

Mormon Women's Forum

VOLUME 8, NUMBERS 1 & 2

AN LDS FEMINIST QUARTERLY

SPRING & SUMMER 1997

Editor's Note: The following four articles are taken from edited transcripts of past radio programs produced by The Mormon Women's Forum. "A Monthly Visit from The Mormon Women's Forum," hosted by MWF board member Margaret Toscano with radio engineer and co-host Laraine Wilkins, is broadcast on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 12:30 p.m. on KRCL, 91 FM in Salt Lake City and 96.5 FM in Park City.

AN INTERVIEW WITH UTAH'S EPISCOPAL BISHOP CAROLYN TANNER IRISH

December 1996

Margaret: I would like to begin by talking a little bit about the Episcopal Church in general. I think that some of our audience may not be familiar with the structure of the church. With the LDS Church as our model of sorts here in Utah, we often think of churches as very unified. Is the Episcopal Church in the United States a unified organization?

Bishop Irish: Not always. Not around every issue. Basically the Episcopal Church in the United States is our branch of the Anglican Communion, our province of the Anglican Communion, which is worldwide and in that sense catholic with a small "c." Every place the British Empire touched ground, there is some form of worship that is conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer and in the general ethos of the English tradition. We took the name "Episcopal" rather than "Anglican" because, of course, after our Revolution "Anglican" was not a particularly popular word with Americans. So the Episcopal Church is called that because it means "bishop." It's a Greek word—*episcopos*. It means "oversight" or "bishop." So that's what characterizes our tradition.

Margaret: Is there a central leadership in the United States?

Bishop Irish: The central authority in the United States is its General Convention, and that meets every three years. It is made up of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies. It is a bicameral legislative body, in that sense structured very much like the American government is structured.

Margaret: Who appointed you as the Bishop in Utah?

Bishop Irish: Well, I wasn't appointed. I was elected, and so I became a head of a diocese when elected a diocesan bishop. And I was elected by clergy and lay people, members of the Episcopal Church in the diocese in the district of Utah, which in fact is coextensive with the state of Utah.

Margaret: I see.

Bishop Irish: So every diocese would have a bishop. We do have a presiding bishop as well, but he serves more as a first

among equals than as . . .

Margaret: . . . any kind of head.

Bishop Irish: Certainly not anything like the President of the LDS Church or the Pope.

Margaret: Right. What are your duties as the Episcopal Bishop of Utah?

Bishop Irish: Well, I have primary responsibility for the diocese as a whole, and that includes the clergy and their families. I serve as pastor to the pastors. I ordain clergy, and we raise up people for leadership in ministry. I confirm young people and older people when they decide to become members of our church. I have a number, in that sense, of liturgical functions. And I visit every congregation at least once a year. I also have, however, oversight of all of our resources, our buildings, our financial resources, a fairly large staff. I'm primarily a teacher. So it's a wonderfully diverse job. I think it would be impossible ever to get bored with being a bishop.

Margaret: It sounds like a very busy and heavy schedule.

Bishop Irish: Sometimes more so than others. And I can assure you December is a very busy time.

Margaret: Our program is really a feminist program—The Mormon Women's Forum is a Mormon feminist group. And so of course I'm very interested in the position of women in the Episcopal Church. When were women first ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal tradition?

Bishop Irish: We had a few women who were what we call "irregularly ordained," that is to say some bishops ordained them before the general convention had voted to ordain women. Now you may know that many Protestant denominations before the Episcopal Church had been ordaining women for some years.

Margaret: Right.

Bishop Irish: But the vote on our case came in 1976. Then those ordinations were regularized, and it became possible

in a regular way for women in most dioceses, not all, to proceed, either to serve as deacons or priests.

Margaret: So could each diocese decide whether or not they were going to accept women priests?

Bishop Irish: Well, each bishop in the diocese had a kind of conscience clause. If they felt that they literally just could not ordain a woman, for a time they had that freedom of their conscience. Now it's much more difficult. One must at least provide some kind of a structure for women coming forward to receive consideration. It's a long and arduous process to become a priest, so I don't want to make it sound like it's just whimsical. But it is possible now in, I think, all but a very small number or handful of dioceses.

Margaret: Was the ordination of women a very controversial thing in the Episcopal Church? Did it cause a lot of dissension? Were there people who actually broke away?

Bishop Irish: Yes, of course it was. I'm sure you know this, Margaret, but every issue there is that touches in the area of human sexuality tends to raise a lot of strong feelings among people. And that would be true if we were talking about homosexual persons, or abortion, or women in authority, or women as priests or bishops. Incidentally, women as bishops did not happen until the first was elected in 1988.

Margaret: So, 12 years after the first ordination.

Bishop Irish: But, of course, that doesn't surprise anyone because it takes some time to become qualified or to seem to be qualified to serve in that capacity. In any case there was controversy, more in some places than in others. I happen to think there might have been less here in Utah, interestingly, than in other places because there is a kind of western ethos here. There is a kind of "can-do-ness" in our church. And in part because the culture itself is so conservative, we have tended to align ourselves with progress.

Margaret: Oh, that's interesting. Because of the Mormon influence here, maybe the Episcopal Church is more liberal in Utah.

Bishop Irish: More progressive, certainly. And that is why, I think, everyone was so stunned when the third female diocesan bishop that was elected was elected in Utah. That would not have been anybody's guess.

Margaret: Oh really? So are you the third woman bishop? Is that what you are saying?

Bishop Irish: There are six of us in the United States, three who serve as suffragan bishops, that is, assistant bishops in larger dioceses, and three who are diocesan bishops. But I am the only one west of the Potomac River in Washington, D.C.

Margaret: What an honor that is.

Bishop Irish: I don't know. But I do feel like a pioneer all over again.

Margaret: I believe it was last spring that you became Bishop.

Bishop Irish: Yes, it was at the end of May.

Margaret: Do they call it a confirmation?

Bishop Irish: A consecration.

Margaret: I attended that ceremony. It was beautiful. It was exciting and joyful.

Bishop Irish: Yes, it was very joyful.

Margaret: I felt both extremely happy and sad at the same time—happy that this was happening here in Utah for the Episcopal Church but a little sad for my own tradition.

Bishop Irish: I can understand that.

Margaret: I had such mixed emotions. So maybe this brings up the subject of your own Mormon background. As you came into this position, there were a lot of interviews in the paper and so forth. People talked about your Mormon background. You are the daughter of O. C. Tanner, isn't that correct?

Bishop Irish: Yes, it is.

Margaret: And he was a prominent Mormon and businessman here in town. If I recall correctly, he wrote a book, *Christ's Ideals for Living*. It was used as an LDS Sunday School manual at one time.

Bishop Irish: Yes.

Margaret: What kind of experience was it growing up in the Mormon Church for you? Did you feel a lot of freedom? Was it a positive experience?

Bishop Irish: Actually, it was indeed a positive experience, and that's a mix of some rather interesting particulars. One was that I think that the LDS Church does an absolutely incredible job with children.

Margaret: Yes.

Bishop Irish: I mean there was always something to do. I always felt valued. I always felt that my little contributions mattered, whatever they were. So that was a wonderful feeling. But the other side of the coin, in terms of my youth, is simply that my family were not particularly traditional Mormons. You mentioned business, but my father, when I was a youth, was primarily a professor. That was what really took up most of his time. He taught philosophy at the University of Utah. So questions were a very good thing in our family, and we had endless religious discussions about philosophy and religion, life and values. And so I had that kind of freedom. I probably was fairly obnoxious to my Sunday School teachers, but I thought that was what we were there to do, to explore some of the big questions.

Margaret: I grew up in a home that was also open, so I got in trouble asking questions too. When did you consider your-

self not Mormon any longer? What age were you when that process happened?

Bishop Irish: I was fourteen.

Margaret: Oh really, that young?

Bishop Irish: Yes. I continued to be active in the LDS Church, of course, because where I lived out in East Millcreek there would not have been a lot to do, and really no social life, except what happened through the ward and, of course, school. And I didn't suffer in any of that. It's just that I felt that that tradition as an exclusive way to salvation was not something that I could embrace.

Margaret: I see. And then how old were you when you became an Episcopalian?

Bishop Irish: I became an Episcopalian when I was 35.

Margaret: Oh my, that long a time.

Bishop Irish: I always considered myself a Christian, as a Mormon and in between times. I had a very deep love of Jesus that was born in my childhood, in my upbringing in the [Mormon] Church and also most especially that came through my father's teaching about Jesus and his own personal feelings about Jesus. So that has remained the core and center of my life and faith. And these adjustments in my church family very much take a second place in terms of their importance to me.

Margaret: Tell us a little bit about your journey between Mormonism and Episcopalianism.

Bishop Irish: Well, I think when I went away to college . . .

Margaret: Where did you go college?

Bishop Irish: I was at Stanford. While there I went about as far from Mormonism as I could find to go. But, interestingly enough, I went to another religious tradition, and it happened to have been Bahai. And Bahai is a world faith. It is not exactly a church, but it's probably the broadest religion that I know of to this day in terms of its inclusivity of all the major faith traditions of the world, of seeing prophets, saints, and gifted people in every nation, in every faith tradition. And there were a good number of intellectuals at Stanford who were members of the Bahai community. So I attended their meetings for a time, and that continued even for a few years. At some point it didn't feel like me. I don't know how to describe that because there was no particular thing that they believe that I don't still believe about the equality of men and women, for example, and universal education, and passivism. But then I went through a period where my life was very much taken up with my studies in philosophy. I thought that those studies could satisfy my spiritual yearnings, which, of course, they can't. That is very much an intellectual path, and while it has always been important to me to include in a religious life, I was still left

with a lot of yearning. The best sign I can give you of that was the fact that in every city I've ever visited in the world, I have made a beeline for the nearest church that was open.

Margaret: I do the same thing.

Bishop Irish: I like to go into empty churches and sit and be quiet and be thankful that people of faith have made this beautiful sanctuary possible. So then I graduated from that kind of empty cocoon to worship with the Quakers for a few years. And again it was a healing time for me. It was just enough of community without being invasive or prying or pushing. I really didn't want anybody to try to press something on me. I started in the Episcopal Church when my children were small because there was a very good Sunday School in the particular church near me.

Margaret: Where were you at that time?

Bishop Irish: In Washington, D.C. And I rather thought that I could probably take them to Sunday School and go off to the Quaker meeting and be quite happy, but it wasn't that way. It was an inter-generational Sunday School, so we all had to gather in there all the time; and it just was a wonderful experience. It was my first introduction to the Episcopal Church. Well, not exactly my first, but my first real participation in it. And after maybe three years I realized that it was home for me, that it really expressed the core of Christianity as I understood it. It was a broad tradition. I felt that I could grow all my life and never sort of grow out of it, if you see what I mean. And then shortly after that I was called to go into the ordained ministry.

Margaret: As you talk about this journey, Bishop Irish, I'm interested in whether or not women's issues were influential in either you leaving Mormonism or joining Episcopalianism. Did you have any sort of feminist consciousness—or maybe feminism isn't the right word—but a womanist consciousness that made you separate from Mormonism and then eventually end up where you did?

Bishop Irish: You know, I don't think that I did, Margaret. I would like to in a sense think that it could have been that simple, but I'm of that generation where [feminism] was not even a word. You know, when I went off to college, in fact, I don't know what I thought I was going off to college for because I wasn't trained to think about a career or anything like that. So I had to grow with the women's movement as it went along and let it impact me where it would. One of the still quite humorous things in my own life is that I am very much a domestic person. All of the things that I was taught to do as a young Mormon girl I still love to do: sew, quilt, cook, knit. Those are the things that give me great joy to do. I don't feel in any way embarrassed about that, but it just didn't ever seem to me to be the particular image that drew me. I have two daughters who are fairly radical feminists, so I hope that they won't be ashamed to hear me say

this. But the fact is I always felt whole and honored as a human being. I always felt loved as a child of God. I never felt like I was inferior to men.

Margaret: And that could be because of your upbringing again and the way your father and mother treated you.

Bishop Irish: Exactly. So I had my struggles when I was ordained. All of us did in that first generation. The fact is once people had some experience of women in this kind of leadership in religious life, it became the most natural thing in the world for most of them to accept that. It was a change, and they had to argue it intellectually. But [they softened] once they had the experience of having the priest work with their own children, visit them in the hospital, those kind of experiences of pastoral care, for example, and, indeed, of a different style of leadership, I think. Far less hierarchal and autocratic. My own style is very collegial and team-oriented, and most people like that.

Margaret: When were you ordained to the priesthood? When did you first feel that you wanted to move in that direction?

Bishop Irish: Well, I felt called to explore that call beginning in 1978, which was just a couple of years after the vote had been taken. Now you don't just explore it all on your own. The church looks you over pretty well, as well. And so I went through a process of two years where I was screened psychologically, physically, intellectually. I was put in different situations to see how I would handle them. In other words, sometimes people feel called to a ministry, and the fact is they love their own church or their own ward, but they are not really made for the larger ministry of the church. And it takes that kind of experience to help them see that. And then I was made a postulant for Holy Orders and I started seminary at the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, just across the river from where I lived. So I was lucky enough to be able to commute and do my three years of study there as a commuting mother.

Margaret: Does every Episcopalian priest go to seminary to be trained?

Bishop Irish: Every priest that is ordained according to the ordinary canons of the church.

Margaret: I see.

Bishop Irish: We have some, for example, here in Utah and in other sparsely populated areas in the West where people go through a procedure toward local ordination. And they may read for orders or take a few classes. Or nowadays seminaries have things on-line for them. We have a greater variety now of ways we can educate people for the priesthood. One of the things that I have always liked about the Episcopal Church is its value and appreciation of educated clergy. I think that stands us in good stead, and we work very hard to continue that whether we have already been to seminary

or not, to try to keep ourselves current and live and connect with the new theological questions of the age.

Margaret: When women were first ordained in 1976 in the Episcopalian Church, were you excited about that? Was this something that you accepted readily? Or did it take you a while to get used to it?

Bishop Irish: Oh, I don't know that I knew about it, to tell you the truth. I was very involved in my parish. I taught, and I was teaching school also. I had four children. I wasn't much into the politics, so to speak, of the church. So that was significant but not a big thing to me. It was far more significant when a woman came to preach in my parish. And there was something about seeing a woman in a pulpit offering her . . .

Margaret: . . . gifts?

Bishop Irish: . . . her gifts to the church that way. Now that really stirred me.

Margaret: Do you think that was the beginning of your own desire?

Bishop Irish: I think it was not only the beginning of my own desire, I think it was some part of the expression of God's call to me.

Margaret: Oh! That gives me chills. Of course, we don't have women ordained in Mormonism, but as I have attended other religions and seen women acting as priests or acting in religious leadership roles, I have had a similar experience. I mean, it is a very deeply touching thing.

Bishop Irish: Yes, it is.

Margaret: So that is very interesting to me, that it was the beginning of the call, that you felt God speaking to you through a woman.

Bishop Irish: Well, you know, it is a very interesting thing. I've used the word "inclusivity" here a number of times. It's one of the things that was hard for me about any tradition that thought they were the best or the only one. But I've become very sensitive as well to the power of language to either exclude us or to draw us in. And so when I can, and as I can, and most in the church now do, I try to use some kind of inclusive language so that we are not just talking about men. The generation that wrote the books may have thought "men" meant everybody . . .

Margaret: . . . that it was supposed to mean everybody.

Bishop Irish: But that is not the way people hear it anymore.

Margaret: And sometimes I don't think we realize that until we hear the inclusive language.

Bishop Irish: Yes.

Margaret: We don't realize how much exclusion there has been until we hear the inclusive language. Let me ask you a

little bit about talking about God. As we talk about inclusion, one of the big issues is how do we talk about God. Do we talk about God in male terms? Do we talk about God as both male and female? Do we try to get rid of gender all together? What is your view on this? What do you like to do?

Bishop Irish: Well, I don't know that I would use either male or female as such. We do have images that are feminine and that are masculine. And, of course, each one of us has a dimension of our own human makeup that is masculine and feminine and that's kind of a continuum within us. I use inclusive language whenever I'm referring to the human race, to people, in the community. I can't verify this for you immediately, but I was told by a friend of mine who researched it that there are in the scriptures over ninety words for God, images of God. And they are not all masculine. Some are feminine.

Margaret: They are not all human either.

Bishop Irish: No, so I think of God as having many names. And I try to use as many of God's names as I can. I mean, I think "Mercy" is a beautiful name of God. I think when Jesus talks about yearning to gather people under his wings as a mother hen would gather her chicks, that's a feminine image. And it's an image that I can understand as a woman, but I have no problem either in our confession of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So I try not to get tripped up by it, and I hope that by doing that, other people are not tripped up.

Margaret: Do you refer to God as both he and she? I mean, sometimes we have to use pronouns. Do you use both?

Bishop Irish: I don't.

Margaret: So you try to avoid the masculine and feminine all together.

Bishop Irish: I try to avoid it all together, but I do know that sometimes I do say "he." And I then follow that with something else. For example, if I were beginning a prayer, I might say, "Oh God, you are our Father and our Mother," or something which would include both. But I feel very much my responsibility as a worship leader not to shock people, not to anger people. And while sometimes you can't help doing that because, let's face it, people think the gospel is good news, good news, good news, but it's not always easy news.

Margaret: No.

Bishop Irish: It calls for a very different kind of world than the world that we live in.

Margaret: It calls for change.

Bishop Irish: It calls for change and justice and peace. And so I try—always aware that I am walking a fine line—to speak in such a way that I can be heard.

Margaret: I wish that we had more time to discuss all of these issues; it is so fascinating. But we're almost out of time, and I want to end with this question: Feminists talk a lot about how gender both does and doesn't matter. There is a lot of argument about whether or not gender matters. I sort of come from the point of view that it both does and doesn't.

Bishop Irish: Yes.

Margaret: I would like you to tell us how your being a female bishop in Utah both does and doesn't matter. What difference does it make that you are a female bishop?

Bishop Irish: I don't think of myself as a female bishop. I'm a woman, and I'm a bishop.

Margaret: Yes.

Bishop Irish: And I never wanted to be anything other than a woman. I never imagined being a bishop. I'm sure it makes differences in some ways, and certainly it's got a fair amount of attention. It has allowed me to be included in the larger Utah community in ways that I never could have imagined. That may have been part of the reason for that. But I wouldn't say that's more important than the fact that my maiden name is Tanner, for example. So I'm with you: it matters and it doesn't matter.

Margaret: You talked before, though, about maybe a different style of leadership that women bring to the office. Do you feel that's a factor at all?

Bishop Irish: I think it's a natural style for women, but I think men are learning it as fast as they can. And many are learning it. Some of it has to do, interestingly, with an ecological awareness that this kind of top-down oppressive structure is some part of what is damaging us. So I'm very hopeful about the church and about its unfolding, I think. I have a number of friends who are LDS, who are among the strongest and loveliest women that I know. And I don't have any sense that because I am in the situation I'm in, I am more so than they are, but . . .

Margaret: Just different opportunities, maybe . . .

Bishop Irish: . . . different opportunities . . .

Margaret: . . . to serve as religious women, to serve as spiritual women . . .

Bishop Irish: Yes.

Margaret: But it's there.

Bishop Irish: It's there for all of us. But you know we have to claim it.

Margaret: Yes, we do. I think you're right. We have to claim it. This has been such an enjoyable experience to talk to you, Bishop Irish. I thank you so much.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT BYU: AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSORS MARTI BRADLEY & BILL EVENSON

July 1996

Margaret: Our topic today is academic freedom at Brigham Young University. I've asked Bill Evenson and Marti Bradley to discuss this issue with us. Bill is Professor of Physics at BYU. He is former Dean of General Education and also of Physical and Mathematical Sciences at BYU. He served as BYU's Associate Academic Vice President under Jeffrey Holland. Marti is currently teaching at the University of Utah, where she is Visiting Assistant Professor of Architecture. Previously she taught at BYU, where she was Assistant Professor of History. Marti resigned from BYU in 1993 to protest the firings of Cecilia Konchar Farr and David Knowlton. These two former professors both lost their jobs because of their liberal writings and activities, even though the university claimed it was for academic reasons. Marti, when you resigned from BYU, were you upset with the way they had handled the Farr and Knowlton firings?

Marti: I was particularly upset with the letters that were put in their employment files. These were comment letters on the quality of their scholarship and on the evaluations they'd received from their students. There was duplicity in this, I thought, particularly because their assessment of what Cecilia had done in the classroom was very far from what her evaluations actually said. She received evaluations only in the very good to excellent range, yet in the letter that went into her file it said that she frequently was criticized and that many students were dissatisfied with her performance. Also, comments on the quality of her scholarship suggested that she was not a good scholar, that she was not publishing in national publications, and that was false. The same thing was true with David.

Margaret: The issue of academic freedom at BYU has been in the news again this summer. In early June Gail Houston, who has been Assistant Professor of English, was denied continuing status. Bill, does this mean that she was fired?

Bill: Yes, the continuing status process is essentially the process of deciding whether someone receives tenure or not, and only those who are on a tenure track—that is they have a position that could be considered permanent—are considered for continuing status. So when continuing status was denied, it meant that she was terminated from an otherwise continuing position.

Margaret: Do they give her a chance to find another job? When does the job end once they decide that she's not go-

ing to get continuing status?

Bill: Ordinarily they give people up to a full academic year to find another job. They usually are quite flexible about that. It depends somewhat on when the decision is made. If the decision is made in late spring, typically they will give a person an academic year to find another job.

Margaret: Is Gail's situation any different from that of Cecilia Farr or David Knowlton?

Bill: Well, certainly different in that the university has been more forthright about the fact that they are concerned about her religious views, and they have not tried to say that she has problems either in her teaching or her scholarship. Perhaps they learned a lesson from the case of David Knowlton and Cecilia Farr, where they tried to make that kind of excuse. But it couldn't be sustained by the facts that were available, even to the public, that their scholarship and their teaching were sufficiently at fault to warrant terminating them. They were terminated at a third year review point, by the way.

Margaret: Which is different from continuing status in what way?

Bill: It is an intermediate step toward continuing status. Gail was continued at the third year review but then terminated after six years at the point of decision about tenure.

Marti: If you remember when Cecilia and David were fired in 1993, Gail was also up for her third year review, and she was put on probation. I think what that did was create a very unreasonable situation for her. She had to exist in this atmosphere of tension for the next two and a half years. The fact that she stuck it out as long as she did and was still treated so shabbily at the end, I think, is unconscionable.

Margaret: Bill, I want to go back to you and ask about the specific reasons why Gail was fired. I think we have established that BYU didn't do the thing they did with Cecilia and David, which was to criticize her scholarship. So what were the reasons they gave for terminating Gail?

Bill: Well, they said that the difficulties had to do with her teaching and other actions that were harmful to the tenants held by the church and the university.

Margaret: Were they specific?

Bill: Well, they gave some examples. The examples that

they gave included student concern about . . .

Margaret: . . . what she was teaching?

Bill: . . . about the way she taught, about imposing her feminist views on them.

Margaret: I also understand that they said she had low scores on the student evaluations in the categories of “gospel insights” and “spiritually inspiring.”

Bill: They referred back to the third year review, which had reported low scores on “gospel insights” and “spiritually inspiring,” even though at the time her scores did not warrant such an allegation because they were higher than the department, or college, or university averages. She did have one or two scores that were lower than the averages, but overall they were higher. If you look at the categories “gospel insights” and “spiritually inspiring,” she is well above the university average, especially for the last two years. So how they can dredge that issue back up is quite beyond me.

Margaret: It seems to me, as I look at the evidence, that they were basing that criticism on the comments of just a few students. Then they somehow concluded that the protests of these few students who were unsatisfied with her approach were enough to terminate her.

Bill: That’s right. They said that there was a consistent pattern of students who complained about her narrow ideological approach to her subject matter. And yet when you look at the data you find on the actual student evaluations, 91.6 percent of all comments on her evaluations were positive. There were only six comments that were made on her student evaluations in these last six years that were negative and would suggest that there was a problem. To put more weight on these than on the 92 percent seems quite unreasonable.

Margaret: Marti, at the University of Utah if you had 92 percent of your students who were happy with your class or thought you were doing a very good job, would that be considered a good record?

Marti: That would be considered a great record.

Margaret: So it seems that the percentage of student complaints didn’t really warrant termination. I understand that they also said that she had a pattern of contradicting fundamental church doctrine and attacking the church. Was that one of the issues?

Bill: That is correct. They have cited public statements, both oral and written, that approved the practice of praying to Mother in Heaven, as well as Heavenly Father, and cited her public affirmations of this practice. Well, they refer, in fact, to a statement she made in a Sunstone [Symposium] panel in 1994, in which she refers only to her own very positive experience with her Heavenly Mother. She does not advocate praying to Heavenly Mother. She does not advo-

cate anything, as far as I can tell, that goes beyond what’s in the hymn, “Oh, My Father,” by Eliza R. Snow.

Marti: Or what Joseph Smith taught his plural wives about Mother in Heaven.

Bill: Yes, and so the accusation seems a stretch. Furthermore, this was a statement she made in 1994, but they have not brought it up until this tenure review. Part of the procedure requirements are that they alert faculty members if things they are saying or doing are out of bounds. They have to be warned. And yet no one ever told her what she did was inappropriate until now.

Margaret: So there is really only one instance where they have any proof that she said anything about Mother in Heaven or about praying to Mother in Heaven?

Bill: That is as far as I know.

Margaret: One time doesn’t seem to me to be a pattern of contradicting church doctrine, but that’s what they are accusing her of?

Bill: That is correct.

Margaret: Marti, you had a comment.

Marti: Yes, I think there is another underlying problem here, which is not something that Gail herself discussed. But I think if you are a strong woman, if you have a Ph.D., and you’re teaching at Brigham Young University, your very presence in some very important ways contradicts advice given by many leaders of the church about women working outside of their homes. One of the reasons I decided to resign from BYU is that I felt it was generally a hostile environment for certain types of women. I can remember one time I was teaching American Heritage, which, as you know, Bill, is a class with a thousand students. And one of my students asked me to defend my decision to work rather than stay home with my children. I felt that it was entirely inappropriate for that young male student to ask that question and then assume that I had to answer it.

Margaret: Was it in class, Marti?

Marti: It was in class.

Bill: Well, yes, to assume that somehow you have to be accountable to him for that kind of difficult decision is wrong.

Marti: Right, and the student is empowered by the church taking a stand against women working. I think what the teaching does is create for women like Gail, and for me, and others a hostile attitude on the part of certain male students. And particularly since 1993 when Cecilia was disciplined because of that sort of attitude, there are vigilante students out there in those classrooms watching for the kind of feminist language that appears occasionally just so they can report it.

Margaret: Do you agree, Bill?

Bill: Yes, I do. It's very unfortunate because I believe that the church also teaches that we are not to judge one another but that we are only accountable to our direct church leaders for ecclesiastical matters, and to the Lord. And yet this spirit does exist on this campus, and it's far too widespread. I am sure that many women encounter it.

Marti: And it is particularly harmful because it gives inordinate credit to the one, two, or three students in a classroom who report that kind of behavior. To give more credit to their view than the other ninety percent, I think, supports that kind of behavior.

Bill: Yeah, it encourages it.

Marti: It encourages it.

Margaret: Which is too bad. We've talked a little bit about some of the reasons why Gail Houston was fired. I want to now pose another question: Did she deserve to be fired? I think that we have already shown our bias here. But I think there are two aspects to the question. One is: Did she do the things that they said she did? And the other part of the question is: Even if she did those things, was that a sufficient cause for her being fired? Did BYU follow its own rules?

Bill: Let me just comment on a couple of the other reasons they gave. They did accuse her of publicly attacking the church for its view on gender roles, which is a silly misreading of her writing about gender and literature. They also accused her of making public statements that they interpreted to contradict and oppose fundamental church doctrine about not extending the priesthood to women. And that refers back to, I believe, a statement in the *Student Review* that she made at least three years ago.

Marti: Yes, in 1993.

Margaret: I thought it might have been in the Sunstone talk. She had one very vague comment—it wasn't even a direct statement—you could interpret as being about priesthood and women.

Bill: Yes. That's true, but it seems to me that each of those instances pulls a little statement quite out of context. And it pulls it out of the past, when they haven't called her in for those statements prior to this point. And so, in any case, I think I find those accusations to be pretty thin.

Margaret: So, you don't think those accusations have been really accurate?

Bill: I don't think, when you read the whole context and you read her reply, that she really is guilty of what they've claimed she's guilty of. And, in addition, they didn't follow their own procedures. The Academic Freedom Document at BYU is really not an unreasonable document in terms of

its provision of academic freedom, if those procedures were followed. But what the Academic Freedom Document has become is a defense of the freedom of the institution to do whatever it wants, and the faculty member has to fall into line.

Margaret: Which is frightening, I think.

Bill: Yes, one of the procedural problems in Gail's case was that after the department and college and the department chair and dean had viewed her application for tenure and made their recommendation, they made very positive recommendations and sent them to the university council. At that point, university administrators decided to add additional material to Gail's file. They told her that they were adding this material, but they didn't tell her the reasons or the issues that were involved. So, they did not give her an adequate opportunity to respond to the issues that they were raising with the council. And before she did have an opportunity to respond, they had the council vote. And the council voted to deny tenure on the basis of this one-sided presentation. After that, Academic Vice President Alan Wilkins wrote to Gail and explained what the issues were. And she answered in what I thought was an eloquent defense that responded very well to the issues that were raised, but that was after the finding by the university council that she shouldn't receive tenure.

Margaret: Do you think that they had already made a decision, and it didn't matter what she said?

Bill: Yes. That's certainly the implication.

Margaret: Marti, what do you feel about this, in terms of Gail deserving to be fired? Do you think that according to the standards that BYU set up in its Academic Freedom Document that she was in violation? Or do you have enough evidence?

Marti: Oh, it's not that. I'm reacting to this question sort of emotionally. This is bringing back so many difficult memories about when I decided to resign three years ago and how difficult it was to give up on it. And I'd also like to address the issue of whether she deserved it or not. I remember when I quit BYU, a number of people said to me, "Well, you know, if you don't like the way it is down there, why don't you get out? They've got their standards. You know you're being unrealistic to believe it can be anything other than what it is." But I think one of the reasons people like Gail choose to take a job at BYU is because they're so idealistic. They want their religious life and their intellectual life to blend, and they have a real strong sense of the importance of that blend being a baseline in the community in which they work and live. I mean that's certainly how I approached it; I wanted my spiritual life and my intellectual life to have some common ground. So, I think that's sort of the condition she functioned under, and in doing that she

had a lot to contribute to BYU. And maybe she wasn't part of the homogenous center, but she certainly inspired a large number of students—female students, in particular—to believe that they had a special contribution to make. And because of that, the sincerity of her belief in what BYU could be and should be makes it impossible to find a way to justify her termination.

Bill: I also have talked to many students who feel that Gail helped them to be closer to the church. I think her net effect has been to help students stay with the church and to increase their faith. And for them to make these kinds of accusations just because somebody in authority is uncomfortable with her, which is what I believe happened, I think it's wrong. And it's the students who really suffer.

Margaret: Why do you think the students suffer, Bill?

Bill: Well, because they don't have a strong woman role model like this to help them deal with the issues that young women are facing.

Margaret: As I understand it, Gail is a very active member of the church. I think she even has a temple recommend.

Bill: That's correct.

Margaret: I wonder why none of those things came into play in terms of the administration seeing her as a fit spiritual role model for BYU. I know her, and I've seen her as somewhat of a conservative feminist, really.

Bill: Well, she's a little bit outside the norm of what they're used to, I believe. And they didn't know how to deal with that.

Margaret: You know, one of the arguments that I always hear from people is that BYU can do what it wants because it's a private institution. Yet I know I first went to BYU because I was excited about the idea of being both an intellectual and a Mormon. I was excited about the idea that Marti just expressed—that I could bring my intellectual and my spiritual life together. So, that's the sort of thing I wanted to see happen there. But I've had a lot of people say to me that I was sort of foolish and idealistic, like Marti said. And their argument is that as a private, religious university, BYU can set whatever standards it wants for its faculty, for its students, for its curriculum, for its ideological stance. What do you think, Bill, about that?

Bill: That's not true for a couple of reasons. One is that the purpose of a university is intellectual development, and nobody can develop their intellectual abilities without grappling with hard issues. As soon as you grapple with hard issues, you encounter risks. There are people who'll defend against this by asking particular kinds of questions. That's the purpose of academic freedom, to allow the space for people to grapple with these issues. BYU should be able to allow that space in an environment which also nurtures

faith and allows people to grapple with hard issues and still come back and feel that they have a place to turn to with their faith. The other reason that that's not true is that university accreditation requires a certain level of academic freedom. There are four or five standards in the accreditation handbook, and BYU's academic freedom policy as written is consistent with those standards. The real problem is that BYU's procedures don't follow their own policies. And so, they don't actually allow the academic freedom that their policies declare.

Margaret: This, to me, is a very important part of the question. My response to people who say, "Well, BYU is a religious institution and can do what it wants," is this: Does BYU deserve to be a fully accredited university that gives degrees that are on par with the University of Utah or other universities if it sets limits on academic freedom? Marti, what is your response to this and to the other question too, about BYU wanting to set its own standards?

Marti: Just very briefly, of course they should have the same standards. It just seems like it's a given. My classes at the University of Utah aren't all that different from my classes at BYU. I think, perhaps, the students were a little brighter—I know the entrance grade point at BYU is a lot higher than at the University of Utah. But the classes you have up at the U are still classes of Mormon students. They still need to ask the same sorts of questions, and they still need the same sort of guidance in how to grapple with the difficult issues, as Bill has said.

Margaret: That's sort of ironic to me, that you don't see a lot of difference between the students at the U and the students at BYU.

Marti: Yes. Basically the majority of your classroom is still going to be Mormon students, or at least students with some sort of ancestry in Mormonism, regardless of where they stand with the church right now. They know what Mormonism is about.

Bill: Yes.

Margaret: Let me ask about the accrediting process. Has BYU had any troubles with getting accreditation since there have been these issues over academic freedom?

Bill: As far as I can tell, the accrediting committees didn't take seriously the concerns about academic freedom. They properly noted that BYU's policies are consistent with the accreditation standards, but they didn't really explore it. Although they were given information by faculty that I'm aware of, still they didn't really explore, as far as I can tell from their report, that BYU hasn't followed its own policies. And that's really the crux of the problem because if BYU really carefully followed its own academic freedom policy, several of these things we talked about couldn't have happened.

Margaret: But this is quite astonishing to me, that they could still be accredited with the kinds of things that have happened. What's wrong with the committee? I mean, are they being bought off?

Bill: No. It's not just BYU, but accreditation has become pretty toothless all over the country.

Margaret: Really?

Bill: Yes.

Margaret: What is the committee like? Who appoints them?

Bill: That's the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. The accreditation associations are private associations that themselves meet certain standards and band together in a national group. And the universities support them by paying fees for the accrediting review. So, they're people in the area of the northwestern United States in universities who are appointed to this committee.

Margaret: Well, what recourse does a faculty member have? I mean we've talked about the "love it or leave it" philosophy, which everybody uses to justify BYU, but I don't think that's always the best choice. And so I'm wondering, is there anything that a professor at BYU can do right now? I would imagine that this whole thing has been demoralizing for the faculty.

Bill: It's demoralizing for those of the faculty who think about these kinds of issues. There are many faculty who have never dealt with academic freedom issues.

Marti: Oh yes, it sort of depends on what you teach. If you teach English, if you teach history, then those are problematic areas. If you teach biology—well, biology could potentially be . . .

Margaret: Yes, biology could be quite controversial. Physics, maybe that's not so controversial.

Bill: No, it's not.

Margaret: But still you had a close association with this problem through your son Brian Evenson. Wasn't he terminated from BYU?

Bill: No. He chose to leave, but it was clear that had he stayed, they wouldn't have kept him beyond, probably, third year review. He was at BYU only for a year and a half in the English Department. He had a much better opportunity at Oklahoma State, where they wanted him to come to their Creative Writing Program. They have a Ph.D.—in fact, one of the better Ph.D.s in the country—in creative writing.

Margaret: So that was good for him. Let me ask another question. I myself have two degrees from BYU, which is becoming a little embarrassing to admit now. I'm wondering whether or not the sorts of things we're seeing happen are not going to lessen the value of a degree from BYU. You talked, Bill, about the students being negatively affected. Are the students going to be able to get into good graduate schools? Are they going to get top-rate jobs if they have a degree from BYU?

Bill: We've seen some effect in the humanities and social sciences, where students have been looked at askance because of degrees from BYU. We haven't yet seen that effect in the natural sciences and in the professional schools.

BYU, I think, is regarded quite highly. But in the academic community that consists of the traditional arts and sciences, BYU's reputation has gone down very steeply in the last few years. And some students are experiencing difficulties as they apply for graduate school.

Margaret: I want to thank you, Bill and Marti, for joining us today. I wish we had more time to talk about this topic. It's a very important one. I applaud both of you for your outspokenness and for the work that you've done.

MAGGIE'S GOD

Buttercups bunching in a tiny fist
the sun a royal halo framing wonder
yellow to yellow a princess
drenched in magnificence
He was with her then.

Reading Shakespeare backwards with a lisp
(the Bard's delight had shaped their Single Soul)
irreverance mellow was their code
Unpardonable Omniscience
He was the Perfect Friend.

Ivied walls dripped meaning on their tryst
hydrating imagination into bloom
Eureka! bellowed the hallowed halls
grasping their significance
amplifying Reason without end

'til the 6 o'clock news withered Maggie's bliss
hot reality shriveling the buttercups:
a silenced fellow now, God sleeps on
beneath an ivied innocence
waiting for the Goddess once again.

—Rita Bowles

ON BEING A MORMON AND A LESBIAN: AN INTERVIEW WITH KELLI FRAME & LEE PARTRIDGE

January 1996

Margaret: The experience of being a lesbian in the Mormon community is a sensitive topic, and so I commend your willingness to talk. What strikes me as quite important, though, is the fact that this is the first time that The Mormon Women's Forum has dealt with this topic in the seven years of its existence. I can't recall other liberal groups dealing with this issue much, either. You always hear about gay Mormon men but almost never about gay Mormon women. Why do you think this is so?

Lee: My understanding in talking with my friends is that many lesbians make the decision to either leave the church or try to somehow repent and conform to the Mormon lifestyle. So one of the reasons it doesn't seem to come up as often is that lesbians more than gay men leave the church and their Mormonism behind.

Margaret: Oh really? You think they do more than gay men?

Lee: Yes.

Margaret: Why do think this is?

Lee: I look at [Mormon support organizations like] Affirmation and Reconciliation, which I think are predominantly made up of gay men. For them to leave Mormonism behind is to give up a lot of power they get from the priesthood. So there is an attempt to still hold on to it or to negotiate a place where they can have it both ways. Does that make sense?

Margaret: Yes, it does make sense. Why do you think that Mormon gay men are more visible than Mormon lesbians, Kelli?

Kelli: You know I have always wondered that. I am not sure. I think that Lee makes a really good point. Being in the church and having the priesthood, you can be successful in the church as a gay man, if you mind your p's and q's. You can't, you know, as a woman. You are in a much lower standing already, and as a lesbian you are not likely to have a husband who gives you status. And as a single woman you are not likely to be called to positions of importance in a ward. So you are much more likely to be marginalized already. Maybe that's why.

Lee: I also think—and I hesitate to say this—but I think feminism comes into play. I didn't want to make this statement because then people will say, "See, feminism leads to women being lesbians."

Margaret: Yes, I see, but you think there is a connection?

Lee: Well, I think there is a connection with leaving the church and being feminist. I think that women find it very difficult to . . .

Margaret: There's no place for them really.

Lee: There's no place for them. Whether you're straight and a thinking, strong, independent woman or a lesbian, there is a connection with being independent and leaving the church. I can't quote the study that shows that the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to leave the LDS Church. Whereas the more education a man has, the more likely he is to continue to be a stalwart member. I think there are a lot of reasons why bright, strong women leave the church. Not all lesbian women fit into that category, but I think there is some correlation. The LDS Church offers no niche for lesbians; they make it too difficult.

Kelli: I agree. The church draws such a hard line that it makes it nearly impossible to stay.

Margaret: But why didn't we ever talk about it in the Forum? We've had a number of lesbian women. What do you think, Kelli?

Kelli: I would say that the biggest reason is that we're afraid of that issue. I mean the accusation of being lesbian has always followed feminism.

Margaret: Right.

Kelli: And I think, as much as anything, the Forum probably wanted to get established as a clearly feminist organization with a set purpose in mind, an agenda that wasn't connected with lesbianism. It was too big of an issue to bring on early. The same thing happens in the gay community, I know. Some people try to lump everything else in with it—transgender and transsexual issues, for example. But the gay community as a whole has tried to put all of those issues off. They say, "No, we can't do all of that. We're just doing this." So I guess it was the same thing.

Lee: I agree, which is why I am so hesitant to make any sort of connection with feminism. I don't know whether I can categorize all the women in the Forum as feminist, but I think we're cautious because if we're talking about feminism and then we bring up lesbianism, then people have a tendency to superimpose those two terms or make them one and the same.

Margaret: Right, and then feminism gets tainted, as it were.

Lee: Right. And then they'll say, "Oh, the women in The Mormon Women's Forum are feminists and they're also lesbians. I always knew that." It allows people to dismiss the Forum—at least I think there's the fear that people in the church will dismiss whatever the Forum does if they get associated with lesbianism.

Margaret: They'll use it as an excuse to dismiss everything else. Which I think is true. Let me shift now a little bit and ask you about your background and experience in the Mormon Church. Lee, were you a convert? Did you grow up in the church? What was your experience?

Lee: I grew up in the church. My parents are both LDS. I am the youngest of five. However, I grew up in what I consider a rather unorthodox family, not because we didn't attend church. We often attended church, but after sacrament meeting we would go to have brunch at a restaurant. I think about sitting on my father's lap as a child and eating my mother's homemade chocolate chip cookies and dunking those cookies in my father's cup of coffee. And so I have very loving parents, very devout as far as attending and being good Christians, but unorthodox in a rigid sense of what it means to be a Mormon, according to some.

Margaret: What about you Kelli? What was your background?

Kelli: I grew up Catholic. When I was about 15, I was converted to the Mormon Church but wasn't baptized until I was 18. I went on a mission and remained a member for about 10 years until I was 28. Actually, it was this issue of being a lesbian and also the larger issue of how women are treated within the Mormon Church that ultimately made me decide that I couldn't, in good conscience, continue to give my energy to an organization that so completely marginalized who I was, and who my friends were, and the people I cared about. So I actually quit identifying as Mormon five or six years ago.

Margaret: How did your Mormonism, though, affect your coming to terms with your lesbianism? Was this a painful process for you? When did you decide that you were a lesbian? When did you start thinking in those terms? How did your Mormonism affect that?

Kelli: That is a really good question. Of course, with hind sight I can look back and say that I was always lesbian. My earliest memories are of having crushes on my grade school teachers and different women who were in my life. But I never could actually say the words, "I am lesbian." And I don't know that I even knew the word until I was way older than I should have been.

Margaret: Most of us didn't.

Kelli: Right. And what I mentioned earlier about the Mormon Church drawing such a hard line is really what helped me, strangely enough, because to listen to certain of the

Mormon leaders you'd think we're monsters. They will say what I consider to be such cruel, inhuman things about gays and lesbians—how evil it is, and perverted, and ungodly, and unholy. The words are like this litany in my head, ringing in my head all during my adolescent and college years. The first time I fell in love with a woman at, I guess, about age 28, I realized that my choices were this: either what I am feeling for this woman is evil and awful and unholy, or those guys are wrong. And it was pretty obvious to me that it was not unholy.

Margaret: Why was it obvious to you?

Kelli: Because it was the most natural thing I had ever done. Everything else in my life up that point—my education, my work, my family life—everything is a compromise. You feel good about it, you don't feel good about it. But this! It's like it flowed from me, from the very deepest part of me.

Margaret: Yes, it is hard to feel that being in love is evil, isn't it?

Kelli: Right. Exactly. And this was just purely Kelli. I knew it was.

Margaret: What about you, Lee?

Lee: Well, I guess from an early age I started questioning my belief in God, my belief in this faith that my parents and grandparents had adhered to. So when I was about 20, I decided that I would serve a mission and make a decision about Mormonism. I had seen my parents at various times suffer a lot of guilt over not living, shall we say, Mormonism by the letter of the law. And I did not want to live that type of life. So on a mission I was first able to articulate a desire for another woman; although, like Kelli, once I overcame that obstacle, I can look back and see that my closest relationships were always with other women. So it was on a mission and once I came to terms with that, it felt like I had come back home.

Margaret: So you didn't feel like, "Oh, I am bad. I am lost. I am going to hell"?

Lee: I didn't. My biggest concern was in talking with my parents and with some of my friends, who at that time, because I was at BYU, were Mormon. I was afraid of their disapproval or even their rejection of me.

Margaret: Well, have you felt rejected by your friends? I mean, has that been a difficult road? Do you feel accepted by people in the Mormon community once they know you are lesbian?

Lee: My experience has been very positive. My parents have been very loving and kind. We openly discuss the fact that they are sad at the fact that their daughter is a lesbian. However, they love me and are very good to me. And my friends, probably because they don't feel the same sense of responsibility that my parents do, have been wonderful,

Mormon, non-Mormon alike.

Margaret: What about you, Kelli? Was it hard to feel accepted in the community, once you were seen as a lesbian woman?

Kelli: I never had to deal with rejection too much. I don't know if I just don't take it in or if I don't get it. I'm not sure. I know that some people have had a very rough row to hoe in that respect, but I haven't. My family is not Mormon. In fact, they were thrilled when I became a lesbian instead of a Mormon. And my friends—I guess I have always chosen friends who were sort of marginalized in the church anyway, the ones who were not the mainstream. I just never had an issue. Something you said earlier, though, I want to make a point about that. You asked if it was hard to come out and if it was painful, if we thought we were evil. I said, “no.” But the truth is, before I actually said, “I am in love with a woman,” the whole time I was internally trying to fight it, all during college, underneath the surface I had this fear that “Oh, no! What if I am one of those?” That was extremely painful for me. I couldn't even look at a picture of Boyd K. Packer without sweating. I just felt horrible. But the moment when I could say, “I'm in love with a woman,” I was free. It was one of the few transforming moments in my life.

Margaret: What about the larger community? In the workplace or in any other circumstances, have you felt that you have been disliked or that there has been bias against you because you are lesbian?

Lee: I have not. While I was at BYU, I obviously had to silence myself, so I understand that. But I saw an end to that silence once I graduated and left BYU. And my experience at this point has been very positive. But once again, I think Kelli and I are more the exception than the rule at times because I have friends whose parents will not speak with them once they come out. I know friends who refuse to come out because of their career, or friends, or whatever. But I have not experienced that rejection, or any sort of hate crime, nor an obstacle at my place of employment.

Margaret: But you think that is an exception more than the rule?

Lee: Yes! Very much.

Margaret: What about you, Kelli?

Kelli: I can honestly say that I have had far more limitations put on my career because I am a woman than because I am a lesbian.

Margaret: Interesting.

Kelli: Even more so because I have been a feminist and an outspoken one. That does not go over well here.

Margaret: No.

Kelli: But in terms of being lesbian, I am fortunate enough

to be working for one of the companies in Utah that openly offers benefits to domestic partners and has an anti-discrimination clause for sexual orientation. And they have been very responsive whenever I have had issues or whenever other gay employees have had issues. I guess there are always one or two people who discriminate. The difference is if it's because you are a lesbian, there are people who won't look at you. They won't talk to you, they won't have anything to do with you, and it's pretty clear cut. If it's because you are a woman, then it is almost invisible. But it's just as deadly. They'll smile and talk to you, but they just don't take you seriously. So I almost would rather have the kind of discrimination against being lesbian because at least I know who they are.

Margaret: My next question for you is this: Both of you have more or less left the LDS Church, although you have Mormon backgrounds. Do you think it is possible to be an active Mormon and a lesbian? Do you know anyone who is?

Lee: I think it would depend on how a woman defines her lesbianism. If she sees herself as woman-identified, where she has intimate female friendships but is not looking at a partnership per se that might include an intimate physical relationship, she might be able somehow to negotiate a space for herself. However, I think she would have to acknowledge her discomfort. I don't think Mormonism allows you to be a homosexual who is out, whether gay or lesbian, and feel very comfortable attending church every Sunday.

Margaret: Kelli, what is your experience with this?

Kelli: Yes, I have to agree with Lee. I don't know anyone who identifies as lesbian and is an active Mormon. They try it for a little while, and then they have to stop trying. And again it's what Lee said earlier, it's not because they can't do it. It's because the church won't let you do it. I can't really imagine coming to sacrament meeting with your lesbian lover sitting next to you on the pew and have everyone acknowledge your relationship and let you be who you are. I don't know any wards like that. Maybe there are some, but I have never seen it.

Margaret: You don't know any women, then, that are in a lesbian relationship and *hide it and are still active in the Church*?

Kelli: No.

Margaret: Why do you think they don't see that as an option?

Kelli: Well, for me it's because it's just too much. You go to church and relatively routinely—straight people probably don't hear it—the slams against gays and lesbians are there. It's every day. In some little way you'll get something: “The way you get to heaven is by being a man and a woman in a couple.” Or, “God doesn't like you if you are this or that.” And it's almost too much to carry. I have seen women who are clearly lesbian, who are Mormon, but

living in straight marriages.

Margaret: Do you think they know they are lesbian?

Kelli: Oh, yes, in private they will acknowledge they are lesbian, but they view it as a temptation. "Oh, Satan is tempting me today. I saw a woman and I felt these stirrings." I just can't imagine a more miserable life.

Margaret: Lee, did you have a response?

Lee: I don't think it's just doctrine that prohibits lesbians from attending church on a regular basis. As Kelli mentioned, guilt might bring them back temporarily, but they'll feel out of place. Furthermore, I think about the importance of community. So many people go to church not only for the worship but also for the sense of community. And if you were trying to attend church with your partner, it seems, to me, that in order for you to stay you would have to be invisible. People could not acknowledge you and your partner. Thus, what community would you have? And I think that is another reason why so many lesbians leave the church and seek another community.

Margaret: I think it was you, Kelli, who mentioned that within the Mormon paradigm women have to have the husband and the children and the nice Mormon family. You're supposed to think of heaven in those terms. This makes me wonder about spirituality and how you think about that. Do you think that when Mormon women who are lesbians leave the church, they give up their Mormon spirituality? Do they have to develop an entirely new kind of spirituality? Or do you think there is still something in Mormonism that they can hold on to? Do they still have parts of their Mormon faith, or does it have to become something completely new?

Kelli: That is a really good question. I know a lot of women who, when they leave the Mormon Church, will go into various kinds of goddess worship or paganism. This happens not just in the Mormon Church but in the Catholic Church or wherever, but I always find that there is a pretty fundamental underpinning to it all. I don't find that people change too much from the religion of their youth. You know the way that they are brought up to think about God and themselves in the bigger universe is pretty hard to put off. At least it has been for me. I still find myself with some fairly standard Christian ideas. For example, I feel that I need to live a good life and that God has an opinion about what kind of life I lead and so on. So, I guess I was thinking of this just recently; I don't feel that internally I am a very different person now than when I was Mormon. I still look at things pretty much the same way.

Margaret: Do you still think of yourself as a spiritual person?

Kelli: Very much so.

Margaret: And you have an inner spiritual life that's important to you?

Kelli: Yes, I have changed the outer form of it. I will never kneel to pray anymore. It's too closely tied to when I would pray that I could be different. You know, "Please God, don't let me be a lesbian." Or, "Don't let me have these thoughts." So it's pretty emotionally tied to that, so I don't do that. But in terms of just who I am, my outlook on the world has not changed that drastically.

Margaret: What about you, Lee?

Lee: Well, I consider myself an agnostic.

Margaret: Do agnostics have a spiritual life?

Lee: Yes, but in a very different sense. When I spoke of the issues that I have addressed with my parents, the fact that I have a lack of faith, or a belief in God, is perhaps the most disturbing to my parents. However, I think because of my parents being such good people and so kind, I don't see a difference between when I was Mormon and attending church and now that I have, per se, left the church. I think I try and contribute to my community. I think that is why I am here talking this morning.

Margaret: Right.

Lee: I think I try to live a good, ethical life.

Margaret: Do you consider yourself Mormon, though?

Lee: Culturally, yes. I think as far as the spirituality, or belief in the doctrine, no.

Margaret: Do you care about the Mormon community or about changing the Mormon community?

Lee: Without a doubt. In particular, I think, because of my experience at BYU. I was there eight and a half years. I had a chance to meet so many people, women in particular. Because of the friendships that I built there and the fact that many of them are in a lot of pain, I want to do something. Once again, guilt seems so pervasive throughout this religion, and I am very concerned about that. And so I have been very willing to share my experience and talk with women. So, yes, because in one sense it is my culture, and it has been one of the many I am a part of. Communities are important to me.

Margaret: Talking about community, what are the stereotypes that people have about lesbians? And if you could do something to change these stereotypes, what would you do? How would you fight some of these stereotypes? Kelli, what are the stereotypes that you see?

Kelli: Well, the stereotypes of the outside community don't concern me too much. I am worried more about the stereotypes that the lesbian community itself internalizes and adopts. The ones I see most clearly are that you have to look a certain way, or act a certain way, or have your hair cut that one way.

Margaret: What's that one way?

Kelli: Sort of what you call a bi-layer haircut. And you have to wear the Birkenstocks, no, not Birkenstocks . . .

Margaret: . . . Doc Martens.

Kelli: Doc Martens. Thanks. You know, whatever the uniform is, that's who you are supposed to be if you are lesbian. I've seen lots of women who come from all different lifestyles. You know, polyester Mormon moms coming into being lesbians, and they immediately take on this role. And I feel very out of place. I feel that I don't belong because I don't look like that. I wish that we could just be whoever we are, that we didn't have to be or look a certain way in order to be lesbian.

Margaret: I always hate that in feminism too. It seems to me, that same idea is in feminism when we start having the party line requirements: to be a good feminist you have to be A, B, C, D, E, and so forth. I mean, one of my personal gripes is the feeling that I shouldn't like high heels and pantyhose if I want to be a real feminist. So I think it is very interesting that this happens so often in marginalized groups, that they start wanting a group identity almost. Lee, what are the stereotypes that you see and dislike?

Lee: Well, I would just like to reemphasize the contradictions because so often you hear feminists, or women, or people of color, or gays and lesbians asking to be accepted in spite of their differences. And then, as Kelli and you have both addressed, we ask people we see in our community to erase those differences and try and negate their personal style. I think that is so damaging for them. Kelli, you and I on another day talked about the stereotype of lesbians being women who hate men. I do not hate men. I have a very close relationship with my father and my two brothers. However, I recently was reading something I thought was very important. It made me see that sometimes the reason you find lesbians who put up a wall between themselves and men is because of the violence that has been committed against them or other women. Sometimes it is violence that leads women or lesbians to hate themselves or each other. And I think that is why you see that need for some sort of group identity, often as an outward appearance, such as a uniform.

Margaret: It gives you a strength against the outward community. There are so many other questions that we could ask, but we are running out of time. I would, though, like to ask another question. Both of you have had a lot of experience in the Mormon community. If you had to give some advice to a young Mormon woman who was afraid that she might be a lesbian, what advice would you give her? Or maybe it's a young Mormon woman who knows she is, and is proud of that, and yet still wants to be Mormon. What advice would you give a woman like this?

Kelli: I think the most important thing is to realize that you may not at a young age have all of the tools you need to deal with the choices you are going to be making. And you do not necessarily have to push it. For example, at age 16, 17, or 18 you feel like maybe you are a lesbian, or you don't know if you are or aren't. At that age there is too much fear around the choice for you to make any rational judgments about it. You have got to get away from some of the fear, and you'll know more clearly as you get a little older. It's going to get a lot easier. I would tell them to be patient with themselves and with their families. And remember that when you do come out, to not expect everyone to immediately say, "Okay, I accept this." Because you have been living with this for years, and they have been living with it for maybe the twenty minutes since you first told them. People sometimes need a little bit of time.

Margaret: And you have to give them time to reach and make a change.

Kelli: Exactly.

Margaret: What about you, Lee? What advice would you give?

Lee: Once again, I have to go back to my experience of being on a mission and being at BYU. What I found out was, once I had kind of wrestled with this myself, the best thing I did was start talking to others, perhaps people who I felt liked me for who I was, which was much more than a lesbian. That sense of community that I began to discover was helpful, and it wasn't just with lesbians. It was often with people who had doubts about religion or felt marginalized for some reason. The sharing of the pain, or the questions, or whatever, was very helpful for me. So I would say, "Don't be afraid to talk with a friend or a sister or even a bishop because we are talking about being Mormon." Of course, it depends on the bishop.

Margaret: That scares me. You think it can be okay?

Lee: In my experience at BYU there was one bishop who was very encouraging, who spoke to many of my friends who were gay, who spoke to their parents and helped their parents come to terms with it. And I know that, once again, my experience is often the exception. But I think it might be helpful. But talk, talk to people.

Margaret: Talk to people. Don't be afraid. I appreciate both of you coming here today. It takes courage, I think, even when you've been out and even when people know. And I think one of the dangers, too, is that once you speak out as a lesbian, sometimes people will want to reduce you to being the token lesbian in the group. And no one likes to be reduced to a type, either a stereotype or just the token person. So I appreciate both of you coming here and sharing your experiences and insights.

TO SEE AND BE SEEN: A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE AND THE “60 MINUTES” SPOTLIGHT ON THE MORMON CHURCH

April 1996

Margaret: On Easter Sunday two events happened which have important implications for Mormon women: The Semi-Annual General Conference of the LDS Church convened, and the national news program “60 Minutes” ran a segment on the Mormon Church featuring a lengthy and unprecedented interview with President Gordon B. Hinckley. *Mormon Women’s Forum Quarterly* staff members Lavina Fielding Anderson and Deborah Rossiter agreed to do a feminist critique of these two news stories. I want to begin by talking about the image of Mormon women in the “60 Minutes” news story. Did we get a positive view of Mormon women? How do you think Mormon women are portrayed in this news story, Deborah?

Deborah: Well, one of the points that bothered me wasn’t what President Hinckley said, but was in Mike Wallace’s narration. In the voice-over narration, Mike Wallace talked about how Mormon women didn’t seem to mind taking a secondary position and having men dominate the leadership of the church. I thought to myself when I heard that, “I wonder if most Mormon women are going to like that view of themselves.” It seems like a lot of women spend their time denying that we’re secondary. In fact, you saw that in conference with President Hinckley’s comment after Chieko Okazaki’s talk.

Margaret: Yes, we like to say that women are strong, that they’re equally as important as men. But you don’t think that was true in how they were portrayed?

Deborah: Well, they said right in the narrative that Mormon women didn’t mind being there.

Margaret: Yes, I have the quote. It’s an interesting one. This was in the little segment that dealt with women and the priesthood. In a voice-over where you see people filing into a church building, Mike Wallace says, “Fact is most Mormon women don’t want to be priests. They accept that men control the church and dominate Mormon society.” So that’s what he said, and your question is very interesting. We as feminists obviously don’t like this, but what about women in general? Do you think that both of those statements go together? He says that women don’t want to be priests, and they accept that men dominate. Do you think that all women who don’t want the priesthood are also comfortable with the idea of men dominating?

Deborah: No. In fact, I think that most women, when they try to defend the church’s position, like to say, “Well, we have just as much power as men. It’s just that our voice is a different sort of voice. We’re separate-but-equal.” This is the kind of argument they give.

Margaret: Yes, that “separate-but-equal stuff.” I want to go back to the general question and get your feel on this, Lavina. If you were a non-member looking in, what would you think of Mormon women if you saw this program?

Lavina: I think that it was pretty clear that Mormon women were supplemental; they were adjunct; they were ornamental. No Mormon woman’s voice was heard except a brief statement by a BYU co-ed, describing somewhat distractedly how she could have a good time without getting drunk. And although there were women in some of the shots, they were background shots. There were women singing among the male missionaries; but President Hinckley was obviously speaking only to the men when he addressed the missionaries. He said, “Here you are; you all look alike in your white shirts and ties.” Well, the women were not wearing white shirts and ties. He didn’t see them. There was about a five-second footage shot while Mike Wallace was doing a voice-over statement about how leaders served without recompense, and Mormons paid 10 percent of their income for tithing. During that five seconds President Hinckley was walking down the hall shaking hands with five people. The first person was Elder [James] Paramore. The second person was Helen Paramore, the general authority’s wife. The third person was Pat Holland, also the wife of a general authority. She held out her hand for President Hinckley to take it. He moved right past her and took the hand of her husband, Jeff Holland, also a general authority. Pat quickly changed her gesture into a pat on his sleeve, so she didn’t just drop her hand. And then President Hinckley went straight on to shake the hand of a missionary who was in the background. I think that that shot spoke volumes.

Margaret: Oh, it does.

Lavina: We saw Sister Hinckley get out of a car and walk for a few steps beside President Hinckley. He did not look at her. He did not speak to her. He kind of had hold of her arm and was pulling her along. I think that there were two

women in the group of four people who were introduced as critics, but none of the women said anything. There were two women in the group of BYU students, and one of them said two sentences. So, I think the conclusion is that Mormon women are present, but they should be seen and not heard. They should be pleasant, they should be polite, they should be passive.

Margaret: So, we have the same old message again: the either silent or absent woman.

Lavina: Absolutely.

Margaret: I found it very interesting that all of the men they chose to speak were influential and powerful men. You had a lengthy interview with Hinckley; Steve Young, the sports celebrity; Orrin Hatch, the political person; Willard Marriott, the financial magnet. Right? And then you had Steve Benson, the critic but also the nationally-known cartoonist.

Lavina: Although he was not introduced by any of his credentials.

Margaret: No, he wasn't.

Lavina: He was made to sound like the spoiled grandson of a church hierarch.

Margaret: Yes, and also as the person who simply couldn't live the rules. Right?

Lavina: That's right.

Margaret: Which was a very interesting comment.

Lavina: And, I think, really misrepresented him because he had served a mission and married in the temple. Steve Young has done neither of those things.

Margaret: Right. There was really not a fair view of many of these things. There is an imbalance here. The one woman who speaks on the program is the BYU student, who is almost nameless again. Who knows her? I don't think they even gave her a name.

Lavina: She wasn't identified.

Margaret: You know, why didn't they interview women like Chieko Okazaki; Christine Durham, of the Utah Supreme Court; Marie Osmond, if they wanted to do a celebrity?

Lavina: And then, of course, we have a political woman like Enid Green Waldholtz.

Margaret: [laughing] That's right. They could have talked to her. But, I think this is interesting because, as you say, the image of Mormon women was that they are silent, submissive, passive. Is this a true image? Let me ask this question in a different way: Who is at fault here for the image of women? Is it "60 Minutes," or is it the LDS Church, or maybe both of them? What do you think? Who's responsible for the image?

Lavina: I think Mormon women share some responsibility for this. I think Mormon women are used to having their existence defined by men. I think they're used to deferring to men. I think they're used to being sure that a man approves if they speak and how they speak. And I think it's easy for the men to patronize them, flatter them, take advantage of their willingness to work for nothing, praise them by telling them how indispensable they are as mothers, basically to ghettoize and marginalize them. They have no public role. They have no public voice.

Margaret: What do you think, Deborah? Who's to blame here? What brings this about, this image?

Deborah: Well, you know, I had thoughts about this when they spoke about women being willing to let men control things. I thought about polygamy and how many women would say, "Polygamy's fine. It works really well for me; it's working." But you would find in the diaries of these women that they weren't happy. They wanted to support the church. They wanted to support the leadership. So they would publicly make these comments. And I wonder if that's not what's happening now. I wonder if women are making these comments because they feel like they have to be supportive, that if they don't, they're seen as critics. But inside they are conflicted. It is hard for them to go to church and always see men in control, and always see men running things, and never get to make decisions about people they care about.

Margaret: This is very important. I want to touch on two other things quickly in the "60 Minutes" program, and then I want to move on to General Conference and the image of women there. One thing that was puzzling to me in the "60 Minutes" story (and this goes along with who's responsible for the image of women) is the whole stance that Mike Wallace took in the program. Mike Wallace was the interviewer. You know, he's the veteran, the old guy who knows how to hit hard. And yet he didn't. I found that he was very soft. Two issues could have been very important for women: one was the women and the priesthood issue, the other was the child abuse issue. He asked about both of these; Hinckley gave an answer; and he didn't really come back with any hard questions. For example, when he asked about women and the priesthood, he said, "Are women ever going to be priests?" And President Hinckley responds, "No, because the revelation says the priesthood is only for men." Well, I think if Mike Wallace had done his homework, he would have found from women like you and me that there is no such revelation. You know, why didn't he push harder on this? What's the effect of that? Let's talk about the child abuse issue too.

Lavina: I want to comment just for a second on the failure to follow up on the revelation. I think it was a conspicuous omission from the whole program that the claim of con-

tinuing revelation, which has been the glory of Mormonism for 170 years, was not mentioned anywhere in the program. Instead we got funny underwear, which is hardly a theological distinction. And I don't know if it was one of the things that was mentioned and was cut, but it seems to me that anyone in the viewing audience would say, "You mean God gave a revelation that women weren't supposed to be priests? What was God's rationale?" It cried out for a follow-up question, and yet it seemed barely important enough to mention before we went on to child abuse, which was described even worse as a "blip here and a blip there."

Margaret: Yes, even though President Hinckley admitted there was some, as you say, he described it as, "Well, you know, this is one of those mistakes that happens here and there." Deborah, what message do you think that women and children who saw the segment on child abuse got from President Hinckley's response?

Deborah: Well, I think that they would be less likely to go to the church or their ecclesiastical leader because the attitude of it just being a blip makes you wonder if they will believe you, because obviously they don't think it's a major problem. I mean, the impression I got from President Hinckley was a minimization of the problem. So if you're having that problem, you feel minimized.

Margaret: Right. Even though he did say it was a horrible thing and that we preach against it, he minimized the occurrence in the church, I think, or the responsibility of the church. Is that how you read it, Lavina?

Lavina: Well, he said, "We're teaching clergy how to handle this. We're working very hard at it, but it's everywhere." In other words, this isn't a Mormon problem, this is a world problem. And look, here we are on the forefront trying to take care of it. The manual that they showed, "Ecclesiastical Helps," is eleven years old!

Margaret: And so it hasn't been updated at all with the recent research?

Lavina: No. And it's a pretty mushy manual too, I can tell you.

Margaret: Mike Wallace did ask him this question: "You know, some research shows that the sort of patriarchal structure of the church encourages this and makes it difficult for women to deal with this." President Hinckley denied it. He said, "Well, that's one person's opinion." To me this is more of the same thing that makes it difficult for women. I know, Lavina, you've dealt with a lot of these child abuse cases in the Mormon Alliance. Do you think that there is evidence that the church, the patriarchal structure, encourages this?

Lavina: Well, I think it was unconscionable in terms of the interview for the study that Mike Wallace brought up to

be brushed off in that way. That was a very reputable study done with 71 women at BYU who had experienced sexual abuse. It was a very specific, identifiable study. You could tell from the context what the study was. Ten of the women had not even bothered to approach their priesthood leaders because they felt that they were going to have a bad experience. Five women had and had had a good experience. The rest had had negative experiences. We're talking about over seventy percent of women who went to their priesthood leaders hoping for help—adult women, adult professional women at a university—felt that they were not helped. Ten percent had had sufficiently bad experiences that they did not even want to approach a leader. And these are all active women, active, functioning women. For Mike Wallace to brush that off—and he had the study—and for President Hinckley to brush it off as one person's opinion—and it wasn't one person's opinion, it was four people's opinion—I think was major "under-the-rugging."

Margaret: I do too. It's not taking responsibility. So let's give this "60 Minutes" story an overall rating. I think we've determined that we have a "thumbs down" in how it dealt with women's issues. Do either of you have an opinion about what grade you would give it in terms of how it dealt with women's issues? A, B, C, D, fail? Deborah? Or do you just want to give it a thumbs down?

Deborah: Yeah, I think thumbs down would be a good review.

Lavina: I'd give it a D because I think that the editing showed the discrepancies. And so in a sort of subtextual way it says Mormon women are nothing in the Mormon Church and asks if that is how Mormon women want to be. I think that this is not a problem that Mormon men are going to solve; I think it's a problem for Mormon women to solve.

Margaret: Let's turn to the LDS General Conference which was aired the same day. Did Mormon women fare any better here, or do we have more or less the same thing but longer and harder? Deborah, what is your general opinion of this?

Deborah: Well, actually that one's easy because just the fact that most of the speakers were men and only two speakers were women shows right there that it's a problem. It's the fact that women are invisible.

Margaret: Do you think that that's the major problem, Lavina? The invisibility, the absence of women?

Lavina: I think it's the absence of women in a significant role. I'm actually just a little bit more encouraged here, just looking at the historical trends. Out of the 20 speakers of the general sessions of Conference—if we subtract the two women who, of course, were giving a message just by stand-

ing up in front of the camera so we could see that they were women—10 used inclusive language, had at least one example that involved women (although some of the examples were somewhat ambiguous), or used examples from the scriptures that included women. Now, I think that this represents a level of sensitivity that we didn't see five years ago and definitely didn't see 10 years ago. So, I think that there's a little bit more awareness of audience than there has been in the past.

Margaret: I agree with you. I felt that.

Lavina: I think they're less invisible. I wouldn't say they're partners yet, but less invisible.

Margaret: It's certainly slow, though. Wouldn't you say it's slow in terms of any kind of progress with the visibility of women?

Lavina: Well, Elder [Boyd] Packer has been quoted as saying, "Change comes to the church in two ways: very slowly and not at all." So, I think very slowly is progress.

Margaret: It's better than not at all, you're right.

Lavina: If we have to choose between the two.

Margaret: I want to go back to the two women speakers, Deborah. They were Chieko Okazaki and Susan Warner. How do you think they represent the rest of us? How do you think they came across? As Lavina said, just the fact that they're there is perhaps the most important image of all.

Deborah: Right.

Margaret: So how did you respond to them?

Deborah: Well, Okazaki's talk was actually one of my favorites. The part of her talk that I really liked, that moved me, was when she talked about learning from women. The groups that she mentioned are all groups that are sometimes marginalized in the church. She mentioned women who worked outside the home and women who worked in the home; she talked about learning from divorced women, single mothers, women that had been abused. She taught that you could learn from anyone and that she wasn't just setting herself up as a leader who was going to take care of them and teach them, but that they had taught her.

Margaret: So you think the most important thing she did was try to establish a new kind of model for interaction between leaders and members and other people. I think that fits in with her general topic. Don't you?

Deborah: Oh, yes. And she's really a strong advocate for diversity and for accepting women for who they are. I mean, look at her metaphor of the fruit baskets.

Margaret: Maybe you could explain that to our audience.

Deborah: She talked about how people in Hawaii would gather fruit and put it in baskets.

Margaret: Women, right?

Deborah: Right. But in Utah, women often gathered fruit, and then they bottled it. She held up a bottle of peaches and this basket of tropical fruit, and she said the container doesn't matter. It's the fruit of your labor, the things that you do, that matter. Everyone can have their own style of doing things.

Margaret: Yes. I love the way that she talked about diversity, that we're united in our faith and in our love and our support of each other, but we are not the same. And at the same time that she's trying to erase differences, she also wants to say differences are okay. I thought that paradox was really wonderful. Lavina, did you have a reaction to her speech?

Lavina: Well, I think that the other strong message that came from her is that she—and I think that this may have been what prompted President Hinckley's comment after her talk—quoted a blessing he had given her about her voice, that she would be blessed in speaking to many audiences and that she would represent the international audience. Then—and this is phenomenal if you stop to think of it—this woman who does not speak Spanish or Korean, or Tongan or Samoan said she taught herself to read in those languages so that she could go to regional conferences there and read in those languages. I think that if we're looking for role models of people who set high goals and have high standards of service, that was pretty extraordinary. Also, she spoke with a lot of energy, a lot of passion. And then President Hinckley got up and made this kind of joke.

Margaret: Yes, let's talk about that. I thought that was one of the most interesting comments of the whole conference. After she had finished giving this marvelous talk—very powerful, not at all the kind of whimpering little Relief Society voice that you sometimes hear—President Hinckley said, "Who says Mormon women in the church don't have a powerful voice?" Now, let's do a little analysis of that. How do we read that? "Who says Mormon women in the church don't have a powerful voice?" Do they? Don't they? We just said they basically don't. Are we contradicted by Okazaki? Is President Hinckley right, Deborah? What's your read of his comment?

Deborah: Well, if women have such a powerful voice, then why aren't more women speaking at General Conference? And if women have such a powerful voice, why can't they be visible in more leadership positions? Why can't they have more autonomy? Why do they have to run everything through the Brethren, which the General Relief Society Presidency have to do? Even Okazaki. And so it made me

feel like, “Look, here’s our token woman and isn’t she great?” She got a pat on the back. It seemed rather patronizing to me.

Margaret: What’s your read, Lavina?

Lavina: There were two other things happening, too. He, in praising her, acknowledged that there has been criticism that Mormon women are suppressed. But the other thing that he did is he appropriated her talk. He approved it, he brought it into male discourse. He didn’t wipe it out.

Margaret: He couldn’t. It was too strong. But he did appropriate it. I agree with you.

Lavina: I was tickled by that. It meant he had to acknowledge it. That didn’t happen with anyone else’s talk in the eight to ten hours.

Margaret: Well, I thought hers was the most powerful and the most spiritual of all the talks that were given in conference. I found his comment to be extremely ironic, like you say, Deborah, because, on the one hand, who could say this wasn’t a powerful voice? But where does her power come from? It is not because she has a position like President Hinckley, but because she is charismatic and strong. Yet, as you say, Deborah, it points out the fact that women don’t have official voices. And, in fact, the Relief Society always has to go through men to get anything accomplished. I don’t know; I found it so ironic.

Lavina: Except, of course, they do. She was given the forum at General Conference, in front of President Hinckley, by President Hinckley. She was quoting President Hinckley.

Margaret: Yes, again, with his approval. And she does support him in her speech. Yet she appropriates his approval, too. So I don’t know; there are ironic twists. Well, we’re almost running out of time. I want to quickly ask you what are the high points and low points for women in this Conference? Deborah, what was your high point?

Deborah: My high point would be Okazaki’s talk.

Margaret: What about the low point for you?

Deborah: The low point would be the Young Women’s Conference.

Margaret: Why?

Deborah: Because I think the theme was sustain the prophets. It seems like whenever you have people saying, “Sustain me, follow me, give me authority,” they don’t have real authority. They push it on the women more than anyone else. And that’s the message the Young Women got.

Margaret: Was there anything else that particularly discouraged you?

Deborah: The metaphor that one of the speakers used about

playing golf, which I don’t think . . .

Margaret: In the women’s session a woman used a male example.

Deborah: Right. She used the male example, and the women couldn’t really relate to that. She talked about her sons playing golf.

Lavina: This was President Hinckley’s daughter who made the statement, too.

Margaret: Oh, I didn’t realize it was his daughter.

Lavina: Virginia Hinckley Pearce.

Margaret: Lavina, what about the high point and low point for you in the Conference?

Lavina: Well, with Deborah I would agree that Chieko Okazaki’s talk was the high point. The low point for me was looking at the Young Women’s choir that was singing that horrible song called, “As I Follow the Prophet, I Can Feel the Savior Near.” They were all dressed in these pastel colors. They had sort of ratty, blond hair that was the same color. They’d all been threatened within an inch of their life if they moved. You could tell because they didn’t; they did not even move forward to sing. They were frozen. And these pallid, passive teenagers—my heart just sank.

Margaret: Which was a contrast to the lovely Tongan girl who gave the opening prayer.

Lavina: Yes.

Margaret: I was glad they had her.

Lavina: And whenever they panned the audience, women were wearing bright colors. They were a variety of ethnic groups. Their hair was arranged differently.

Margaret: But we had that pallid chorus. A final question: What’s our overall grade for the conference? Are we doing well at valuing women and encouraging women’s voices? How are we doing as a church? How does the General Conference reflect this? Do you have a grade for this, Lavina?

Lavina: I’d give it a C because it’s better than it was five years ago, but there’s a long way to go.

Margaret: A long, long way. What about you, Deborah? What would you give it?

Deborah: I was just thinking I’d give it a C- because until there are more women speakers, I don’t think it can even get a C.

Margaret: And I think it’s important to say that we’re not going to have more women speakers until women are real leaders in the church, and they have real power, ecclesiastical power.

From the Internet

COMPILED BY STACY BURTON

On Primary Manuals: May 1996

Last night I reviewed one of the new Primary manuals in preparation for a stake meeting. (We're trying to focus Primary teachers back on the scriptures and scripture stories and away from lessons and sharing time based on Bookcraft.)

So there I was searching for the scripture stories used in the lessons when I suddenly realized that the non-scripture stories I was seeing in the lessons were all about little boys. Nothing new there, you say. I decided to keep track.

This was *Primary 2*, the manual for Choose the Right A, 4-7 year olds, being used for the first time this year.

In the first 12 lessons there were 10 non-scripture stories. Nine had little boy main characters and one had a little girl character. In the "girl" story she was engaging in bad behavior that needed correcting. All nine of the "boy" stories showed boys as heroes, engaging in praiseworthy behavior.

Could the imbalance really be this bad throughout the whole manual? I wondered. Well, by the end of the 46 lessons, we had 36 stories with boy main characters and 28 with girl main characters. Not as hopelessly unbalanced as I had feared.

However, the content of the stories and the portrayal of male and female figures was shocking. Of the 36 boy stories, 84 percent showed boys in heroic behavior and 16 percent showed boys behaving badly and learning to do better. Several of the boy stories were about little boys who grew up to be noble, important adults. Of the 28 girl stories, only 39 percent showed girls engaging in praiseworthy behavior while a nearly equal number (36 percent) showed them behaving badly and having to be corrected. The

remaining 22 percent of girl stories showed the girls in a passive role, being taught or given a blessing by a priesthood holder. Not a single story showed a little girl growing up to be a praiseworthy adult.

Clearly our Primary children are being taught that boys are stronger, smarter, more capable, of higher moral character, and with greater potential than are girls. Girls get into trouble more than do boys. Girls don't grow up to be strong adults. Girls are passive, dependent, and weak.

If the manuals have been like this all along, no wonder so many of my sisters in this ward "don't want the priesthood," don't feel they are capable of leaving an abusive relationship, are unable to make decisions, feel overwhelmed when asked to teach a Relief Society lesson once a month, prefer making crafts in the safety of the church building to giving community service.

I wouldn't have been so surprised to see this imbalance in older manuals, but this is a brand new one!

Elisabeth Schafer

This information needs to go to the Church Primary Presidency, General Relief Society Presidency, and First Presidency/Quorum of the Twelve. I find this very disturbing.

Carlan Bradshaw

This was a fascinating piece—I remember that in Young Women (I'm a convert, so I didn't go to Primary) I just had to identify with all the good boy stories in the scriptures and sort of ignore their gender roles. However, I do recall wondering why some of the questions I had about life were NOT answered in the scriptures, as promised ("you can find all the answers in the scriptures . . ."), but now see it was because there were precisely

NO good examples of females except for loyalty and devotion to someone else, generally.

Carolyn Jew

I have always been amazed at this fact in all of our manuals and stories. I made a trip to [the] Sunstone [Symposium] in Seattle just to hear Jerrie Hurd give a paper on young women in the scriptures. It was amazing what she had found and could apply to lessons for young women. I have used her examples many times since then and have all of her books for reference [*Leaven: 150 Women in Scripture Whose Lives Lift Ours* (1995), *Our Sisters in the Bible* (1983), and *Our Sisters in the Latter-day Scriptures* (1987)]. I think more of us need to change the examples and stories we use so that we get some positive role models out there. I haven't seen any of the new manuals due to not having a calling at the present time, but will have to check this out with friends. If they are all like this one we need to get vocal or just rely on personal revelation to prepare lessons. I've relied on it often—which is one reason that no one could ever tell what lesson number I was on when I taught Relief Society.

Sandi McKell

I have counted the girl stories in a Primary manual before with the same sorts of results—girls were consistently portrayed as passive, naughty, or in need of help.

My grassroots answer is that I teach Primary with all kinds of substitute stories—change genders, change stories, offer new heroes who are savvy or resourceful instead of macho, talk about strong women, and so on. In my ward's Primary they always sing "I'm so glad when mommy comes home" and even "the wise woman built her house upon the rock." (Or "the wise one," in our PC nursery.)

This, of course, is no solution to the overarching problem. But it's one small place I can do something.

Luana Uluave

I found it disturbing, back in the early eighties, when I was teaching Primary. *The Friend* and *The New Era* were almost equally guilty at that time. Since I was in the mission field then, and teaching kids who went to very balanced secular classes, the children picked up on the imbalance as well. I had seven- and eight-year-olds, who objected to the fact that we never had stories about girls, and asked why we don't know anything about any of the prophets' wives when they were little.

Kristy Sumner

Carolyn! Thanks so much for pointing this out! This is exactly what I did, also. I remember distinctly thinking that the male stories in the scriptures applied precisely to me. I remember thinking what a great striping warrior I'd be, and I was sure that I was going to go out and do exactly what the sons of Mosiah did. I even felt I could slay Goliath just like David. I never once worried that because I was female the role model didn't apply to me. I wonder what made me like that. Maybe it was the fact that I was the eldest child and only girl in my family (I had five younger brothers). At home I felt as good as (better, actually) than all the boys, so why not elsewhere as well?

I've wondered the same thing about the scriptures, but I'd say that there aren't any good answers for either gender in the scriptures.

Charlee Hodson

On Mother's Day May 1996

I never thought it could happen, but I walked out of sacrament meeting on Mother's Day feeling happy and full of hope. The first speaker was a 17-year-old girl named Lupe. She talked about a time when her Sunday School teacher had let them have a question-and-answer session for their lesson.

The girls all wanted to know why only men have the priesthood.

tried to get off the hook," she said, "with some lame answer like 'well, that's how God wants it.' So we asked him again, and he said 'well, women get to be mothers, instead.' We decided he must not have been in the delivery room when his wife had their children." Everyone laughed and waited for her to resolve the question, but she didn't—she just let the girls' dissatisfaction

with those answers hang in the air. She finished by talking about the "sons of Helaman," but there were no neat conclusions anywhere.

Then a woman from Swarthmore College who was just baptized last year spoke. She talked about how, as a feminist (yep, she said it over the pulpit), she had been suspicious about Mormon women from the beginning. She talked about the strengths of the women in the ward whom she had come to know, and how impressed she

has been with women who are making their own choices and coming to terms with their own visions of what their roles should be.

The last speaker talked almost entirely about Heavenly Mother, and what She might be like. He used adjectives like powerful, wise, kind, and creative. He concluded with this nearly perfect poem by e. e. cummings:

if there are any heavens my mother will(all by herself)have one. It will not be a pansy heaven nor a fragile heaven of lilies-of-the-valley but it will be a heaven of blackred roses

my father will be(deep like a rose tall like a rose)

standing near my

swaying over her (silent)

with eyes which are really petals and see

nothing with the face of a poet really which is a flower and not a face with hands

which whisper

This is my beloved my

(suddenly in sunlight

he will bow,

& the whole garden will bow)

[from e. e. cummings, *Complete Poems 1913-1962*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972]

Kristine Haglund

I wish I could have been there.

Craig Rossiter

On Blessings from Women May 1996

On this theme, how many women on this list have given blessings? I asked my wife for one, and she felt really uncomfortable giving it (this was just before we left the church). I enjoyed the experience, and I thought at the time that women should place themselves in the position of giving blessings and counsel more often.

Dave Smith

Blessings, hmmm. The discussion we had last year really had an impact on me, and I wondered why I felt no

interest in giving blessings. I thought about it again last week—we had just moved to D.C. and within five minutes of being in our new apartment Emma pulled a 20-pound barbell off the shelf onto her foot. It was swollen, bruised, and maybe broken, and she cried and cried, "Make it better. Make it better." Of course we didn't have a doctor here. (The end of the story is she limped for a few days but no permanent damage done.)

Anyway, I didn't give her a blessing. I thought about it and decided I just couldn't—not because I didn't feel like I deserved to or whatever,

but because it felt to me like the wrong thing to do. Instead I said a prayer for her, invoking my authority as her mother, and I held her and iced her foot and talked to her for several hours. (Jason and I alternated on the comforting, while the other did more unpacking.)

I can't articulate exactly why I have decided not to give blessings, but I don't feel like it's because I've been trained to be helpless in this way. I think it's more out of respect for a ritual that has been very meaningful to me throughout my life—to me, my rituals are meaningful because they are familiar, repetitive, and although I sometimes add rituals, I don't often change existing rituals. I don't think that's about doctrine or authority so much as about a meaningful symbol that I want to leave intact. I don't have any objections to anyone blessing anyone in whatever way seems right to the participants, but I'm pretty sure that I won't be giving priesthood-style blessings in my life (that is, unless I hold the priesthood :-)).

Luana Uluave

Lu, this is exactly what makes me so sad. Blessing others *was* a ritual experienced by Mormon women for decades. It's so sad that we now have several generations of women for whom this is not a real option.

Bryan Waterman

I wanted to share one of the most spiritual experiences I have ever had which took place last March 17. I had a series of medical problems that caused several weeks of inactivity and had asked my bishop and husband Stanley to bless me. The bishop seemed so reluctant that I felt puzzled, but finally concluded it was because I go to church so seldom. He is our home teacher also. He did give me a blessing, but basically I felt he was chastising me a little. He told me to "humble myself before the Lord," among other things.

I finally decided I wanted my friend Judy Loyd to give me a blessing. She

was the "bishop" to her local RLDS congregation for several years and is an elder in the church. I told Stan I had asked her to come over to give me a blessing, but he forgot. When he joined us that Sunday afternoon he was non-plussed when I told him Judy was going to give me a blessing and asked if he would like to join her. He said, "Of course."

This must have been a first in Mormon history, at least in modern church history: a man and woman giving a blessing. Judy is a good friend and is so self-assured and spiritual about her right to the priesthood that I felt totally confident in her "authority." It was such a beautiful experience. It was intimately and intensely personal as well as touching. We heard words we had never heard in normal male blessings. Tears were streaming down my face long before she finished. Stan anointed, and she blessed. She brought her own consecrated oil as she is called on from time to time to bless others in the local RLDS congregation. Stan was overwhelmed with the whole thing and felt it was "woman to woman and soul to soul."

It was a spiritual and comforting event, unlike the uncomfortable feeling I had when the bishop finished. Perhaps this was my own fault though. Perhaps I did not feel worthy for his blessing because I am not active. He is a good man and tries very hard to do his job. He has made it his challenge to get us back to the temple, I think. I told him I was a "live" Mormon, and I felt my first responsibility was to my family who need me now who are living. I don't believe in baptizing for the dead anyway, but I do believe in temple marriages.

I digress. Never have I felt the spirit of the Lord more than during that blessing. Judy's hands on my head felt so right. I would not hesitate to ask Mormon women for a blessing. If anyone wants to know why, just read page 80 of the latest *Sunstone* [March 1996]. Patty Sessions and other women were giving blessings all the

time and "rejoicing in the spirit of the Lord." We are missing out on some beautiful experiences, sisters. I hope everyone has at least one experience with someone like Judy that I experienced. Judy starting by saying: "Heavenly Parent, your daughter has asked for a blessing."

She ended by saying: "God, fulfill the desires of her heart and make her whole [and] restore her to health by the power of the Priesthood of God." She was not so restricted by all the jargon that I usually hear by male priesthood holders who have to make sure they have in all the correct terminology.

I apologize for this long post, but I did want to share it with this list because I think you will appreciate this experience. I will never forget it.

Violet Kimball

Vi, thanks for sharing this.

When I had been home from my mission only a few months I went to a midnight mass on New Year's Eve at a charismatic Lutheran church where my sort-of-girlfriend's father was the pastor. I was moved when the people to pass the bread and wine were a husband-and-wife team, and also liked the symbolism of tearing off my own piece of bread from the loaf. But the most moving thing of all came when the service broke down into small clusters of families and friends who prayed privately with each other. Of course my girlfriend's dad came over to where we were sitting. He put his hands on Heidi's head and gave what could have been a traditional Mormon father's blessing—stay firm in the faith, have a good semester at USC, and so on. But then her mother took over and did the same thing and I really had to fight being bitter that the same scene couldn't be played out in most Mormon families. I tried to explain to my parents how I felt about it but they just didn't get it.

Anyway—thanks again for your post.

Bryan Waterman

Womanwatch: An LDS Feminist Chronology

COMPILED BY LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON

TUESDAY, 15 APRIL 1997. Answering pre-submitted questions at Weber State University's Institute of Religion, President Gordon B. Hinckley said, "Girls should not feel any pressure to go [on missions]." Asked, "What are the qualities you admire most about your wife?" he drew laughter with his answer, "Endurance." (Associated Press, "Hinckley to Girls: It's OK to Skip Mission," April 19, 1997.)

Thursday, 1 May 1997. A BYU woman reported staying in an emotionally abusive marriage longer than she should have because "we are trained to be loving and trusting. . . . My biggest fear was that someone would disapprove of me." (Ashley Baker, "Looking for Mr. Right? Take the Time to Know," *(BYU) Universe*, 1 May 1997, 10.)

Thursday, 1 May 1997. From December 1980 through August 1981, women received 40 percent of all degrees awarded by Brigham Young University. In the December 1995 through August 1996 period, the percentage increased to 47. One BYU professor reported a General Authority gave a piano to his wife when she completed her degree by independent study. A related article encouraged women to enter nontraditional majors and quoted an instructor of technology education as saying, "It would be cool to see more young ladies enter the field. . . . We have 100 percent placement for our graduates and each graduate might have four or five job offers. Elementary education can't say the same." (Tiffany Lance, "More Women Finish Degrees,"

(BYU) Universe, 1 May 1997, 1, 14; Shawn Dickerson, "Some Majors Divide Along Gender Lines," *ibid.*, 14.)

Thursday, 1 May 1997. Asked for figures on the number of women serving LDS missions, Don LeFevre, LDS Public Affairs, said that three-fourths of all missionaries are young men while the remaining fourth consists of "sisters and couple missionaries." He also sidestepped a question about whether numbers have increased recently by commenting, "The number of missionaries in all categories—young elders, young sisters and older married couples—has increased over the years." (Michelle Kowalski, "Sisters Important Part of Church Missionary Program," *(BYU) Universe*, 1 May 1997, 1.)

Thursday, 1 May 1997. Barbara Washburn, wife of J. Ballard Washburn, who served in Africa's first Area Presidency, commented in an interview that "Those who criticize the position of women in the Church . . . have not heard what is happening in Africa, where the LDS Church is helping women gain equality." She cited the Relief Society literacy efforts and belonging to the Relief Society as "their own organization." She also reported that her husband "helped break down the gender barrier" when he "solicited" her needs and treated her "as an equal." Elder Robert Sackley refused to begin a meeting in which the men "had taken all of the chairs in the chapel, forcing the women to sit outside." He announced that "he would not speak until the

men were sitting by their wives." Although his action visibly "disgruntled the men," he waited until they complied. (Jonathan Bagley, "Relief Society Strengthens Africa," *(BYU) Universe*, 1 May 1997, 1.)

Saturday, 24 May 1997. In the *Church News* interview with newly called Seventy Duane B. Gerrard, his wife Kay Bennion Gerrard was quoted in answer to a question "about husbands who are heavily involved in career and Church service." Sister Gerrard said, "'As long as they're doing what they're supposed to do, you just work along with them.' . . . What time he spent with [their eight children] was valuable. 'They knew if he wasn't there, he was doing something else he should be doing.'" (Greg Hill, "Prayer, Hard Work Lead Elder Gerrard to 'Great Heights'," *Church News*, 24 May 1997, 6.)

Saturday, 24 May 1997. An American elm in a Salt Lake City park has attracted the attention of hundreds of devout Catholics who think they can see an image resembling Our Lady of Guadalupe in the configuration of a flat knothole, formed when a large branch was cut off some years ago. A liquid oozing from the surface impresses believers that "the Holy Mother is weeping." The city's urban forester says the liquid "is not exactly the same" as the watery substance exuded at weak spots in some tree species. The local diocese has no plans to investigate the phenomenon. Believers have surrounded the tree with candles, rosaries, crosses, flowers, and pictures of Guadalupe. They wait in line to climb a ladder to stroke the image, make the sign of the cross before it, and moisten handkerchiefs in the liquid. (Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Faithful See Hope in Image," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 May 1997, B-1.)

Wednesday, 27 May 1997. *BYU's Universe* began a three-part series on

rape prevention. Statistics reported in the first article included an average of 80 rapes reported in Utah County annually, with an estimated total, including unreported rapes, of 480. A BYU counselor estimated that each rapist commits an average of thirty rapes; another reported results of her survey that only 12 percent of women and three percent of men “spoke with someone” (not necessarily the police) after being sexually assaulted. Part two of the series featured the story of an anonymous BYU student who was raped on a date, reported it to the police, decided not to press charges, and then was raped repeatedly by the date and by five of his friends over a period of eight months. Finally, she went to the police again. Six of her attackers were charged with rape. Three were put on probation and forbidden to enter the state; the date was sentenced to five years. (Gina Blaser, “Rape Prevention: Part 1: Crimes Violate Human Soul,” and “Part 2: BYU Rape Victim Shares Story of 8-Month ‘Nightmare,’” *(BYU) Universe*, 27 May 1997, 1, 3; 28 May 1997, 1.)

Thursday, 29 May 1997. Three women students at BYU reported feeling pressure and ostracism because they didn’t go on missions. One had felt inspired not to go, another was taking medication for a continuing condition, and a third reversed a mission decision when she began dating someone seriously whom she did not marry. “People should try to be a little more understanding of women who are 21, unmarried, and aren’t going on missions. They’re not bad people,” one said. A religion professor and former mission president commented, “Quite frankly, a mission is not for all girls.” The article also featured two interviews with young women who felt a strong desire to serve. Danielle Smith of Monticello, Minnesota, had set a mission as her

goal when she was 12. Her father wanted her to get her “MRS degree” instead, and Smith felt that “her earthly father was asking her to disobey her Heavenly Father.” He eventually supported her. Another woman’s stake president cancelled his interview with her, saying: “We don’t have time to interview you because we have a lot of elders going on missions we need to interview.” He did not offer to reschedule the interview. (Carrie Williams, “BYU Women Describe Pressures to Serve,” *(BYU) Universe*, 29 May 1997, 8.)

Thursday, 29 May 1997. According to BYU sociologist Richard E. Johnson, between 1983 and 1992, forcible rape in Utah jumped 80 percent. Johnson commented that “Utah’s religious climate makes rape an especially difficult crime to track.” (Edward L. Carter, “Utah’s Juvenile Arrest Rate Ranks No. 1,” *Deseret News*, 29 May 1997, A-2.)

Monday, 3 June 1997. Brigham Young University was one of 25 schools against which the National Women’s Law Center filed complaints for Title IX violations. At BYU during the 1995-96 school year, women made up 52 percent of the student body, accounted for only 38 percent of the school’s varsity athletes, and received only 30 percent of the \$1,674,180 awarded to student athletes in aid. (Dan Egan, “BYU and USU Both Caught Off Guard by Group’s Charge,” *Deseret News*, 4 June 1997, B-1.)

Monday, 3 June 1997. John Parkinson, 64, an oncologist of Fairfield California, lost his license in 1995 after 28 women testified that they were given pelvic exams for ailments ranging from backaches to sore throats and were also given unorthodox cancer treatments. Parkinson, also a

stake president and father of nine, continued to treat an LDS mother and daughter from nearby Vacaville with pelvic exams that sometimes occurred several days in a row and lasted up to two hours or more. They went to the police when Parkinson told the daughter during a pelvic exam that he loved her and wanted to marry her. (After the death of Parkinson’s first wife from cancer in the early 1990s, he had married one of his patients.) The jury of seven women and one man found Parkinson guilty on “16 counts of genital or anal penetration by a foreign object for sexual purpose[s], and two felony counts of practicing medicine without a license.” (Associated Press, “Former Doctor Convicted of Sexually Abusing Patients,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 June 1997, A-18; interview notes in my possession.)

Thursday, 5 June 1997. Lisa Anne Grow, the first woman to graduate at the head of her Harvard Law School class, is a “devout Mormon” from Sandy, Utah, who will clerk, first for a federal appeals judge in Virginia, then, the following year, for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. She plans to return to Utah and stated, “I plan to do good things with my law degree, but it won’t be the focus of my life.” (Katherine Kapos, “First Woman to Top Harvard Law Class Happens to Be Utahn,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 June 1997, A-1, A-4; Marjorie Cortez, “Harvard Law School Graduate Is a ‘First,’” *Deseret News*, 5 June 1997, B-2.)

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In Volume 7, Numbers 3 & 4, the author of Almanac of the Dead was incorrectly identified. The novel was written by Leslie Marmon Silko. Our sincere apology to Ms. Silko and for any confusion this error caused.

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Search the Scriptures

The Power of God and the Problem of Evil

JANICE ALLRED

ONE OF THE MOST important obstacles to faith in God is the problem of evil. If God is good and he has all power and knowledge, why is there so much evil, pain, and suffering in the world? Most of us can think of many ways to improve the world. If we had the power of God we could really make a difference. Murderers, rapists, child abusers, plunderers, liars, and oppressors could be stopped or, at least, hindered in their violence against others. On the other hand, when we read scriptural passages that describe God's judgment and punishment of the wicked, we again question God's goodness. Most of us realize that from time to time we are sinners. We can imagine ourselves being punished by God and we ask, "How can a loving God punish and destroy his children?"

Juxtaposing these two concerns points to another way of looking at the problem of evil. If evil is violence against others, can we stop the evil by doing violence against the evildoers? How does violence against evildoers differ from violence against the innocent? Can we make a sharp distinction between sinners and the sinless? How can evil be eradicated? If we fight violence with violence, do we destroy evil or only perpetuate it?

Section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants addresses this problem structurally with the juxtaposition of curses on the wicked followed by a definition of the power of God as knowledge, love, and faithfulness. This section begins with a prayer uttered by Joseph Smith while he was imprisoned in the Liberty jail. In this prayer he calls upon the God of power to look with compassion upon the

wrongs and oppressions suffered by the people of the church and to intervene on their behalf. "Let thine anger be kindled against our enemies; and in the fury of thine heart, with thy sword avenge us of our wrongs" (D&C 121:5). The prayer is followed by the response that Joseph Smith received from God (7-25) in which God pronounces curses against the enemies of Joseph Smith who conspired through false allegations to have him jailed and killed and all those who oppress others for the purpose of subjugating and destroying them while claiming to be dealing with them justly. Does God bring about these curses by violent means? Before attempting to answer this question, I will examine the rest of this section, which deals with the nature of God's power.

We tend to think of God's power as sovereignty, as governing power, the power to make something happen, the power to issue commands and compel others to follow them. The sovereignty of God means that all things are under his control. Section 121 describes the power of God in a very different way. Immediately following the curses are several verses which describe how God will reveal knowledge to his people. They promise great revelations in the last days of knowledge which has been hidden and held in reserve for the end of the world. These verses seem to be an abrupt change of topic, but verses 33 and 34 suggest the connection.

How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it

upstream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints. (33)

Here the power of God is described as the power of nature, an overwhelming power that human beings cannot resist, the kind of power that we expect God to use to punish the wicked. Verse 33 says that puny man cannot hinder Almighty God from pouring down knowledge upon his people, but verse 34 stops the flowing cadence of the sentences abruptly. "Behold, there are many called, but few are chosen." It says that people do stop God from giving them knowledge. The next few verses explain how.

God does not relate to human beings like a force of nature, violently, destructively, and irresistibly, but in a personal way. Many are called to receive revelations, but they are not able to receive them because they do not understand the nature of God's power. This revelation explains the nature of God's power by discussing the abuse and proper use of priesthood power. Priesthood power, according to this revelation, is the power of God conferred upon human beings. Most of us, as soon as this power is conferred on us, begin to exercise it unrighteously. "We undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness" (37).

The addition of the phrase "in any degree of unrighteousness" leads many people to conclude that some types of control, dominion, and compulsion are righteous. This conclusion interprets the phrase "in any degree of unrighteousness" restrictively rather than nonrestrictively. A restrictive modifier restricts the domain of the subject it modifies. The difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive modifiers can be explained with an illustration. If I point to a bowl of red, yellow, and green apples and say,

"Take an apple which is red," "which is red" restricts the domain of the apples I am referring to. If I point to a bowl of all red apples and say, "Take an apple, which is red," then "which is red" describes the apples, but it does not put any restrictions on which of the apples may be selected; it is not essential to the meaning of my directive. In a text a comma before a modifier indicates that it is being used nonrestrictively. "In any degree of unrighteousness" is preceded by a comma, which indicates that it is being used nonrestrictively. This means that it refers to all kinds of control, dominion, and compulsion. Other textual evidence also supports this interpretation. Verse 46 indicates that compulsion is never righteous: "Thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever." If some types of compulsion were righteous, then it would be necessary to define the difference between righteous and unrighteous compulsion; but the revelation does not. Thus we can conclude that "in any degree of unrighteousness" is being used nonrestrictively and means "no matter in what degree of unrighteousness." Although some types of compulsion are more unrighteous than others, compulsion is always unrighteous.

The power of God cannot be controlled or handled except on the principles of righteousness. These principles recognize the free agency of every human being and regard her will as inviolate. The power of God does not operate by compulsion, it does not treat people as objects to be controlled, but it addresses them as subjects, as free moral agents with individual wills. The power of God does not compel, but it influences by love, persuasion, long-suffering, and knowledge.

The Spirit of the Lord is also depicted as a personal power in this revelation. It is not a mechanistic or natural power, but the power of per-

sonal beings interacting with other personal beings. The concept of priesthood is introduced in this context. Priesthood is thus a kind of community of personal beings, spiritual and mortal, who associate in love and mutual service.

This revelation points out two ways in which power can deal with evil righteously, without compulsion. The mildest way is described in verses 43-44.

Reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; That he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.

If someone offends us or injures us, we must tell him. If we see an injustice, we must call attention to it. If there are problems, we must point them out. Evil must be identified. But this must be done truthfully (when moved upon by the Holy Ghost), for the purpose of bringing about repentance, restitution, and reconciliation, and according to the principles of righteousness (showing forth an increase of love). "Thy faithfulness" in verse 44 refers to a person's commitment to relate to others personally, as subjects, without compulsion, in the bonds of love. The phrase, "the cords of death," refers to power exercised unrighteously through compulsion and/or lying for the purpose of controlling or exploiting others. The cords of death do not recognize the personal, subjective self of others, but treat them like dead objects. Using the cords of death kills authentic human relationships. "Thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death" means that the power of love, persuasion, long-suffering, and knowledge is greater than the power of compulsion.

A more extreme way that the power of God deals with evil and the type of evil that justifies the use of this

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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extreme measure are described in verse 37. Those who should be dealt with in this way are people who abuse their power by covering their sins (lying and refusing to accept the reproofs given them), by gratifying their pride and vain ambition (seeking to establish their superiority over others by exploiting them and not relating to them as subjects), and by exercising control, dominion, or compulsion over others (compelling them to act against their will). People who abuse their power in these ways put themselves outside the community of beings who associate in love and truth. When they do so, "the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or authority of that man. Behold, ere he is aware, he is left unto himself" (37-38). Although the unrighteous person uses compulsory means against others, the power of God still continues to act in a personal, non-compulsory way. Righteous beings are grieved, and they withdraw their help. They refuse to use their power to help people who abuse their power.

I will now return to the curses given in the first part of Section 121

to see if they are consistent with the principles I have discovered in the second part of the revelation. The curses given are against those who "swear falsely against my servants that they might bring them into bondage and death" (18) and discomfort, drive, murder, and testify against them. This covers all three ways of abusing power. By swearing falsely against others in order to justify their oppression of them as punishment, these abusers of power cover up their own sins. Discomforting, driving, and murdering are clearly compulsory means that gratify the pride of abusers by putting others in bondage to them (and killing them as subjects) or actually murdering them.

The curses against these people are as follows:

(1) They will not prosper materially.

(2) The evil "things which they are willing to bring upon others, . . . [will] come upon themselves" (13).

(3) "They and their posterity shall be swept from under heaven" (15). (It seems to me that posterity should not be interpreted literally here.)

(4) They will "be severed from the

ordinances of . . . [God's] house" (19) and "will not have [the] right to the priesthood" (21).

(5) They will "be despised by those who flattered them" (20).

(6) They will be sent to hell.

Does bringing about these curses fall within the scope of the righteous use of power defined in the second part of this section? Some of the curses (2 & 5) seem to be merely a prediction of what will befall such people. The wicked will punish the wicked. The fourth curse means that they will be expelled from the community of the priesthood. It is not obvious how (1), (3), and (6) can be effected without compulsory means, but it is possible that they might be brought about by withholding help.

Although Section 121 does not fully answer the questions I raise, it does offer some important insights for working toward answers. It defines the wicked as those who abuse power, sets forth the principles that govern the righteous use of power, explains how evil can be dealt with in righteous ways, and assures us that God deals with us, not by compulsion, but in a personal way.

This issue of the *MWF Quarterly* is the third of four double issues planned for publication in 1997 to get us back on schedule. Each of these counts as only one issue on your subscription.

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