ was through the Holy Spirit, I would always try to follow what I felt the Spirit inspired me to do, even if it contradicted what a leader said. President Bacon said he was very troubled by this attitude, that this was the sort of thing apostates say to justify going against the brethren. Bishop Runia wanted to know if I would withdraw my article if I could, now that I knew the directive was from Salt Lake. I said that I couldn't say for sure, but I probably wouldn't. I explained why I decided to publish the article and said that I honestly felt it might help some people and was unlikely to harm anyone.

Just before the meeting broke up President Bacon asked Bishop Runia and Bishop Hammond to share their feelings

about our discussion. Bishop Runia said that he felt I had been trying to do what I thought was right. It hadn't been clear that the directive was from Salt Lake, and there had been a misunderstanding about what I had promised to do. Since he was to blame because it was now too late for me to stop publication, he thought that they should drop the whole thing. Bishop Hammond expressed his respect for our family. He said that he'd taught several of our children in classes, and he knew that we'd taught them the scriptures in our home. He said that he was not very knowledgeable about the scriptures but that he had a simple faith. I was thinking, "That is good. Faith is good." But then I realized that he was not talking about faith in Jesus Christ. "I have to rely on what my leaders tell me," he said. President Bacon said that I had disobeyed him and would have to be punished. He and the two bishops would discuss what they would do.

After this meeting I realized the futility of agreeing to any limitations on my speaking and writing. I saw that when I did this I implicitly accepted a leader's right to control me. I decided that from then on I would not allow myself to be trapped by a promise that implied I recognized any kind of obligation to obey a leader's directives.

The *Dialogue* issue (Summer 1994) in which "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother" was published came out in late June. I was braced for another meeting, but we heard nothing for a month. Then Bishop Hammond asked David if we could meet with him on July 24. David was late in returning from his home teaching, so I went to the interview by myself. Bishop Hammond told me he had received a copy of my article from President Bacon and read it. He said that he must hold a disciplinary council on me. I asked him why he had waited so long to tell me this. It had been two months since President Bacon had told me I must be punished. This had put me under a lot of stress. He apologized and said that they had to wait until the article was published. President Bacon had thought that maybe I wouldn't publish it. I remember feeling faintly disoriented. Hadn't I made it clear that I couldn't recall the article? And how could President Bacon have interpreted anything I said to mean that I might change my mind?

I asked Bishop Hammond if he saw the content of the article as the problem or did he believe a court was necessary because I had gone against President Bacon's counsel in publishing it. He said, "Both." I told him that this was a bad time for me to have a court. He said, "I know. I'll try to put it off as long as possible." One of my sons was leaving on a mission on August 31 and another was returning on August 18. We had planned to hold a combined farewell/homecoming meeting for them on August 28. I understood the bishop to mean that he would try to wait until after this event. I then asked Bishop Hammond what ideas in

the article bothered him. He said that there was a lot of false doctrine in it, but he couldn't discuss it until the disciplinary council. He told me that when he had been made a bishop he had taken an oath to defend the Church and keep its doctrines pure, so it was necessary for him to hold a court.

David arrived and Bishop Hammond again said that after talking to President Bacon he had no choice but to hold a court on me. David then pled passionately with him not to do it. He told him that he should consider resigning rather than do it. Bishop Hammond said that he had a responsibility to defend the Church. "Against a mother of nine!" David exclaimed. He told Bishop Hammond that it would be in the press, and he would receive a lot of pressure. "That is your choice," Bishop Hammond replied. "No, it isn't," David told him. "You don't understand. Janice is well known in the Mormon intellectual community, and there are already many people who know about the pressure that she is under. We don't have to tell anybody about it. They'll ask us, and we can't lie." David also told Bishop Hammond that holding a court might cause polarization in the ward. "Janice is known and respected by many people. They won't understand why you are doing this." He then suggested that Bishop Hammond get President Bacon to hold the court since he had been so involved in the case. "You are a new bishop. It isn't fair that you have to deal with this." Bishop Hammond replied that he felt it would be better for me if he did it himself. Finally David got Bishop Hammond to agree to set up one more meeting with President Bacon before he scheduled a disciplinary council to see if it could possibly be avoided.

I didn't tell Bishop Hammond, but one reason it was a bad time for me to have a court was because I was working hard on a paper for the Sunstone Symposium that was to be held from August 17-20. The paper I was writing, titled "Him Shall Ye Hear: Prophets and People in the Church of Jesus Christ," challenged the popular Mormon belief that the Lord will not permit the prophet to lead the Church astray. I argued that this belief is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ and has no scriptural foundation. In doing so I explored the following questions: What is prophecy? Who is a prophet? Which prophet are we commanded to hear? What is the relationship between the individual, Christ and his Church? How is a true church of Christ constituted and in what ways can it go astray? And what do the scriptures prophesy about the Church in the latter days?

On Wednesday, August 17, I received a call from Vern Anderson of the Associated Press. He had read my paper, "Him Shall Ye Hear," and wanted to do a story on it. He had learned that I was facing a disciplinary council for my *Dialogue* article and wanted to include this information as part of his story. He told me that he did not want to make my situation in the Church more difficult, and he would not

do the article without my permission. I had wanted to wait until I received the summons to the court (it was hard for me to think of the new language—"invitation to the disciplinary council") before I talked to the press, thinking that until it was actually scheduled there was hope that I might avoid it. But Bishop Hammond had said that he would definitely hold a court. I had written "Him Shall Ye Hear" because I believe that the idea that the Lord will not permit the prophet to lead the Church astray is causing the Church to become increasingly authoritarian, preventing us from thinking critically about many important issues and damaging people's spiritual growth. I had written the article to get people to examine this idea critically. So I told Vern to go ahead with his story and that I would give him an interview.

That same afternoon I received a call from Bishop Hammond telling me that he'd finally arranged a meeting for us with President Bacon for the following Sunday morning. He apologized for the delay, but President Bacon had undergone surgery and was only now well enough to meet with us. Bishop Hammond added, "President Bacon said he'd meet with you, but he said to tell you that it wouldn't make any difference." Bishop Hammond also wanted to confirm that we would be holding our missionary farewell/homecoming on August 28 for our two sons, Joel and Nephi. Our daughter, Miriam, who is 13, had been asked to be the youth speaker. Bishop Hammond said that he thought it would be good just to have the three children speak. It would give the missionaries plenty of time. I told him that David and I were also planning to give short talks. He replied that he didn't think we should. "Why not?" I said. "David hasn't done anything, and I shouldn't be punished before I'm found guilty." "Let me talk to President Bacon about it," Bishop Hammond said.

The next morning, August 18, David called Bishop Hammond. Bishop Hammond told him that neither of us would be able to speak at our sons' farewell/homecoming. "I don't think it is appropriate for someone who is facing a disciplinary council to speak in sacrament meeting," he said. "What about me?" David asked. "I thought it would look strange if you spoke and Janice didn't," he replied. David said that he wanted to speak anyway, but Bishop Hammond said that he wouldn't be allowed to. David then asked him why he had not been given a job in the ward. I had wondered if the bishop had put him under some kind of ban. He admitted that after our May 22 meeting he had decided that David should not have a Church position. This same morning Nephi returned from his mission.

On August 19, *The Salt Lake Tribune* ran Vern Anderson's article about me on its front page. "LDS Mom Catches Hell for Writing About a Mother in Heaven" was the headline. I thought it was well written and accurate, and I appreciated Vern's sensitivity and thoroughness. That

morning I delivered my paper, "Him Shall Ye Hear," at the symposium. Channel 4 was there to tape it, having been informed that the speech would be important. I did a short interview with Paul Murphy of Channel 4 after the speech, and it ran on the evening news.

We didn't get home from the symposium until 1:30 Sunday morning. Then my baby John woke up, very upset with me since I'd been gone for three days, and it took us two hours to get him back to sleep. Nephi was scheduled to report to the high council on his mission at 7 a.m., so we dragged ourselves out of bed and went with him. Walking back home, we found our cat dead in the road, just run over by a car. We were scheduled to meet with President Bacon at 9 o'clock.

David and I had been increasingly worried that President Bacon and Bishop Hammond were thinking of us as a unit and were regarding David as part of the problem. He is a very open, honest and warm person, much more talkative than I am, especially with people he doesn't know well. He had taken a very active part in all our interviews, and we are in substantive agreement on the issues we discussed. So it was natural that our leaders should view us in that way, but it was unfair of them to punish him for his opinions and attitudes. President Bacon had always told me that I could believe whatever I wanted to—that publishing and disobedience were my problems. Now David had been forbidden to speak in a sacrament meeting, and he was banned from holding a Church position. Since he teaches at BYU, any kind of action taken against him could jeopardize his job. We were quite concerned about this and decided that he should drop out of the interviews. However, he accompanied me to this meeting since he had been asked to come.

When we arrived, President Bacon, his two counselors, James McDonald and Craig Hickman, and Bishop Hammond were waiting for us. They asked if they could meet with us separately, and we thought this was a good idea since we both felt they needed to start separating us in their minds. I went first, and we talked a little over two hours. President Bacon began by filling his counselors in on the background. He got a lot of the details wrong, and when I corrected him, he became impatient and said the differences were negligible. The important thing was that I had disobeyed him. I pointed out that my version of the details in dispute showed that I had *not* disobeyed him. "In any case," I argued, "I am not under any obligation to follow your counsel. Since there is no Church law against speaking publicly or publishing articles about God the Mother, it is unfair to punish me for disobeying something which is neither a law of the Church nor a commandment of God." President Bacon told me that the brethren are very clear about this. I tried to find out if he had received any new instructions from the Church hierarchy. He asked me, "What

difference does that make? I'm your leader and you should do what I say. I represent Jesus Christ to you," he told me. I replied, "I am also a servant of Jesus Christ." He then asked me if it would make any difference to me if he told me which two apostles it came from. I said it wouldn't because I had made my decision on the basis of my own judgment and spiritual feelings. I told him that I would always try to listen to the counsel of leaders and others with an open mind and heart, but that finally I would do what I believed God wanted me to do. President Hickman said that, since we can be deceived about spiritual feelings, it is safer to follow our leaders. I told him that I realized I could be wrong in what I believed, but that I couldn't go against my conscience simply because I might be wrong. I had to trust in Jesus, that he would show me my sins if I was willing to repent, that all was not lost if I made a mistake because his grace is sufficient to save me. To have faith in Jesus Christ means to be willing to trust in our own spiritual feelings. President Bacon told me I was rationalizing.

President Bacon wanted to know what my motives were in publishing and speaking. I told him that I don't believe we can really know what our motives are. We should examine our motives and try to understand them, but we should also realize that some of them are beyond our conscious ability to grasp. Since it is very easy for us to think up good motives for what we want to do, we need to think about the act itself. Will it have good results? Will it help someone? I suppose that my reasons for writing and speaking are complex; I do want to do it, and I do receive personal benefits from it, but not without a cost to me and my family. However, the reason I feel an obligation to write and speak is because I have benefitted greatly from the writing and speaking of others, and I feel that I should try to return some of what I have received.

They were all very upset by the AP article that had appeared in the *Tribune*. "This is bad news for the Church," President Bacon said, pointing to the headline. "This makes the Church look bad."

"What makes the Church look bad," I told them, "is not that I published an article but that you are going to punish me for it. My paper was given to a small audience on a difficult topic, and it was published in a journal with a limited circulation. If you had not decided to punish me, this newspaper article would never have been written."

President Bacon said that it would never have been written if I'd obeyed him in the first place.

We also discussed the issue of confidentiality. They said that they regarded these meetings as sacred and felt it was a violation of confidentiality for me to discuss them with anyone else. I pointed out that the rule of confidentiality in the priest-penitent relationship was to protect the penitent, not the priest. I considered myself free to discuss these meet-

ings, and I intended to do so. I gave them permission to discuss them too, but they said they couldn't because they considered them sacred. They said that they could not be as open and honest in these meetings if they thought that what they were saying would appear in the press. I told them that I would try to be truthful and fair in what I said about them, but that they should understand that I would speak and write about it.

Finally, they asked me to reconsider my decision, to pray about it and repent. "If you say you're sorry and are willing to be counseled by us, it will go better with you," they told me. I told them that I would be willing to pray about it, but I had already done this many times, and I doubted if it would change the way I felt.

As I left the building, David came over to kiss me. I whispered, "Be careful. You can't help me, but you can hurt yourself." When David came home an hour and a half later he said to me, "Well, they want me to get you to repent and stop writing. I'm supposed to give you a blessing telling you to do what your priesthood leaders tell you."

I had been washing the breakfast dishes. I stopped, looked at him and said, "If you ever do that, we're through!" In saying this I did not mean that our marriage would be through, but that the trust, respect and equality which we had always had in our relationship would be violated. I then went into the other room, sat down on the couch and cried. That was the first time I'd cried in the whole, long ordeal. "They're trying to destroy our marriage," I sobbed. "They're trying to make you into a bad patriarch like themselves. They would destroy our marriage to get me to submit to them." I did not believe that David would do what they asked, and he knew I didn't. He understood me to be saying, "I love you, and I need you, and I'm so glad you're not the kind of man who thinks priesthood gives him the right to control others." David said that he had told them that he didn't give blessings like that, that he tried to listen to what the Spirit said to him. He had also told them that he couldn't control me and wouldn't try. "She's an adult; she makes her own decisions," he had said. "We don't have that kind of a marriage." But they didn't want to accept his answers.

Implicit in the whole interview was the assumption that David either agreed with me and was encouraging me or he was not using his priesthood properly to control me. There was also the implied threat to him and his employment. "We need to know what your feelings are. Do we need to take action against you?" was what David was told at the beginning of his interview, the implication being that if he was on my side they would also need to take action against him.

At one point they asked him to take what I have come to regard as their loyalty oath: "If two apostles asked you not to publish something, would you do what they asked?" He

said that he wouldn't publish if he were asked not to. He was glad that they did not ask him the general form of the question.

August 28 was the day of Joel's missionary farewell and Nephi's homecoming. We planned to hold a small open house afterward for some of our friends and family. Two hours before the sacrament meeting, as we were working frantically to get everything ready, I got a call from Bishop Hammond. He wanted me and David to meet him in his office right then.

"Can't we wait until this evening?" I asked. "I'm really busy now."

"I need to talk to you right now," he said.

So David and I went over to his office. He said that he had been thinking about it, and he realized that this was a special day for our family, so he had decided to let us bear our testimonies about how we felt about our sons' missions. This made me really angry. I told him that a testimony to me was about Jesus Christ. I had planned a talk in my mind about what Jesus has done for me, but since he had told me I wouldn't be allowed to give it, I hadn't prepared it. David said he would be willing to bear his testimony. I said that I would, too, but I would not sit on the stand, and I would not have my name in the program as if I were a scheduled speaker. The reason I said this was because I did not feel capable of speaking spontaneously, from my heart, without losing my composure. There were so many things that I could not say, and the pain of being rejected and not trusted was so great that I did not feel I could speak honestly and coherently about my feelings within the bounds of what would be considered appropriate. If I had been given even one day to prepare, I could have given a talk. Having my name on the program and sitting on the stand would imply that I was prepared to speak, and I wasn't, so I refused.

David said that it was probably too late for us to have our names in the program anyway. The bishop said it wasn't and that he wanted us to sit on the stand and have our names in the program. We refused, but said we would each give a short testimony if there was time and he called us out of the audience. The children finished their talks right on time, and the bishop didn't call us up to speak.

On the morning of August 31 while Joel and I were finishing his packing so he could enter the Mission Training Center that afternoon, a friend called to tell me that I was in the news again. He had just heard about an AP article which reported that President Hinckley had given a talk in a regional conference in which he had responded to the paper I had just given at the Sunstone Symposium. In this talk President Hinckley reaffirmed his statement that the Lord would not allow the prophet to lead the Church astray, but he did not respond specifically to any of the arguments I had presented in my paper. About me he said, "She can deliver

her paper until doomsday, but God will see to it that the Church will not be led astray" ("Hinckley: LDS Church Will Never Go Astray," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, September 3, 1994). The theme of prophetic infallibility was also stressed in General Conference a few weeks later. Many of the speakers addressed the theme, but none of them offered any scriptural evidence or theological reasoning to support it; they simply reaffirmed it and quoted other general authorities. (See David B. Haight, "Solemn Assemblies," L. Tom Perry, "Heed the Prophet's Voice," James E. Faust, "The Keys That Never Rust," L. Aldin Porter, "The Revelations of Heaven," *Ensign*, November 1994.) An article in *The Salt Lake Tribune* said that a talk by Aldin Porter of the Presidency of the Seventy, which gave the strongest statement of leader infallibility, seemed to be responding to my paper ("Be Faithful-Be Followers" October 3, 1994). These articles made a strong impression on President Bacon and Bishop Hammond and helped to convince them that I was clearly an apostate in open and public opposition to the Church and its leaders.

On September 15 I again met with Bishop Hammond at his request. He wanted to know if I'd prayed and reconsidered my views as he and President Bacon had asked me to do. I said that I had, but that my views had not changed. I said that I didn't think I had done anything that warranted Church discipline. He responded that my papers were damaging to people's testimonies because I teach something different than the Church. He saw himself as the defender of the faith. "There's a line and I think you've crossed it," he said. I asked him if he'd definitely decided to hold a court. He said that he had. "Then please do it as quickly as possible, because this waiting and uncertainty is very stressful for me," I told him. He said that he had to check with President Bacon first but that he would try to hurry things along.

September 18 was our stake conference. President Bacon gave a speech stressing the importance of following the brethren and denouncing apostasy and intellectual pride. To anyone who knew of my situation it was obvious that much of what he said was directed at me. He said that the latter-day prophets would never lead the people of the Church astray. "There are those who do not believe this," he continued, "those who drift away from the truth. Sorrow will come to them sooner or later. They will know afflictions, and it will hurt their little children. Their sin is the sin of intellectual pride."

He later told me that several people had thanked him for his talk because they had been confused about the Allred affair, and now they knew what to think about it. I told him that his remarks had hurt me. I said that I had no problem with him talking about the issue, but I felt it was unkind of him to attack my character and motives and say I was hurting my children. He said that he wasn't just talking about

me, but all apostates. Still, he never apologized.

On September 25 Bishop Hammond called me to tell me nothing would be done until after general conference. Again there would be a delay without an explanation. Although I was certainly not eager to go through the ordeal of the disciplinary council, I was prepared, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to deal with the uncertainty that had characterized my interactions with my Church leaders from the beginning. I had been under a lot of stress for the past four months, and I was hoping to end the ordeal as soon as possible. I felt that I was reaching the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. I was not sleeping well, partly because our baby was still waking up at night and partly because of worry and stress. I also had problems with my digestion whenever something particularly stressful occurred. With seven children in the house (our oldest daughter is married and our son Joel had left on his mission), the demands on me never stopped. I was spending a lot of time talking to people about my situation, and although I wanted to do this, it did take a lot of time and emotional energy. Many people offered me support and encouragement, but there were also some who wanted to persuade me that I was making the wrong choice. I was also working on a defense to present at my disciplinary council which required a lot of time and thought. As I talked, listened, wrote, thought and prayed, the issues became clearer to me, and I was able to feel peace about the decisions I had made. Many times I felt the Spirit of God comforting me, enlightening me and strengthening me.

This was also a difficult time for David and our children. David shared my problems as much as he could and gave me both emotional and physical support. Our children are accustomed to lively, open discussions on a wide variety of topics, and we have always shared our doubts, questions, criticisms and beliefs with them and encouraged them to share theirs with us. We discussed my situation openly, and the children listened and joined in the conversation as they wanted to. I made a special effort to talk to each of the children, to answer any questions and help them deal with any concerns they might have. My six-year-old son said he did not want to go to Church if I could not go, so I assured him that I would continue to go with him.

On Thursday, October 6, I met again with President Bacon and Bishop Hammond, and we talked for three hours. Before the meeting Bishop Hammond told me that President Bacon was still open about whether or not a court would be held. That really disheartened me. I knew that they did not intend to just drop the whole thing. They wanted to get me to make some kind of concession or promise. I had told them as clearly as I could, over and over, that I would follow my conscience and that I would not be controlled by them. Why wouldn't they believe me?

During this meeting President Bacon brought up the issue of teaching false doctrine for the first time. Bishop Hammond had always been concerned about this issue, but President Bacon had always seemed to believe that my sin was disobedience. Now he was saying that the problem with my paper was that it contained false doctrine. In all our discussions President Bacon had either stated or assumed that the problem with the paper was simply that it was on a forbidden topic. Like Bishop Hammond, President Bacon did not want to get involved in a discussion about the doctrine; he simply wanted to declare it false. When I asked him how he knew that it was false, he said that he had received a copy of the article from Salt Lake with certain parts underlined, and those parts were the false doctrine. I told him that he couldn't simply assume that. Perhaps those were the parts they particularly admired. He then stated in a very solemn manner that he knew what was false doctrine because of his position and priesthood. It was that simple for him. He did not have to think, study or ponder. His position made him infallible.

After about two hours of discussion in which I engaged them on every point, I finally grew discouraged, realizing the hopelessness of ever getting them to understand my viewpoint and accept it as one that could be held by a faithful Church member. For about twenty minutes I said nothing. They both spoke, giving me advice. Finally, President Bacon said, "At last I think we're getting somewhere. I'm finally starting to feel a humble attitude from you." It was clear. I was acceptable as long as I was silent.

"Where do we go from here?" I asked.

"You tell us," President Bacon said.

"Well," I said, "you should say, 'We have talked to Janice Allred. She believes in Jesus Christ, she accepts the scriptures as the word of God, she loves the Church and is committed to it, and she follows the commandments. We should just drop this whole procedure against her. She should be free to write and publish according to her own judgment.'"

They both stared at me, incredulity on their faces. President Bacon said, "I couldn't remain stake president one week if I didn't do something about this." He then said that he would decide whether to have a court or not. "I will have to judge you," he told me. "I will have two counselors and twelve men to advise me, but the final decision will be mine." I had realized for some time that President Bacon had not turned my case over to Bishop Hammond, that he was still involved in it, and that he wanted to do the court himself. So this announcement did not surprise me.

Just before he left President Bacon said to me, "Can I be very frank with you? I have this feeling in my heart, very strong, that I just want to defend you and protect you. I just want to defend Janice Allred to the Brethren." I acknow-

ledged his comment politely, but after he left I thought, "Poor President Bacon, can't you understand what the Spirit is telling you? You've been praying to know what to do about me, and the Spirit is trying to tell you, but you're unwilling to let the Spirit work on your mind as well as your heart. The only way you think you can protect me is by changing me."

Two days later on Saturday, October 8, Bishop Hammond told me that President Bacon had decided to hold a stake disciplinary council and would set the date the next day. He had asked Bishop Hammond to tell me not to partake of the sacrament the next day. He had also asked him to find out how many witnesses I planned to bring. I told him I had four, and I asked him if it would be all right if my sister was with me during the court to give me support and help me remember what took place. He said he'd ask President Bacon.

The next day I kept waiting for two priesthood holders to appear at my door with the summons, but they didn't come. Finally, about 5:00 in the afternoon, as I was finishing up in the ward nursery, I got a message to come to the bishop's office. Bishop Hammond gave me the letter there and told me that the court would be held on Wednesday night. He said that President Bacon had agreed to let my sister be present. Then he said, "I really don't understand you. I don't know why you're doing what you're doing, but I really respect your integrity. I appreciate it that you've always been very open and have always told me the truth." I told him that I knew the whole thing had been very difficult for him, but I felt he had done his best to do what he believed was right. I also told him that I was glad that President Bacon would be holding the council instead of him. I didn't tell him that I had prayed it would be so.

I called Margaret and Lavina to tell them I'd finally received the summons. (Lavina is the Relief Society president of the dissidents, the marginalized, the abused and the cast out.) The Mormon Alliance released a press statement (Margaret is one of the trustees), and Lavina started calling people to set things in motion for the vigil she had been organizing.

Monday night at 6:30 another letter from President Bacon was delivered to me. This one said that he had authorized Bishop Hammond to conduct the court and that he would "sustain him in his decision."

On Wednesday afternoon Bishop Hammond called me to say that the court would be held in Bishop Runia's office instead of his and that I couldn't have Margaret come in with me. "Since there will only be four men instead of fifteen, you won't need her as a support person," he said.

"But I also wanted her to be there to take notes or at least help me remember what happens," I said.

Bishop Hammond repeated that she could not come.

"Why don't you think about it and let me know when we get there," I said.

Bishop Hammond also told me that one of his counselors and his clerk were out of town and he had chosen two men to replace them.

Lavina and her son Christian arrived about 3:00 p.m. to help us tidy up the house and make dinner for us. Channel 13 came down to do an interview about 4:00, and then Channel 2 and Channel 4 showed up before they were finished. Lynne Whitesides came to help also. Somehow I finished all the interviews, and we ate dinner. The Toscanos and a lot of other people arrived for the vigil, and we walked over to the church. There were already quite a few people there. I hugged a few friends, and then Margaret and I started to go into the building, but a friend stopped me and asked to speak to me privately. He told me that he had been given a message from an anonymous source that claimed to speak for the Church. The message was that the result of my court was not predetermined and that if I cooperated I would be let off. He advised me not to let pride prevent me from cooperating. This agreed with what I already believed was the case. Bishop Hammond had told me on several occasions that he had not decided the outcome of my court, and I believed him, but what was the meaning of this message? Did it mean that Bishop Hammond had not been given any instructions from Church headquarters, or did it mean that he had been told to let me off if I cooperated? I decided it must mean the latter since the source would not know that Bishop Hammond intended to let me off if I cooperated unless he had been instructed to. My friend later told David that he had found out that President Hinckley was the source of this message and that it had passed through several people before it reached him. The message supported my suspicion that Bishop Hammond was receiving counsel or instructions from Church headquarters, perhaps through President Bacon. I later asked him if he had been contacted by any general authorities about me, and he denied it.

As Margaret and I entered the church, I felt frustrated again by my inability to confront my accusers. I wasn't sure how to use the message I had just received. I decided to defend myself as I had planned. I was willing to negotiate, but not to deny my beliefs or compromise my integrity. There was no one in Bishop Runia's office, but we met two men from the ward who said that the bishop had asked them to monitor the halls and make sure no one caused any trouble. They said that the court had been moved to the stake president's office. Margaret was told that she wouldn't be allowed to stay, and she went back outside.

Present in the court were Bishop Hammond, his counselor Gary Winterton, Keith Halls, a high councilor who was substituting for the other counselor, and Paul MacKay,

the elder's quorum president who was substituting for the clerk. Bishop Hammond first asked me, "Are you taping these proceedings?" Surprised at the question, I answered, "No." Then he asked me if I had ever taped any of our interviews. I answered that I hadn't.

Bishop Hammond said I was guilty of apostasy, and Keith Halls presented the case. He said that I had repeatedly acted in clear, open and deliberate public opposition to the Church and its leaders because I had disobeyed three bishops and one stake president. He then presented letters from Bishops Lowe and Runia and President Hickman to substantiate this claim. Bishop Lowe had been my bishop in 1992 when I first met with President Bacon about my speech on God the Mother. President Hickman, one of President Bacon's counselors, had been present at the meeting in January 1993 when President Bacon first asked me not to speak on the topic of God the Mother. Bishop Hammond was the third bishop who was supposed to have counseled me not to publish my speech. I told them that none of the bishops had ever told me not to publish my article, and I had interpreted President Bacon's request not to publish as counsel, not a commandment, because he had not said that I would be punished if I disobeyed and because he had no right to give me commandments which I must obey or be punished.

I had prepared a single-spaced, twelve-page defense. I read the first part which was an account of all that had happened. After that I called in my first two witnesses, a husband and wife, good friends from my former ward. They are well respected and have both served in leadership positions in the Church. His profession requires intelligence and reasoning skills so they were good witnesses for me. The woman gave a character witness for me. She said that I was a seeker of truth, that she believed I was a pure soul, and that she admired my honesty and integrity. She told about our relationship and testified that I had taught her many things which had helped her. The man then also made a strong statement about my integrity. He told them, "If you force Janice to go against her integrity, it will destroy her. Please don't do it." He told them of his relationship to Sunstone. He'd served on the board for awhile and had subscribed to the magazine for many years. He said that some of the articles were good, others were not, but that the audience for *Sunstone* is comprised of people who are already questioning and who have the critical skills to handle the kind of articles that appear in it. He said that my article was long and difficult, and few people were likely to read it. He then told the men that if they were charging me with damaging people's testimonies, they would have to have actual witnesses. He advised them to weigh the small potential damage that my article might cause against the certain damage that disciplining me would cause me and my family and the Church. "To

your neighbors and Church members it may seem that you are doing your duty," he told them, "but to the outside world this looks like oppression and tyranny."

My next witness was a friend I've known for many years. She talked about my family and said that I'd done a good job raising my children and teaching them the gospel. She talked about my Church service and testified that she'd read what I'd written and that it had built her testimony.

My last witness, a BYU professor, was unable to come but sent a letter. In it he said that although he disagreed with the ideas I expressed in my papers, he believed that I had every right to express them.

After the witnesses spoke, I read the rest of my defense. First, I defended myself against the charge of disobedience. I read:

It should be noted that disobedience to Church leaders is not listed as a reason for Church discipline in the bishop's handbook. The Church recognizes certain transgressions as serious and requires local leaders to discipline members who commit them; such transgressions include murder, rape, adultery, robbery and others. This law is known by, and binding upon, all Church members.

Bishops and stake presidents may counsel members concerning their private lives. Such counsel may be from their own wisdom or it may be inspired by God. Members are not obligated by Church law to follow the advice and counsel of their leaders. They may accept it or reject it, and leaders do not have the right to compel members to follow their counsel by imposing some kind of Church discipline upon them.

Section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants is very clear on this point:

"No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned;

By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile." (D&C 121:41-42).

It is an abuse of priesthood power to "exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men" (D&C 121:37).

Sometimes the Lord commands one of his servants to deliver a specific commandment to a person, but the prophet is never authorized to compel that person to obey the commandment. The Lord reserves judgment and punishment to himself.

The Church may certainly punish those who transgress certain commandments and do not repent, which it does, but these commandments must be made known to the members along with the consequences of disobeying them. The Church must accept these laws, and they must be administered with justice and equity. In other words, Church discipline must follow the rule

of law and not be imposed arbitrarily.

This is in accordance with the principle of free agency which allows every person to freely choose.

No priesthood leader, no matter how great his authority, has the right to compel submission to his own opinions and desires or even to the word of God. It does not matter that some great and good men have done this. It is still wrong; the Lord has declared it. If the general authorities have received a revelation from God forbidding his people to discuss, ask questions about or pray to God the Mother, then they should publish it and allow the people to exercise their God-given right to accept or reject it. If they have not, then they should stop the persecutions of those who are seeking more light and knowledge concerning her and those who wish to share the light and knowledge which they have received.

Therefore, I plead not guilty to the charge of disobedience, because there is no Church law which requires us to obey the counsel of our leaders or suffer Church discipline. Such a law would be contrary to the revelations of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Next I defended myself against the charge of apostasy. First I stated my religious beliefs and commitments, concluding with the statement, "I consider myself to be a follower and servant of Jesus Christ and a faithful member of his Church." I continued:

One definition of apostates given in the handbook is "members who . . . persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after being corrected by their bishops or higher authority." I assume that if I am being charged with apostasy because of the contents of my article "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother", this definition of apostasy is being used. However, I specifically state in my article that the interpretation of the Godhead which I offer is not Church doctrine. Therefore, I am not guilty of apostasy according to this definition of apostasy.

However, some may still believe that espousing any ideas which are not Church doctrine is apostasy so I will briefly address two important questions regarding this issue. The first is "What is Church doctrine?" and the second is "What liberties do Church members have in regard to their religious beliefs?" . . .

If we study the history of doctrine in Christianity we see a history of contention, with the church marred by schisms and oppression as the need of the individual to find her own truth clashes with the need of the institution to establish one doctrine.

Jesus addressed the problem of contention over doctrine in his Church when he spoke to the Nephites after his resurrection. He told them that there should be no contention among them because the spirit of contention is not from him but from the devil. What is the spirit of contention? In the Book of Mormon conten-

tion is always about winning. The spirit of contention is of competition, pride and enmity. Jesus is telling us that this spirit is never from him, and we should never have it even when we find ourselves in disagreements with others in our pursuit of truth. It is possible to disagree with love and without trying to impose our opinions upon others.

In speaking to the Nephites one of the first things Jesus did was to set forth his doctrine in a very simple way. Jesus said that his doctrine is the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

By having very few points of doctrine and giving space for a wide range of interpretations within these doctrines, Jesus establishes an inclusive church which allows many beliefs. There are obviously many religious questions which are not answered in the doctrine of Christ, and many revelations have been given which touch upon these questions. Church members can and should explore these questions and ponder these revelations, but the Lord tells us not to try to establish other truths as his doctrine because this will inevitably lead to contention. Because different people have different experiences, different intellectual frameworks and different gifts and are at different stages in their spiritual journeys, their understanding of the gospel and the scriptures, their interpretations of religious truth will certainly differ. These different viewpoints need not lead to contention if members understand what Jesus taught about the doctrine of his church.

My article "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother" gives an interpretation of the Godhead based on a detailed analysis of the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. While this interpretation differs from the official interpretation offered by the Church, it does not in any way contradict any of the points of doctrine which Jesus established in his church. The standard which I try to use for judging all religious ideas is the gospel of Jesus Christ. If I believe that any idea is not consistent with his gospel, then I reject it. Since my article is firmly based on the scriptures and offers a possible, well-supported interpretation of the nature of God which in no way contradicts the doctrine of Christ, it is unfair and incorrect to call it false doctrine. My ideas may be untrue, but they fall within the range of possible interpretations allowed by the scripture.

I then addressed the question, "What liberties do Church members have in regard to their beliefs?"

First, we should understand that freedom of belief cannot be separated from freedom of speech which includes the freedom to read, write, publish and meet with others to discuss and exchange ideas. We do not form our beliefs in isolation from others but in the dynamic experience of interacting with others through

reading, listening, talking and writing. We depend upon others to supply us with information and share their interpretations and insights with us. We also need to receive their responses to both our ideas and experiences. We need criticism from others in order to see the flaws in our reasoning, the gaps in our knowledge and different ways of looking at our experiences.

It is also necessary to understand that no one can believe anything simply by an act of will. We believe what we do because of a complicated and largely unknown process in which our experiences, our way of thinking, our knowledge, our feelings, our emotional needs, our language, our culture and other unknown influences all play a part.

Thus it is futile as well as wrong to try to coerce belief, which is part of the meaning of Doctrine and Covenants 121: "No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness and pure knowledge . . ."

These are the effective and righteous means to change or influence beliefs.

Using discipline or coercion to compel belief also encourages lying and discourages the free exercise of thought and speech required for the pursuit of truth and intellectual and spiritual development. If any form of coercion or punishment is used to control belief, some people will lie about their beliefs to avoid punishment for having the wrong beliefs and to reap the rewards of holding the correct beliefs.

Finally, as I have discussed, there is the problem of determining what is and what is not true doctrine. To assume, as the handbook does, that the bishop or stake president is always right when there is a doctrinal disagreement between a member and a leader is to show contempt for truth and the processes for understanding it. So how do we decide? Usually we do not need to or rather everyone should decide for himself. . . .

The way to deal with false doctrine is not to punish those who believe it but to teach true doctrine. . . .

I ended my defense by saying:

I am not an apostate. I believe in Jesus Christ and his doctrine. I have tried with all my heart to keep my covenants. I have not broken any law of the Church but have tried to do my duty and fulfill my callings.

If you use this council to punish me, you will punish an innocent person.

If you punish me, it will be because I refused to lie.

If you punish me, it will be because I refused to let you stand between me and God.

If you punish me, it will be because I refused to bow to your authority by giving you my unconditional obedience.

If you punish me, it will be because I refused to give

up my freedom to believe, speak and act according to my conscience.

If you punish me, it will be because I refused to deny my testimony of Jesus Christ.

I am not your judge, and I pray that God will be merciful to you. But if you punish me, you will have to answer to Him for using your priesthood authority unrighteously.

Although I invited them to question me about my defense, they did not ask any questions or comment on anything I said.

While I was reading my defense, a little after ten o'clock, one of the hall monitors interrupted, saying that there was an urgent phone call for Bishop Hammond. Bishop Hammond left and returned a few minutes later. Again he said to me, "I must ask you if you are taping these proceedings."

"No, I am not," I replied.

"Then I must tell you that we were informed before hand that you were planning on taping these proceedings, so I must ask you again. Are you taping these proceedings?"

"No, I am not," I replied.

"Then I must tell you that I have just received a message that Channel 13 has just announced on their news that you are taping these proceedings. So I'll ask you again. Are you taping these proceedings?"

"No, I am not," I said. "But I'll tell you what I know about taping." I had been surprised the first time Bishop Hammond had asked the question. I had wondered if it was a regular part of the proceedings. Now I was stunned and baffled by Bishop Hammond's revelation. Channel 13's reporter hadn't asked me anything about taping. I couldn't figure out what was happening. Then I thought that someone must know something about a conversation I'd recently had with a friend. I decided that the only way to get Bishop Hammond to believe that I was not taping was to tell him what had happened.

I said, "A friend of mine called me on Monday night and said that she'd been talking to someone on Channel 2 to see if they might be interested in secretly taping this meeting. They said they could do it. She wanted to know if I'd be interested. I told her I'd have to think about it and that she should call me back. She called back an hour later, and I told her that since I didn't think it was honest to tape someone without their knowledge, I didn't want to do it. She said that was fine and Channel 2 wouldn't do it anyway because of legal reasons. I am not taping," I repeated.

Bishop Hammond said, "Okay, I believe you."

After I finished reading my defense, the members of the disciplinary council spent the next two and a half hours interrogating me about my beliefs, trying to get me to repent and trying to get me to agree to some restrictions on my writ-

ing and speaking. One of the things that made the court abusive, in my opinion, was the assumption by the bishopric that they were right and I was wrong. I believe that this assumption is built into the structure of the disciplinary council, as its name implies. It is no longer a court where guilt or innocence is determined, but a council whose purpose is to "save the souls of transgressors by assisting members to repent" (*The General Handbook of Instruction*) and determine what punishment they deserve. I went into the court prepared to defend myself and my ideas against the charge of apostasy, but they had already decided I was guilty; their purpose was to change me, to get me to see things their way or at least not to speak of my way of seeing things. But instead of using love and persuasion to change me, they used the threat of punishment. Although they were courteous and tried to be considerate of my feelings, it was very painful for me to hear again and again that my beliefs were false doctrine and that my writings were damaging, harmful and dangerous to people's testimonies when these things had given me joy and caused my heart to burn within me many times; I had only wanted to share them with others.

We spent a long time trying to work out some kind of limitations on my writing. I really tried to find something I could do that would be acceptable to them. Keith Halls suggested that I should promise to never disagree with or contradict a general authority. I said that I couldn't do that, but I could agree to not disagree with them directly. That wasn't acceptable to them.

During this time they asked me one question dozens of times in various different ways. The question was, "If you were asked to do something by a prophet or any Church leader would you do it, even if it went against your conscience?" Every time I answered that I would think about it, pray about it and then act according to what my best judgment and the Spirit told me to do. I had told them this many times in all the interviews we had had. I had never given any other answer to this question. As it got later and later, I kept thinking, "Why won't they believe me? What do I have to do to convince them that I will not be controlled by them?"

Bishop Hammond kept saying, "Janice, I have to have something from you." But he wouldn't accept what I could offer. They kept telling me that my membership was at stake. Finally, as we were talking about my paper "Him Shall Ye Hear," Bishop Hammond told me that if I refused to promise to never publish the paper, he would excommunicate me. I considered this. Was publishing this paper really worth my membership? Then I thought, "But this paper is my testimony that we must follow Jesus and do what the Spirit tells us. I have to publish it if I can. I have to do what I think is right."

"Promise not to publish it," Bishop Hammond said.

"I can't do it." I said. "I would rather die. I love the Church and I know that they'll reject me, but I have to be free." As I said this, I felt my heart break. I saw a white bird fly out of it, flying up toward heaven. It cried, "I must be free." Then I began sobbing. I left the room and went into the high council room, where I sat down and continued to sob.

The effect of my crying on the men was remarkable. One of them came in to see if I was all right. I said that I was, but they thought they should go get David anyway. Then the bishop came in and said he was sorry if he'd been too harsh, but he'd had to say what he did. "I have integrity, too," he said. "But no matter what happens we'll still be your friends."

While I waited for David I thought about my heart breaking and the white bird, the dove, the spirit of God that must be free, my spirit that must be free, free to fly to God in my own way. I wondered if Jesus had accepted my sacrifice, my broken heart, if he would heal it or if it would always be broken like the wounds in his hands.

I looked at my watch. It was one in the morning. Then David came, and they started their deliberations. I told David some of what had happened. Then I started crying again. "I tried, I really tried," I told him, "but I have to be free. I can't submit my conscience and my judgment to those men."

"I know," he said.

"They are going to excommunicate me," I told him.

"It's all right," he said.

We wanted to go see the people who were still waiting, but the hall monitors wouldn't let us. After awhile some of them started to drift over where we were, then about two o'clock David went and brought the rest of them over. I hugged everyone. I needed to feel their love. I told Lynne and Lavina as they walked with me to get a drink, "Well, my friends, I'll probably be joining you."

At 2:30 I was called back to hear the decision. They told me that they were putting me on formal probation. That meant that I was still a member and nothing was marked on my membership record, but I would have some conditions and restrictions placed on me. The restrictions were that I was not to partake of the sacrament, hold a temple recommend or speak or pray in Church. However, I would still be allowed to serve in the nursery. Within two weeks they would inform me of some conditions that they would place me under. If I didn't obey these conditions, then another disciplinary council would be held. They asked me if I would obey the restrictions and conditions. I said that I would obey the restrictions, but I couldn't promise to obey the conditions until I knew what they were.

As we left the room, I felt sick. I knew the conditions would require me to do what I had already refused to do, to

submit my writing and speaking to their judgment. “Why wouldn’t they accept my decision?” I thought. “Do they think because I cried that I will change my mind? Can’t they see that it means that I won’t? Do they think that if there’s more time, more pressure, more strain, I’ll be too exhausted to on? How can they make me do this again?”

After telling everyone about the decision, I did a short interview for Channel 4. Then I walked home with Rebecca and Ammon, two of my children. It was 3:30 a.m. I asked them if they’d seen the news on Channel 13. They said they had. “What did they say about me taping the court proceedings?” I asked them.

They were astonished. “Nothing,” they said. Then I told them about the taping questions and what I’d said. Lavina joined us, and I repeated the story. When I told the part about the bishop saying that Channel 13 announced that I was taping the proceedings, Lavina said, “Janice, that is absolutely not true. Shauna [the reporter] couldn’t have said it because it is not true, and Shauna wouldn’t have said it, even if it were true, on the air during a live broadcast because it would be unprofessional.”

When she said that, it struck me for the first time that the bishop had lied to me. “He lied to me? He lied to me!” I said again and again. I couldn’t believe it.

Then Lavina shook my arm and said, “He was setting you up, Janice. He was trying to trap you.” Later, as we all sat around the kitchen table eating toast and the soup that was left over from dinner, Lavina pointed out that the bishop might not have known it was a lie—that he might have been passing on a message from someone he trusted who *was* trying to trap me. I felt betrayed—betrayed by lies and betrayed by a decision that refused to acknowledge my integrity and responsibility. My children, who were still awake, had mixed reactions—alarm at the possibility of surveillance and entrapment, and thrills of excitement at the same possibility. It was 4:30 a.m. when we got to bed, and I lay there for three hours before I fell asleep.

Two weeks later Bishop Hammond gave me the conditions and one more restriction; I could no longer hold a Church position. As I had suspected, the conditions required me to submit my writing and speaking to supervision and censorship. Bishop Hammond specifically told me that if I published “Him Shall Ye Hear” he would consider it a violation of the conditions.

I wrote an open letter to Bishop Hammond in which I informed him of some objections I had to the action taken against me and let him know what my intentions were in regard to the conditions.

In this letter I wrote, “[I]t is unfair for you to place me on formal probation and then impose all the restrictions on me which are imposed for disfellowshipment. . . . I feel that you decided to impose formal probation on me to make your ac-

tions seem less harsh. However, its effect on my life is exactly the same as being disfellowshipped.”

One of the conditions stated, “You are asked to not publish or speak in opposition to the doctrine of the Church as contained in the four standard works or official statements of the First Presidency.” In regard to this I wrote:

Since you get to decide what opposes the doctrine of the Church, complying with this condition to your satisfaction would require me to accept close supervision and control of my writing and speaking which would seriously infringe upon my freedom of speech. I will not accept this. . . .

I have no intention of speaking or publishing in opposition to the doctrine of the Church as contained in the four standard works or official statements of the First Presidency. However, I can only speak and write according to my own understanding and judgment, and I acknowledge that I make mistakes and fall short of what I hope to achieve. I do not regard anything I have written or hope to write as any kind of final truth, but by speaking and writing and listening and reading I hope to continually discover and learn new truths.

Another condition stated, “You should refrain from clear and open opposition and criticism of the Church or its leaders.” Concerning this I wrote:

I am not in opposition to the Church or its leaders. I claim and will use my right to disagree with ideas and dissent from policies and practices. I will try to do this for the purpose of building, not destroying the Church.

Finally, concerning my intentions in regard to probation I wrote:

I will follow the restrictions which you have imposed on me. Although I consider myself worthy of partaking of the sacrament and serving in the temple and I would gladly serve in a Church position or pray or speak in Church, I recognize your right as my ecclesiastical leader to forbid me to do these things. . . .

Now I must set some limits as to what I am able to do. I am no longer able physically and emotionally to defend myself and my ideas in an unequal arena where you have the power to judge and punish but are unwilling or unable to engage in an honest and open discussion of the ideas and issues. . . .

In regard to the conditions, I have always been willing to talk to you and have listened carefully to whatever counsel you have given me. However, as I have always told you, I believe that I am responsible to God and myself for what I do and I will always try to do what I believe is right according to my best judgment and the light I am able to receive from God. I do not recognize your authority or the authority of any other person over my own conscience in making my personal decisions. ☉

Book Review

Wisdom *B*orn of *E*xperience

LIGHTEN UP!

BY CHIEKO N. OKAZAKI.

Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1993, 232 Pages.

Reviewed by

KATHLEEN A. McDONALD

I had not attended Church for over a year when a family member gave me Chieko Okazaki's *Lighten Up!* on cassette tape for Christmas. Since Sister Okazaki is the first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, I recall feeling somewhat annoyed with the gift, thinking, "Just what I need—more words from Salt Lake that fail to show any understanding of my reality." I don't know why I bothered to turn on the tapes one night in bed before falling asleep; I think I did so more out of obligation to the gift's giver than from any interest on my part. Imagine my surprise when I heard words that demonstrated insight and compassion for my personal life's circumstances and that left me feeling warmed, loved and hopeful.

Sister Okazaki is a woman who has truly lived; she has experienced many hardships, challenges and sadnesses that provide context to her words and that, to me, give her credibility. Born in Hawaii to a family of Japanese heritage, she converted from Buddhism to Mormonism against her parents' wishes at the age of fifteen. While in college, she met her husband Ed, a Congregationalist who joined the Church after they were married. They had two children, but were unable to have more. After moving to Utah, the pair encountered harsh racism because of the sentiments against Japanese

Americans following World War II. She worked most of her married life while raising her children. She is a triple cancer survivor. Ed passed away in 1992, forcing her to cope with "the bewildering reality of loneliness" (p. 3). Given these experiences, Sister Okazaki doesn't offer sugar-coated maxims in this book; rather, she honestly acknowledges the rigors facing modern LDS women and offers substantive, intelligent advice.

Lighten Up!'s primary theme is that LDS women do not have to be a homogeneous group, thinking, talking and behaving in the same or similar ways. Rather, differences are a cause for celebration because they strengthen both the individual and the organization. In a chapter that distinguishes between "principles," which are eternal and unchanging, and "practices," which are malleable enough to accommodate the different yet equally valid ways an individual woman might implement those principles, Sister Okazaki states the following:

But when it comes to practices, I want kaleidoscopic vision. I want the whole world of options to be at our fingertips so that we can consult our needs and wants when we decide how to apply those principles. I want us to make up our own minds, experiment with one form and abandon it without

feeling guilty if we find it doesn't work, listen to what works for other people, find something else, seek the Father's will, find still something else, move into a different season of our lives, and find still something else. (pp. 17-18)

Later, after describing her own marriage, including the choice to work while raising children, she applies this approach to marital and parental responsibilities:

The 1990s are a time of transition for American families, and transitions are always confusing. There are many voices telling you what kind of relationship you should have with your husband or wife, what kind of a parent you need to be, what kinds of experiences your children need to have. Listen carefully to these messages and ask yourself, "Will this help us be a good team? What is best for us as a couple? What is best for us as a family?" Do not try to fit your life into someone else's idea of what you should be. Be wise and prayerful—and be yourself. Find your own rhythm. It is teamwork—the rhythm of each foot taking its turn being first—that moves the body forward. (pp. 35-36)

I felt such relief after reading this passage; here is a Church leader saying something relevant. I could not help comparing this passage to almost the opposite message presented in a lesson entitled "Patriarchal Leadership in the Home" from the current Aaronic Priesthood manual: "In the world there are many voices proclaiming what the family should be and do. For the Lord's purposes, he has ordained the patriarchal order with the father at the head. We need to remember the divine counsel from the Lord's servants and sustain our fathers in their patriarchal role." I have spent a considerable amount of time puzzling over

how Sister Okazaki gets away with making statements that seem directly in contrast to those such as in this priesthood lesson. I have also wondered how she has managed to stay active in the Church without getting bogged down, as I have, in the parts of the Church that are so objectionable to women. My tentative conclusion—and my fervent hope—is that she is not an anomaly.

Sister Okazaki also is an advocate for women in the plainest of terms. I do not often read, except in publications such as *Sunstone*, *Dialogue*—which, by the way, she quotes twice (pp. 69, 99)—and *Exponent II*, statements by church authorities that are so feminist in tone as the following:

On one occasion I attended a meeting where someone was telling us about the importance of teaching women to strengthen the family. I had a little trouble with that presentation in three ways. First, that approach seems to assume that women are *weakening* the family. Of the hundreds of women I know, I don't know anybody who isn't doing the best she can to make her family strong. Second, I want to know if men are getting the same message. Men as a group certainly have far more control than women over many of the social and economic factors that make strong families possible. And third, I want a few reports from the real world about the specifics of family life. I don't think generalities are very helpful. Until those three conditions are met, the major product of sermons about strengthening the family is likely to be guilt, and I'm against guilt. (pp. 180-181)

No feminist will be surprised by the content of these statements; what is surprising is that they are coming from Salt Lake.

The honesty with which Sister Okazaki confronts Church-created situ-

ations that destroy our sense of self-worth and impede our path to God is startling. Introducing a theme that resonates throughout the book, she states early on, "Sometimes, women hear messages coming from their own sisters in the gospel and the organization of the Church that reinforce these feelings of sadness and inadequacy. This hurts me. This is not the gospel. It's not what the Church is for." (p. 5) I appreciate the candor with which she lovingly but firmly attacks such problems.

Among the most important parts of the book for me were the chapters on "Opening the Door to Christ" and "Spiritual Preparation." Reiterating the themes of honesty, reality and differences, she approaches the topic of spirituality in a manner that reminds us that one's spiritual journey is a deeply personal matter; that Jesus knows and loves us; and that we can connect directly to God on an individual basis through prayer (pp. 182-186, 192-194). At this time in my life, about the only religious tenets I am sure of are that our Heavenly Parents and Jesus live and that they love me. The thoughts in these chapters give me the incentive and courage to build on this knowledge and to shape my own spiritual destiny in a manner pleasing to Them.

Lighten Up! can raise the self-esteem of the individual LDS woman and alleviate guilt caused by the lists of "shoulds" and "musts" emanating from the Church at all levels. It is feminist at its core, although the word "feminism" nowhere appears. Any woman like myself who is feeling alienated from the Church, misunderstood by Church leaders and unwilling to capitulate her selfhood to a theological system that often feels so antithetical to what a loving God would want, yet who also desires the experience of community worship to augment her individual spiritual journey will find great solace in Sister Okazaki's words. I am grateful for her wisdom. ☺

Mormon Women's Forum: An LDS Feminist Quarterly is published by The Mormon Women's Forum, a non-profit corporation. The views expressed reflect the perspectives of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the editors, The Mormon Women's Forum or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Founded in 1988, The Mormon Women's Forum invites all people to examine women's issues, particularly within the context of Mormonism. It makes no formal demands on any organization or system of belief. It does, however, examine and question traditional interpretations of women's roles, their history and their relationship to deity.

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I Have An Answer

Questions to Gospel Answers

ANSWER: The first law of heaven is obedience. If a leader tells us to do something, we should do it; if it turns out that what we did was wrong, the sin will be on the head of the leader, not ours.

QUESTIONS: What is the point of having a conscience, what is the point of receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, if we are willing to overrule both conscience and Spirit in deference to a human leader's commandments? An earthly tribunal at Nuremberg found the excuse of "I was only following orders" morally bankrupt. Why would a heavenly tribunal find such a rationalization any less reprehensible?

Obedience is "the first law of heaven" only when it is defined as "obedience to correct principles." Is blind loyalty to leadership more important in the eternal scheme of things than loyalty to righteousness and godliness? Is there any virtue in being obedient to evil, in doing what one knows in one's heart to be wrong? Isn't such "obedience" tantamount to denying the Holy Ghost?

Sociologist Stanley Milgram's famous experiments clearly showed how willingly most people relinquish personal responsibility for their actions. Most people obeyed orders even when those orders went counter to their own sense of justice and morality; afterwards, they were quick to shift all culpability to the authority figure.

The desire to duck personal accountability seems to genuinely characterize mortal human behavior; if we are expected to "put off the natural [wo]man" in this life, then is it not required of us to take responsibility for our own actions, to "act and not be acted upon"? Isn't it more courageous and Christlike to stand for what is right and good, even if we risk the displeasure of leaders, censure or punishment, or even death? What is a life without integrity? Can we become godlike if we fail to act according to godly principles?

Finally, who besides Jesus Christ can take on someone else's sins? Isn't it the ultimate presumption for a fallible mortal, no matter his position, to promise that "if you do what I say, God

will hold me responsible for what you do"? Has God ever ratified such a rash claim? If we believe and act on such claims, we are putting our trust in the arm of flesh, searing our consciences with as a hot iron, and dooming ourselves to spiritual infantilism.

If we are to progress, we must learn to discern right and wrong for ourselves; we must learn to negotiate the grey areas, cope with ambiguity and make hard choices according to our own best knowledge and judgment, rather than continually defer to others, some of whom are only too happy to acquire more and more power and control over others. If a leader's orders cannot pass the litmus test of personal conscience, we obey such orders at the peril of our spiritual integrity, and possibly our eternal life.

The war in heaven was all about our agency—our freedom to choose good or evil. Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to say that it is freedom to obey, and not obedience itself, that is the first law of heaven. Ultimately, to obey evil is to negate God's plan of eternal progression. Did we win that war in heaven only to lose it here on earth?

—Lynn "now if only I could get my kids to do what I say without question!"
Matthews Anderson

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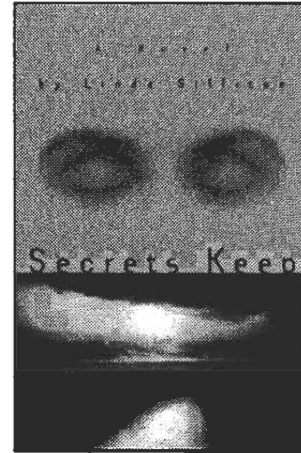
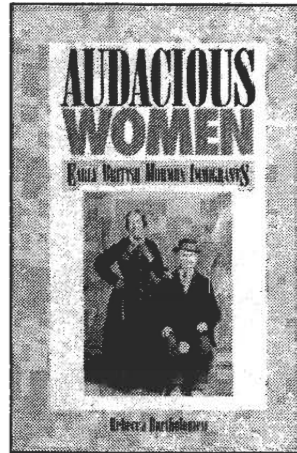
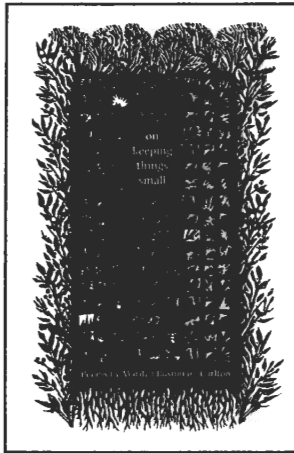
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literary giants



it's the little things that count. ask marilyn bushman-carlton (on keeping things small). the tiniest perception can create huge ripples, as rebecca bartholomew knows (audacious women). little things, such as linda sillitoe discloses, can do the most good—or harm (secrets keep).

signature books

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