

Mormonage

by Kevin G. Barnhurst

On Human Rights

"The Mormon puritanism of Salt Lake City and the garish hedonism of Las Vegas are not antithetical," says Outlook editor William Greider in the March 4 *Washington Post*. "They are flip sides of the same coin. Their core values are identical: In a harsh land, you conquer it or it conquers you. Conquering the land means making a profit and making a profit sometimes means leaving behind scars.

"Sometimes the scars are on people. . ."

Because both cities tend to subordinate human rights and individual needs to corporate and group profits, Greider classifies "Vegas and Salt Lake City, both geographically and spiritually" as part of the country's "Empty Quarter."

Greider's scathing remarks on spiritually empty profits were published the same day the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported that the Church's purchase of a downtown Salt Lake City block just north of the City-County Building had been "consummated." The property, valued between \$4 and \$5 million, was purchased ostensibly "to aid in development of the south end of the city's business district," according to J. Howard Dunn, head of the Church-owned Zion's Securities Corporation. (Property values continue to rise at 10 percent each year by conservative estimates.)

Meanwhile, several blocks northeast of the Church's property, the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, with less than 3500 members, has completed 20 percent of the 10-story, 100-unit high-rise housing project for the low-income aged. Unlike Zion's Securities Corporation, the Episcopal Management Corporation is a nonprofit, humanitarian entity, backed by a long-term loan from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). When the project is completed this Thanksgiving Day, tenants will pay one fourth of whatever they earn monthly—the rest of the \$400 monthly tab will be covered by HUD subsidies.

The Diocese began the project after its Committee on Aging discovered an acute

shortage of housing for the low-income aged in the Salt Lake Valley. The new facility, which will offer some units for the physically handicapped, is adjacent to Taufer Park and to the Central City Community Center, where a hot meal is served at noon every day. The apartments will be open to anyone over 61 years of age, regardless of religious affiliation.

Saint Mark's Tower will, according to Robert M. Gordon, executive assistant to the bishop of the Diocese, "be a real asset for the Diocese and a witness to this community for a long, long time."

Ignoring the Aged

The project will be an asset to senior citizens, whose National Council, representing 3800 clubs across the country, gave Mormon Senator Jake Garn and Representative Dan Marriott on March 21 a zero rating for their voting on issues that affect the aged. This sort of activism among the aged may be important to their mental health. University of Utah psychologist P. Ronald Spinelli reports that senility may be caused by a lack of social contacts and a lack of stimulation in the environment rather than by chronological age only. In a weekend workshop reported by the *Salt Lake Tribune* April 6, Spinelli also indicated that easy compliance was gained from the aged who are treated as helpless.

Mollie Orshansky, the leading authority on poverty statistics who designed the poverty formula for the Social Security Administration 15 years ago, reported new studies indicating that 21 percent, rather than the official 14 percent, of the aged are poor. The official figures "conceal the large number of hidden poor among the elderly," according to Orshansky, who was quoted in the April 14 *Washington Post*, because the government lumps together the incomes of older persons living with their younger relatives to determine whether the entire household is below the poverty line of \$6200 in 1978, currently \$6700.

Orshansky cited statistics to show that the aged will choose to live alone if they have enough money. "Given the chance,

old people would prefer to live by themselves," she said, "and I suspect their children would like that too, in many cases."

For whatever reason, aged Americans have turned away from traditional family solutions to the problems of aging. They look increasingly to the state for help. Associated Press writer David Ammons reported from Olympia, Washington, on what is considered the country's "premier" program for the aged. The state of Washington provides hot meals, transportation, free legal advice, health care at home or at a day-care center (including preventive "health screening" and mental health services), help with household chores and with shopping, as much as \$800 in household repairs, social activities, advocates to deal with government bureaucracies, and property tax breaks. According to Charles Reed, who heads the Washington Office on Aging, these programs are designed to keep the aged in their own homes as long as possible.

Extensive government intervention is usually condemned by Mormon leaders, who advocate a family approach, but no official Church "program" or support system has been promoted. In a statement released in mid-April, the First Presidency did urge support of the Arthritis Foundation's annual Campaign:

"Approximately one family in three is believed to be affected by the arthritis diseases. Sometimes culminating in death but more often resulting in chronic disability and pain, these diseases can be treated and serious crippling can be avoided if early detection and prompt treatment are effected.

"We urge you to become involved in the effort of the Arthritis Foundation to educate the public concerning the early warning signs of arthritis and concerning the avoidance of arthritis 'quackery.' We also urge you to volunteer your time and resources in support of the 'Challenge Arthritis' campaign of the Arthritis Foundation scheduled for May 1979." No outpouring of Mormon volunteers has been noted.

Other Minorities

The failure to eliminate poverty, unemployment, and substandard housing for the aging and other segments of the American population was cited by monitoring groups as one of several human rights violations in the United States. Watch committees in Washington and New York, which monitor compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords, reported several major violations: the sterilization of Indian women, denying property rights and

self-government to Indian nations, refusing self-determination to the residents of Micronesia, secret recruitment of university professors by the CIA, refusing to ratify international accords on genocide and on the eradication of racial discrimination, allowing inhuman conditions in jails and prisons, and strip-searching of women arrested for even minor traffic violations in Chicago and other police misconduct against minority groups.

According to the March 28 *Daily Universe*, BYU's student newspaper, a student enrolled in a justice administration course was allowed to work as an "undercover homosexual" for college credit. As a BYU Security intern, the student, John David Neumann, "indicated to members of the homosexual community" that he was a homosexual "in order to keep his cover." On Feb. 12 Neumann met a 24-year-old Provo man in the BYU Wilkinson Center, rode with him toward Heber, and told him about "homosexuals at BYU." "He said it was possible to pick them up in the Wilkinson Center and at the Richards P.E. Building," said the *Universe* article. Neumann claimed that when the Provo man made sexual advances, he "grabbed him by the wrist" and signaled BYU Security officers, who cited the Provo man for reckless driving. Two days later a warrant was issued, and the man was later apprehended and charged in Fourth District Court with forcible sexual abuse.

The so-called "witch hunts" of Utah Valley homosexuals, although widely known, have usually not received such forthright coverage in the area newspapers.

Children's Right

The *Daily Universe* has also prominently reported the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) suit against the Provo Canyon Boy's School. The suit charges the school with violating the civil and constitutional rights of its students and with administering "cruel and unusual punishment." The ACLU sought an injunction to close the school until the suit was settled but was denied because no clear and present danger to the students at the school was established. The school retained in March as partner and executive director Dr. D. Eugene Thorne, a BYU psychology professor who holds a law degree. In an interview published March 21, the *Universe* quoted Thorne on the legal questions involved in the ACLU suit. "They're saying that if a kid doesn't want to consent to his parents' wishes that he stay at the school, he should be set free," said Thorne. "There's no precedent in the law

that says the parent can't intervene in the welfare of the child."

The suit is part of a trend. Jacqueline Trescott reported in the April 4 *Washington Post* that two teenage girls in Tacoma, Washington, have sued their parents for "mal-parenting," that a member of the Unification Church whose parents repeatedly attempted to "de-program" her has sued the deprogrammers and her parents for violations of her First Amendment rights, and that a 24-year-old Boulder, Colorado, man is asking \$350,000 in damages for his parents' "inadequate parenting and mental abuse." These cases represent the ugly head of an otherwise benign children's rights movement. Organizations such as the Children's Rights Center and the National Center for Youth Law in San Francisco and the Children's Defense Fund in Washington are usually interested in the poor or institutionalized child. Benign or not, the movement has its effect on the slowly emerging legal framework surrounding the changing American Family.

In March, the House of Representatives refused 214 to 157 to continue the Select Committee on Population, which was formed during the last Congress. All of the Mormon congressmen from the intermountain states voted against the committee, fearing the controversy that might arise if the committee should tackle family issues instead of its mandated overview of world population problems.

In the absence of legislative action, the courts are taking the lead. On March 24, *United Press International* reported a 3-2 decision by the New Hampshire Supreme Court which struck down a provision of a 1977 law making parents "responsible for any damage incurred or for any violations of this chapter (on off-road vehicles) by any person under the age of 18." The court noted that parents could not be held criminally liable for conduct that did not include "a voluntary act or the voluntary omission to perform an act of which he is physically capable" (implying that parents may have neither the physical capability nor the will power to constrain their children). "The net effect of the statute is to punish parenthood," said the court. "Parenthood lies at the very foundation of our civilization. The continuance of the human race is entirely dependent upon it."

The Largest Minority

Another case that is further defining human rights is the dispute between Michelle Triola Marvin and actor Lee

Marvin. The decision, which awarded less than the \$1.8 million asked, was hailed as a victory by both sides and continued the trend to impose greater legal implications on the act of living together (cohabitation). According to Dr. Robin Malouf, assistant professor of family and consumer studies at the University of Utah, cohabitation has taken on much the same legal commitment as marriage, without the legal ceremony.

"Courts have begun assigning a dollar value to the unpaid domestic services a woman may provide. Now that's being extended to assign a dollar value to the unpaid domestic services of an unmarried woman," Malouf said in an interview with the *Salt Lake Tribune* April 1. "Historically, the legal aspects of marriage have not pointed in the direction of equality of the sexes," she said.

Riding on the crest of the women's rights movement, Mormons for ERA published their first newsletter April 13, principally to pep-talk Mormon feminists, to call for action and donations, and to propose an agenda for upcoming activities. The group has had broad coverage in the media, beginning with a confrontation between Mormon Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah and Mormon feminist Sonia Johnson at the hearings on the ERA Extension Bill before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. Subsequent coverage of Mormon lobbying in Virginia, charging the Church with certain illegalities, was summarized by Linda Sillitoe in the March and April issues of *Utah Holiday* magazine. The motto of the group, "Mormons for ERA are Everywhere," was flown behind an airplane over Temple Square between the Saturday sessions of April General Conference.

Posturing on both sides of the issue will probably continue until active lobbying can resume when the state legislatures reopen in 1980. A week before April Conference, the Western States Pro Family Rally was held in Meridian, Idaho. Principal speaker was Phyllis Scheafley, whose Eagle Forum sponsored the event. W. Cleon Skousen of the Freeman Institute and Marian Boyer, first counselor to the Relief Society general president, were also speakers. The activities of these and other Mormons are widely considered to be opposed to "human rights"—a term that for most people includes more than the right to do missionary work and to hear the restored gospel.