2000

The Return of Ashtoreth to the Groves and High Places: Feminist Ideology, the Politics of Victimization, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Gary F. Novak

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

This Mormon Studies is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
The Return of Ashtoreth to the Groves and High Places: Feminist Ideology, the Politics of Victimization, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Gary F. Novak

Review of God the Mother and Other Theological Essays (1997), by Janice Allred.
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. (Psalm 137:1)

Liberal relativism has its roots in the ... tradition of tolerance ...; but in itself it is a seminary of intolerance. 

Leo Strauss¹

We are then in the position of beings who are sane and sober when engaged in trivial business and who gamble like mad-men when confronted with serious issues—retail sanity and wholesale madness.

Leo Strauss²

With the decline in influence of more traditional revisionist LDS histories, we are now witnessing the rise of more factional and radical attempts at adjusting the restored gospel to the trends and fashions of secular ideologies. God the Mother and Other Theological

2. Ibid., 4.

Essays is a collection of Janice Allred’s essays, most of them talks delivered at the Sunstone Symposium since the early 1980s. The title is something of a misnomer, since the book has no essay titled “God the Mother.” “God the Mother” is not even the theme that ties these essays together. However, “Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother” is both Janice Allred’s best-known essay and the essay to which the title is meant to draw attention. As a whole—and this is especially true of the more recent essays—the topics reflect Allred’s trendy feminist biases, often follow the lead of Paul and Margaret Toscano, or express Allred’s hostility toward church leaders. However that may be, one may say that the Toscanos tend to be more radical in their theology and more explicit in their criticism of the church.

Janice Allred’s name is not, I suspect, exactly a household word among the Saints. To the degree that she is known, she is known for making trouble for the church, publicizing her disciplinary councils.


and expressing her opinions on what she calls "God the Mother," "Mother in Heaven," "the Mother," or sometimes, more simply, "the Goddess." I suspect that in most wards, and perhaps even in Utah, Janice Allred is practically unknown. To the extent that she is known, she is or wants to be noted also—judging from the number of times that I see it mentioned—as a mother of nine.

The book does reflect some recurring themes. Allred likes to talk about what she labels "unconditional love," ecclesiastical or spiritual control or abuse, authoritarianism, "honoring subjectivity," forgiveness, grace, justification, and sanctification. Her interpretations of Mormon scripture are often decidedly Protestant and are informed by an uncritically accepted and occasionally unacknowledged feminism.

The Dialogues of Janice Allred: A Guide for the Perplexed

Janice Allred has provided an interesting and detailed account of her excommunication in Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance: Volume 2, 1996. Based on notes Allred took after each session with her bishop, her accounts seethe with hostility toward her leaders. She is confident that the disciplinary councils were attempts to coerce her not to publish or talk, that her bishop was lying to her on more or less trivial matters, and that she was in no need of repentance. Allred seems to realize, however, that her opinions on the Godhead and praying to Mother in Heaven indeed placed her outside the community of Saints; in her words, she was "heretical." Throughout her accounts, she cannot understand that she may need to repent of or change some of her opinions to remain in the church. It is always the leaders who are at fault, who should repent of the evil they visit upon

6. For example, when I lived in Arizona only two sisters seem to have known Janice Merrill Allred. Having grown up in Mesa, these sisters were apparently childhood friends of the Merrill sisters, Janice and Margaret.

7. This is mentioned on the back of God the Mother and in Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 117, 132, 281, 283. I am not sure what being a mother of nine has to do with anything, and I am not sure why a mother of nine cannot hold heretical opinions. After all, Janice Allred's disciplinary councils had nothing to do with her being a mother and everything to do with her published opinions.

8. Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 124.
her, and who are coercive, abusive, lying, and attempting to punish. She seems incapable of understanding how her bishop may not have appreciated her attempts to publicize her excommunication.

Although it would be tempting to go through "White Bird Flying" in some detail, I will provide only enough details to sketch Allred's hostility toward the church and church leaders. Allred cannot understand how her bishop came across a copy of "God the Mother" unless it was given to him from someone in Salt Lake. That may or may not have been the case (and if so, so what?), but her essays have been collected on the Internet—free to anyone and everyone—for years. At the time, very nearly every move Allred made was chronicled, published, and debated on the Mormon-L e-mail list. Oddly, although she is willing to make public speeches at the Sunstone Symposium and publish them in Dialogue, she was unwilling to make her public teachings available to her bishop.

According to Allred, it is not her intention to judge other people. "I have," she says, "no desire to hurt, belittle or denigrate" the people who find their way into the story of her excommunication.9 She is sharing her story, she says, so that she can persuade others to "envision and work for a more loving, open and tolerant Church community."10 She is, on the other hand, confident that those who judged her "were polite and correct on the surface; but underneath, where they lived, they were as crude and violent as a military weapon."11 She accuses her bishop of lying and setting traps and of emotional rape, violence, hypocrisy, and various abuses of ecclesiastical or spiritual authority.12 At the same time, she protests that she is not judging her bishop.13

Allred is confident that no one can or ought to judge her because "no one can believe anything by an act of will" and hence "it is futile

---

9. Ibid., 121.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 119.
13. See ibid., 265.
as well as wrong to coerce belief." I would agree that belief cannot be coerced. Allred's statement, however, can be read to say that she is not responsible for what she believes because she happens to believe it. And her protestation that she believes what she believes does nothing to explain or modify her heretical teachings on the Godhead. In spite of her claim that "every person has the right to teach false ideas as well as true ones," simply possessing that "right" in one community (let us call it the community of citizens) does not guarantee her place within the boundaries of another community.

How to Read Janice Allred: A Handbook for Beginners

The rhetoric, agenda, and polemics of *God the Mother* should not be ignored. Many of the most controversial items are settled by sheer assertion. Allred writes "I believe," "I think," or some equivalent phrase and then proceeds to opine, often settling by assertion what she wishes to demonstrate. "I believe that she [God the Mother] is the Holy Ghost" (p. 30), Allred asserts without providing an argument. "I believe that God the Mother is equal to God the Father" (p. 43). "I believe that a serious acceptance of the existence of God the Mother requires us Mormons to re-examine and reinterpret our doctrine of the Godhead" (p. 44). "I believe that the other personage who appeared to Joseph Smith in the first vision was the Mother" (p. 67). "I believe that this being who bears witness of Jesus Christ is his Beloved, the Woman of Holiness, who is now the Holy Ghost" (p. 67). "The essence of the doctrine of original sin, which I believe we must accept if we affirm the universal need for redemption, is that as human beings we must sin" (p. 135). "I do not believe that the structure of the church of Jesus Christ will be exactly the same in all times, places and cultures" (p. 242). "I believe that God wants and expects us to work with him and each other to create our own systems that embody the principles of his gospel" (p. 242). "I believe that the time has come when we, inspired by a vision of equality and filled

15. Ibid.
with love for each other, must look for another way of being to­
together, pleading with God to help us find it” (p. 242). “The LDS
church today is not democratic and I believe it falls short in recog-
nizing and protecting basic human freedoms in its own structure”
(p. 258). “I believe that equating priesthood with governing or deci-
sion-making power is a mistake” (p. 261).

*God the Mother* is also a book that cries out for documentation.
It contains only occasional footnotes. “Feminists have argued per-
suasively,” claims Allred, “that gender is socially and psychologically
constructed within a culture” (p. 21). Which feminists and in what
publications? “The first wave of feminists emphasized the similarities
between men and women” (p. 23). Again, which feminists and in
what publications? Is there a classification scheme for feminism that
is categorized by various “waves”? We are not told. “Statements by
prophets and churchmen about the role of women can be shown to
be heavily influenced by culture” (p. 23). Which prophets, which
churchmen? Did the prophet or churchman in question have a con-
cept of culture? Did he accept modern historicist notions of cultural
conditioning or did he know nothing of them? “Freedom depends on
the existence of natural law” (p. 202). According to whom? Is it possi-
ble to conceive of freedom without “natural law”? By “natural law”
Allred does not mean natural right, but rather something like the
laws of physics or at least that some phenomena are predictable (see
Allred makes the argument? “Some people,” writes Allred, “have ob-
jected to the idea that God’s love is unconditional, maintaining that
unconditional love is meaningless” (p. 207). Again, Allred does not
indicate who these people are, and hence readers are unable to check
sources, the soundness of Allred’s understanding of the arguments,
or her ability to accurately represent this or that position.

Allred’s arguments often rely on an unexamined, unreflective
commitment to feminism and popular psychology. Hence we read
that feminists have *argued* this or that, or that feminists have *demo-

strated* this or that, or that feminists have *shown* this or that. Allred
does not distinguish between varieties of feminism, nor does she dis-
tinguish between feminist thinkers. In a similar fashion Allred bor-
rows language from popular psychology. Hence we read about "the self," "selfhood," "mother selfhood," "dependency," "subjectivity," "respecting diversity," "equality," "roles," and "self-esteem," to mention a few of the more obvious. Not a single one of these concepts, understood in terms of modern, popular psychology, is particularly at home in the world of the scriptures. Indeed, each one of these is foreign to the world of Bible and Book of Mormon prophets. Discerning readers may wonder if they are being fed a diet of scripture mingled with the philosophies of men (or, at least in this case, a woman).

*God the Mother* is a book that should be read with scriptures in hand. Allred is often interested in "reinterpreting" language found in the scriptures. As I will show, she does not always accurately quote the scriptures, and she is often careless about the context of the language she quotes.

*God the Mother* displays many "Toscanoisms"—beliefs or teachings peculiar to the Toscano circle of influence. Aside from her peculiar teachings about the Godhead and Mother in Heaven and about the condition of the church and how the church ought to be structured, Allred says, "I myself have been called to be a member of the LDS Church" (p. xiv). Readers already familiar with the writings of Paul or Margaret Toscano will recognize this sort of thing.16 This peculiar use of language functions as a kind of code language that indicates, among other things, that people are called to their religious beliefs, no matter what they are.17

**Prophets and Theologians**

Janice Allred understands what she does as constructive theology. She distinguishes her kind of theology from three other types: orthodox, scholarly, and philosophical. Constructive theology is the good theology, the better theology, or at least the newest, most comprehensive, or least problematic theology. Although Allred is


careful not to fault anyone who may subscribe to some other kind of theology, it is clear that orthodox theology is the least desirable kind of theology. According to Allred, orthodox theology or orthodox theologians assume "that there is a body of doctrine . . . found in the scriptures" and their task is "to extract this doctrine and present it in propositional form" (p. viii). Orthodox theology, from Allred's point of view, is defective because it is nonspeculative; that is, because it cannot or will not "significantly change what they [proponents of orthodox theology] regard as doctrine" (p. ix). Apparently a theology that can change doctrine is superior to or more useful than one that cannot change doctrine. At least part of the proper task of theology, it would seem, is to change doctrine.

Scholarly theology also, whatever its virtues, is involved in mere cataloging, evaluation, and documentation. Because its approach is "historical or sociological" (p. ix) and hence not speculative and capable of change, it is, in Allred's view, flawed.

Philosophical theology may or may not suggest a "solution to or a new way of thinking about" theological questions (p. ix). To the degree that it is incomplete and to be faulted, philosophical theology suffers because it "may assume . . . Mormon insights are true without attempting to support them philosophically" (p. ix).

Constructive theology—the better or more adequate theology—is Allred's own "new" theology. Allred's claim for her own theology is that it is a new approach, an innovation or novel contribution, to theology. Although she calls her theology "new," she is quick to claim that her kind of theology is the way theology has always been done (p. ix). It is "the beginning of theology" and one would therefore expect it to go back to the roots of theology (p. ix). But Allred does not discuss the beginnings of theology, and she does not attempt to recover what may have been lost or forgotten at the roots of theology. She does not go back to Plato, who apparently coined the word theology. The origins of theology, in fact, have their roots in the second book of Plato's Republic. 18 In the well-ordered city constructed in speech (but not in deed), theology turns out to be a way for the city

18. See Plato, Republic 377C–386A; compare Books II and X of The Laws. See also Louis Midgley, "Directions That Diverge: 'Jerusalem and Athens' Revisited," review of The
(polis) to control or silence the poets—those who are touched with the divine madness or who are inspired. Theology (theos + logos—words about God, a giving of accounts about God, or the science or explanation of God) is a way of controlling those in the mantic or prophetic tradition. Prophets and poets are dangerous to the city because they cannot be trusted to say the things that favor the health of and benefit the city. That is, they may tell stories about the injustice of the gods that are not proper or useful for young people to hear.

A striking example of how unpredictable and uncontrolled prophets present a danger to the city or regime is found in Amos:

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent this message to King Jeroboam of Israel: “Amos is conspiring against you within the House of Israel. The country cannot endure the things he is saying. For Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be exiled from its soil.’”

Amaziah also said to Amos, “Seer, off with you to the land of Judah! Earn your living there, and do your prophesying there. But don’t ever prophesy again at Bethel; for it is a king’s sanctuary and a royal palace.” Amos answered Amaziah: “I am not a prophet, and I am not a prophet’s disciple. I am a cattle breeder and a tender of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me away from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel.’ And so, hear the word of the Lord. You say I must not prophesy about the House of Israel or preach about the House of Isaac; but this, I swear, is what the Lord said: Your wife shall play the harlot in the town, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line. And you yourself shall die on unclean soil; for Israel shall be exiled from its soil.” (Amos 7:10–17)

---

19. That is, Amos is not hired to be a prophet at the royal court.

Thus Allred's new constructive theology—with its roots in classical theology—may or may not be in fundamental conflict with the prophetic tradition and the community that embraces that tradition. Is Allred interested in silencing the prophets? Does she find it necessary to "reinterpret" their language? Does she attempt to explain away the often uncomfortable and disquieting messages of the prophets? Allred fails to indicate that theology always turns out to be man's words about God and never the word of God for man. Theology is not the work of prophets. Theology, it would seem, turns out to be a way of controlling the speech or teachings of the prophets.

Allred carefully avoids criticizing anyone by name. She does not discuss Louis Midgley's useful article on theology in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, even as a point of departure. Neither does she examine Hugh Nibley's essays on the corrosive influence of theology in The World and the Prophets nor his essays on the sophic and the mantic in The Ancient State.21

She Came In through the Bathroom Window

Of course it is Allred's speculations about "the Goddess" or Mother in Heaven that contributed to her excommunication and that make this book a curiosity. She announces her intentions to "reinterpret the Mormon concept of the Godhead" (p. 43). That reinterpretation is founded on her radical feminist theology rather than on a real or imagined inadequacy in some specific understanding of scripture. Her reinterpretation of scripture is therefore based on the conviction that our understanding of scripture is somehow inadequate and, in a fundamental sense, has always been inadequate. Although she may have modified her views since the publication of this book, Allred is careful to point out that "an official reinterpretation of LDS doctrine... rests solely with the leaders of the church”

Her reinterpretation is based, she says, on three convictions, although she does not provide reasons for those convictions in this essay.

I believe that God the Mother is equal to God the Father in divinity, power, and perfection. I believe that God, both Father and Mother, are deeply involved in our mortality and immortality. I also believe that God the Father has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. (p. 43)

It comes as no surprise that Mother in Heaven turns out to be none other than the Holy Ghost (see p. 56) since Allred had declared that belief in essays published years before the appearance of “God the Mother.” Identifying Mother in Heaven with the Holy Ghost seems to be common among those under the influence of the Toscanos. Allred is, however, somewhat coy in referring to the Holy Ghost with the more traditional “he” in the early part of her essay (see p. 44).

22. In an e-mail message sent to several LDS mailing lists on 16 August 1998, Allred released a document titled “Revelation and Prophecy Received on July 21, 1998 by Janice Allred.” In the “Revelation” Allred commands members of the church to “think not that it [the marvelous work that is about to come forth among ‘the children of women’] will come from your leaders for they sit upon their thrones of power.” According to the “Revelation,” church leaders are guilty of sacrificing “the little ones” (I would guess this includes Janice Allred and perhaps others of the like-minded Toscano circle) “to their idols: the idols of pride, of worldly power, and reputation.” Why? “And they do it that they might get gain.” I am unsure exactly what gain any leader of the church has received for excommunicating Allred. Be that as it may, “the key has been taken from them and given to a woman who will complete the work of the patriarchs and prophets.” Among other things, the “Revelation” would seem to be Allred’s announcement that she is now authorized to give revelation to the church and that she will reveal God the Mother (or at least that is how I interpret the language “that which was hidden from the foundation of the world is about to come forth”).

23. “Jesus Our Mother: The Quest for Feminine Identity,” for example, was first published in 1989, some three years before the initial publication of “Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother.”

24. See Toscano and Toscano, Strangers in Paradox, 54, and M. Toscano, “Put On Your Strength,” 430–31. Margaret Toscano seems to be more radical in her feminism than is her sister Janice Allred. She calls, for example, for a “transformation of the entire Mormon priesthood system” (ibid., 424) and even suggests a female parallel to the regular
There is a method to Allred’s madness. She wants to change or redefine (or “reinterpret”) the Godhead so that it does not contain three individuals, but two: one male and one female.25 The first portion of Allred’s “reinterpretation” involves her effort to identify God the Father and Jesus Christ as one and the same person.26 She seems to have achieved a sort of modified version of an old heresy, modalism, in which God reveals himself in different modes.27 She notes that “God” is the generic term for deity, the Supreme Being, the translation for the word El or Elohim in the Bible (actually, only in the Old Testament) and that the “personal name for God in the Bible is YHWH” (p. 45). She further claims that the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants follow this pattern. One might pick at nits

order of the priesthood. She suggests the name “Miriamic priesthood” as a counterpart to the Aaronic priesthood. She is understandably reticent to give up the name “Melchizedek” for the higher priesthood. But even Toscano does not care for her own suggestion that the “female counterpart” to an elder might be a “crone.” “Not many Mormon women,” she says, “would wish to be ordained ‘crones’” (ibid., 422).

25. This is not to say that Allred is not open to various other interpretations of the Godhead. Besides some of the hints provided by her sister, M. Toscano, “Put On Your Strength,” 427–33, Allred writes, “I would argue that this interpretation would also require us to recognize God as Mother, Daughter, and Holy Ghost” (p. 58), thus suggesting another female trinity; however, she moves on to her own interpretation following this sentence.

26. On this subject, compare Hamblin, “Return of Simon and Helena,” 309–12. Hamblin refers to several key scriptures and statements by Joseph Smith that clearly identify the Father and the Son as separate individuals—distinct and separate persons—each with his own body. Allred may be responding to one of Hamblin’s arguments by claiming that it was Mother in Heaven who introduced Christ as “My Beloved Son” during the first vision. She insists that Joseph Smith “never used the masculine pronoun to refer to this personage” (p. 67). Allred is able to make this claim because of the lack of detail in the published text regarding the identity of the speaking personage. However, she does not consider other accounts of the first vision in which Joseph Smith provided a description of both personages. For example, “I . . . saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness,” in The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 1: Autobiographical and Historical Writings, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 448–49; see also 391. I am somewhat inclined to suggest—even though I recognize the problems associated with an argument from lack of evidence—that if Joseph had seen a woman introducing Christ, it would have been worthy of mention.

27. See Louis Midgley’s discussion of modalism in his review of Walter Martin in this volume, pages 411–12. The ancient version of modalism involved God’s revealing himself variously as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
with Allred for borrowing from Greek philosophy to identify the God of the Bible as "the Supreme Being," a term found nowhere in scripture. Neither does she indicate that in the Bible "El" or "Elohim" can just as easily refer to the gods of the neighboring heathen nations as to the God of Abraham. She muddles her discussion by claiming that titles like "Messiah," "Savior," or "Holy One" are names, a confusion that permeates the essay (p. 46).

Allred is at her best when she identifies ambiguous language in or selectively quotes from scripture. She is not careful in selecting her material. For example, when claiming that "in many verses the Son is called the Father, implying that the Father and the Son are the same person" (p. 48), she cites 2 Nephi 19:6, nothing other than a direct quotation of the famous passage from Isaiah 9:6. Since her method was to examine "all the references to deity in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants," one might have expected her to filter biblical quotations from her speculations. When she cites Amulek's encounter with Zeezrom, she quotes from 3 Nephi 12:48, a passage that is a gloss on Matthew 5:48, and goes so far as to base part of her argument on the insertion of a hypothetical, "more natural" and because it is what Jesus would have or should have said if he was attempting to distinguish between himself and his Father in heaven (p. 48). Allred then adds an additional comma to the scripture and bases that portion of her argument on that comma. According to Allred, the Book of Mormon passage reads, "should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in Heaven, is perfect." The actual scripture reads, "should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Without the additional comma, Allred's proof text does not favor her interpretation because there is no appositive phrase (see pp. 48-49).


29. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."
Allred refers to Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 but, for obvious reasons, does not quote it:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.

Allred attempts to rationalize and explain away the scripture, first claiming, contrary to Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 itself and many other passages, that "our bodies can only be inhabited by our own spirits."\(^{30}\) She then makes the remarkable claim that "if the Father dwelt in the Son, 'the Father' must mean the spirit body of God and the Son and the Father must constitute one eternal being" (p. 52). In this way she once again attempts to make the Father and the Son one person.

Although I am confident that most Latter-day Saints will find Allred's attempt to unify the Father and the Son unconvincing, it does play a polemical function in her essay. Allred does not want merely to identify a Mother in Heaven but to identify and deify her and ultimately place her in the Godhead.\(^ {31}\) "I believe," Allred says at the beginning of her essay, "that God the Mother is equal to God the Father in divinity, power, and perfection" (p. 43). And with this opinion firmly in place, Allred must find a way of justifying her assertions.

It is easy for Allred to identify Mother in Heaven with the Holy Ghost since she did not include the Holy Ghost in her modalism. Having made it possible to make the Godhead a sort of divine couple, Allred proceeds to speculate that "perhaps, then, the Holy Ghost is the name of the Mother which refers to her work among us in mortality" (p. 56).\(^ {32}\) But then again, perhaps not. And other problems

---

30. I am not confident that the scriptural "dwell" is equivalent to Allred's "inhabit."
31. In the absence of further light and knowledge on the subject from the prophets, I freely confess my ignorance of the "divinity, power, and perfection" of Mother in Heaven. Attentive readers will no doubt notice Allred's shifting terminology from the mundane "Mother in Heaven" to the more powerful "God the Mother" or "the Goddess."
32. Anyone who has read Strangers in Paradox will easily recognize Allred's discussion of the exiled, wandering Mother.
must be dealt with. Someone might suspect that Mother in Heaven already has a body. Allred solves this dilemma by suggesting that a resurrected person may have “the power to separate his body and spirit if he so desires” (p. 56). Allred suggests that if Jesus had the power to lay down his life and then take it again, then John 5:26 and 10:17–1833 “could refer not only to his power to lay down a mortal body and take it again as an immortal body, but also to his power to lay down an immortal body and take on a mortal body” (p. 56). Although I know of no one with firsthand knowledge on the subject, by my count that makes two bodies. How many spiritless immortal bodies are left lying around?

In any case, “if it was possible for the Lord to lay down his immortal body to take on mortal flesh,” Allred continues, “then surely it is also possible for the Mother to lay down her immortal body to become the Holy Ghost” (p. 57). It is again unclear whether such a disembodied Mother in Heaven would simply take her immortal body again or get a mortal body to lay down and take again. I suspect that, if pressed on the issue, Allred would select the option that offers the most parallels to Jesus.

Finally, Allred is not simply content to speculate about Mother in Heaven. The last portion of her essay expresses her longings and hopes for her revelation. Allred looks forward to the prophet (or prophetess, as it turns out) of Mother in Heaven. She believes that she is able to see hints and dark references to Mother in Heaven in many scriptures. Hence she sees suggestive language in scriptures concerning marriages, feasts, Zion, and wilderness (see pp. 61–68). She portrays Mother in Heaven as a sort of redeemer who “exiled herself voluntarily to be with us . . . she also took our sins on herself” (p. 62).34

33. “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,” and “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

34. Although Allred cites the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 7:1, the verse is drawn from Isaiah 50:1. Parallels can be found in Toscano and Toscano, Strangers in Paradox, 54.
Allred clearly expects that the time for revealing Mother in Heaven is near. We should, she says, “expect that some people will receive visions or voices or feelings which manifest her presence and her mission” (p. 63). She then recounts a remarkable story as told by her husband. When returning from a trip to Denver, he read Strangers in Paradox to Janice while she drove. Finally, he reported,

I couldn’t control my voice; I couldn’t go on. I wept for a while and then said, “I am very touched by this.” Janice said, “It’s more than that. It’s revelation.” I said, “She is here with us. She is in the back seat with us” . . .

I realized that she was not in the back seat. She was around me and before me. With tear fogged [sic] eyes I saw her fill the horizon in front of me. I couldn’t go on reading. Tears were on my cheeks. . . . I began wondering if I could remain on earth. I was being expanded and it was joyful—and it hurt! . . .

“I’ve given my heart to the Mother. She was here and I wasn’t sure that I would go on living.” (p. 64)

Having made Mother in Heaven “equal to God the Father in power, might, and dominion” (p. 55), Allred addresses the question of whether “we should worship the Mother” (p. 65). According to Allred, that question “depends on whether we know her and know who she is” (p. 65). It would be incorrect and improper to worship something or someone that is unknown. Hence, “once she has been revealed to us and we see and understand that she is also God, then we also, in the most fundamental way, worship her” (p. 65). Once known, it would seem that worship is unavoidable. Unsurprisingly, Allred is also of the opinion that no one can forbid worship of Mother in Heaven. Can Mother in Heaven be prayed to? Again, Allred’s affirmative answer should surprise no one.36

35. I have excerpted from Allred’s much longer version. “Expanding our views” or “being expanded” weaves its way throughout Strangers in Paradox. See, for example, p. 55, which occurs on the page following the materials that David Allred was reading in the car.
36. Given Allred’s explicit teaching in “God the Mother,” her less-than-forthright
In the space of twenty-seven pages, Allred has managed to jettison (reinterpret) the traditional Latter-day Saint concept of the Godhead; introduce two new deities, one based on the old modalist heresy and the other an expansion and enlargement of a traditional Latter-day Saint belief; introduce a new Godhead; provide her new deity with tasks to perform and sins to take upon herself; propose a way of worshiping this deity; and, finally, even create some mythology for this new deity. She thereby manages to separate herself from many of the core beliefs and teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

You Say You Want a Revolution?

Janice Allred knew before she was excommunicated that her theology of God the Mother and her reinterpretation of the Godhead would likely be viewed as heretical. If she was not interested in re-structuring and reinventing the church according to her own whims and fancy before her excommunication, the essays that she wrote during and after her excommunication—roughly the last four essays in God the Mother—certainly leave nothing to doubt. What does Allred say about prophets and how the church must be reconstituted?

answers to her bishop are somewhat surprising. "I told him that I had given a paper on God the Mother but had not advocated praying to her. I did not, however, tell him that I had given ideas that could be used to justify praying to her." Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 123. "Should we," asks Allred, "pray to the Mother? Although we are not commanded to pray to her, we are commanded to pray with her. . . And when we pray, we invoke her presence. And our prayers are answered through her. Understanding this, we certainly may address her directly in our prayers" (p. 67). I have excised the scriptures Allred quotes to support her position.

37. See, for example, Allred's gloss on the Sermon on the Mount (p. 68).

38. Allred seems reluctant to draw upon ancient goddess cults for her new deity, although she mentions "ancient forms of Goddess worship" at least once (p. 65). Allred's attempts at reinterpreting scripture and creating a theology of God the Mother provide a stark contrast to Daniel C. Peterson's careful unpacking of the Book of Mormon and ancient Canaanite Asherah cults. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 191–243. It is perhaps a sign of the times in which we live that Peterson must include a disclaimer and warning about "theological or ecclesiological innovation" (ibid., 218).

39. See Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 124.
It turns out that prophets—or at least their statements regarding “the role of women”—are “heavily influenced by culture” (p. 23). Curiously, the very next sentence begins, “revelations from God disrupt the status quo” (p. 23); that is, they are not merely part of the culture or of the cultural milieu but stand over against it. Who, I wonder, delivers revelations from God if not prophets? Can Allred have it both ways? Is the feminism Allred relies on heavily influenced by culture? Is the popular psychology on which Allred relies heavily influenced by culture? Is it acceptable for Allred’s preconceptions and background assumptions to be heavily influenced by culture—or perhaps, more accurately, trendy and popular intellectual fads—and not acceptable for prophets to be influenced by culture? Now it seems perfectly obvious that prophets speak in the medium of their day—they would hardly be intelligible otherwise—and they often address the issues of the day—they would hardly have a relevant message otherwise.40 But which prophet, I wonder, is or has been heavily influenced by feminism, trendy psychology, Continental philosophy, or theology? Would a prophet still be a prophet when preaching secular ideologies or do all of these elements of our culture stand in stark opposition to prophets, to prophetic messages from the heavens, and to the restored gospel?

It is obvious, however, that Allred must make modern prophets appear to be nothing other than men influenced—heavily influenced—by their cultural conditioning and eager to maintain the established status quo and power structure. Hence they participate in the authoritarian, orthodox, undemocratic, hierarchical church that oppresses and excommunicates honest truth seekers like Janice Allred.41 Hence we are told that the Sunday School and priesthood and Relief Society lessons “are dominated by the orthodox notion of truth and have a conventional, noncritical content” (p. 14). “Control is, in fact, the hidden agenda of orthodoxy” (p. 16) and persecuted

40. I imagine that a modern prophetic warning against Baal worship might raise some eyebrows.
41. One can find this message throughout God the Mother, but see especially “Him Ye Shall Hear,” 219–49, and “Equality and Diversity,” 250–68.
heretics are “compelled to lie about their beliefs” (p. 16) if they desire to stay in the church. Orthodoxy is, then, “an inherently divisive and oppressive principle” (p. 16). Allred’s solution is a church in which “all members are of equal value, where the truth of every member is listened to and valued, where it is recognized that all members receive revelation” (p. 19). Allred longs for a church in which anything goes. Theology is one of the good things that seems, in Allred’s view, to supply the charm or cure for orthodoxy (see p. 15). And it is her own theological speculations that Allred wishes to impose on the church.

But it gets worse. “The present model we have of church government,” Allred informs us, “is authoritarian” or “thoroughly authoritarian” (p. 200). Hence it is “intrinsically sexist,” elitist, compulsive, violent, coercive, abusive, exploitive, and manipulative (see pp. 200, 203, 231, 258, and passim). Indeed, according to Allred, “authoritarianism is incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ” (pp. 200–201). And to make matters even worse, “authoritarian religions that demand unconditional obedience to human authorities or claim that any of their utterances are infallible encourage idolatry” (p. 101). Church leaders become mindless, sightless bureaucrats, “legalistic in their prescriptions and fundamentalist in their conception of truth” (p. 205).42

The church, it seems, has gone horribly astray. Allred suggests that it is already in a state of apostasy and that it has introduced novel doctrines to entrench the evils of orthodoxy, authoritarianism, and apostasy. The key evil that Allred wants to “refute” turns out to be the old cultural Mormon chestnut that “the prophet is infallible on matters of doctrine” or that the members of the First Presidency are “infallible in their statements and decisions” (p. 221). However,

42. Shocking as it may seem, the prophets have warned the Saints against the unconditional obedience Allred abhors. Hugh Nibley does a nice job laying out the teaching in “Educating the Saints,” and “Criticizing the Brethren,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 306–45, and 407–48, and “Zeal without Knowledge,” in *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 63–84.
Allred’s best quotation from President Hunter says exactly the opposite of what she wants it to say (see p. 221). Allred wants it to say that “the prophet is infallible on matters of doctrine,” but President Hunter was careful to qualify his statement: when “we feel that the answer is scriptural and scripturally placed[, t]hen we take a strong stand” (p. 221). And would we not expect a prophet to take a strong stand? Are prophets noted for their soft, wishy-washy stand on the issues they address?43 Does not Allred herself take a strong stand on her interpretations of scripture?

“At though many church presidents and general authorities have said that the Lord will not permit the prophet to lead the church astray,” Allred informs us, “none of them has ever claimed to have received a revelation from the Lord saying this” (p. 234). Allred here seems to be searching for the kind of certainty she condemns as self-deceptive in other places (see p. 7). Be that as it may, she seems to have conveniently forgotten President’s Woodruff’s statements following Official Declaration—1 in the Doctrine and Covenants:

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty. (D&C, p. 292)

That statement seems fairly straightforward. Allred, however, covers her tracks by insisting that even if such a revelation did exist, “it would have to be examined critically and confirmed by the Holy Spirit” (p. 234). She may believe that she has a monopoly—or at least the theological monopoly—on the Holy Spirit (= Holy Ghost = Mother in Heaven), but one suspects that Allred is attempting to have her cake and eat it too.

43. It is difficult to imagine Moses, Nathan, Isaiah, Amos, Elijah, Nephi, Mormon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or even Gordon B. Hinckley not taking “a strong stand.” Indeed, I suspect, after reading Allred’s own “Revelation,” that she herself would grant and expect prophets to take a strong stand.
There are several scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants that seem to lend support to President's Woodruff's statement by indicating that the gospel has been restored for the last time.

For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard. (D&C 33:3)

Wherefore lay to with your might and call faithful laborers into my vineyard, that it may be pruned for the last time. (D&C 39:17)

Wherefore, labor ye, labor ye in my vineyard for the last time—for the last time call upon the inhabitants of the earth. (D&C 43:28)

Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come. (D&C 88:84)

For the preparation wherewith I design to prepare my apostles to prune my vineyard for the last time, that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. (D&C 95:4)

For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, for the last days and for the last time, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times. (D&C 112:30)

I certainly do not want to argue that apostasy is not possible and that we can relax in carnal security and think that all is well in Zion. Indeed, the Book of Mormon warns against this very thing.

44. There certainly is reason to believe that the Saints have at various times fallen into forgetfulness about the Book of Mormon and have been in grave danger of apostasy.
However, I do want to suggest that Allred’s argument is specious in several respects. The core of her position concerning the apostasy of the church is rather transparently self-serving. Allred’s arguments for democratizing church organization, reinterpreting scripture, and valuing diversity seem to be a way of insuring that heretics like herself are not excommunicated and that they have the opportunity to form or reform the church after their own image.

"An honest study of the church throughout time in the scriptures and historical texts," Allred preaches—apparently because a dishonest study would reveal exactly the opposite—"makes it clear that the church of God always goes astray" (p. 244). Hence "a church that believes it cannot go astray gives good evidence that it already has" (p. 244). So, for Allred, the church is either astray or in apostasy, and it is no wonder, given the list of sins that she lays at the feet of the church or at least at the feet of the leaders of the church.

All You Need Is Love

So how does Allred think that the church, or at least the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be saved? What must be done to reconstitute, reform, or revolutionize the church to bring it from its state of apostasy (or, if apostasy is too strong a word, to bring it back from the paths in which it has strayed)? "The LDS church today is not democratic," says Allred, "and I believe it falls short in recognizing and protecting basic human freedoms in its own structure" (p. 258). She does not address the question of whether the church in any dispensation has been democratic. So what could or should be done to make the church more democratic?

It begins, apparently, with the individual. Allred lays out "four principles which individuals can follow to promote equality" (p. 258):

---


45. Allred does not begin to answer the historical question of who in the past has led the church astray. Was it apostles or theologians? For an examination of these sorts of questions, see Nibley, The World and the Prophets, 26-52.
• “The person with greater power, knowledge, talents, possessions, or any other resource should use that resource to benefit the other person(s).” Hence “power should not be used to control, abuse, or exploit others but to empower them, and gifts should be shared” (p. 258).

• “We must honor everyone’s gifts” (p. 258). Not surprisingly, this would also mean that we must honor Allred’s gifts—whatever they are—and be “willing to be changed by her” (p. 260).

• “We must change roles to promote equality” (p. 260). And what roles does Allred mention? None other than nursery worker and president of the church (although it is clear that Allred does not suggest that nursery workers ought to be “president for a day”). Janice Allred was, at one time, a nursery worker.

• “We must honor the agency of every person” (p. 265). A thoughtful reader may wonder whether free agency or human agency is part of the fundamental human condition and hence whether it can or cannot be honored or, for that matter, dishonored. For Allred, honoring agency means that we are to “recognize and try to understand her in her subjectivity” (p. 265). That is, attempting to change another person—rather than understand him or her—is a bad thing (see p. 266).

If this list is not specific enough, Allred has a few explicit suggestions and corrections for the church. “I believe,” she opines, “that equating priesthood with governing or decision-making power is a mistake” (p. 261). Why? Because “the individual is the locus of decision-making power” (p. 261). “I do not believe,” Allred again expresses, “that the structure of the church of Jesus Christ will be exactly the same in all times” because “the church is embedded in different cultures” (p. 242). Hence because the church structure can be different in different times and places, it can be remade along the lines suggested by Allred. “I believe,” says Allred, “that God wants and expects
us to work with him and each other to create our own systems that
embody the principles of his gospel” (p. 242). She does not say why.
“I believe that the time has come when we, inspired by a vision of
equality and filled with love for each other, must look for another
way of being together” (p. 242). Allred’s “new way of being to­
gether”—without the evils of an antidemocratic, authoritarian hier­
archy—would clearly make room for, and perhaps even honor, dis­
senters like her.

What exactly would change? Priesthood bearers “cannot obligate
others or exercise compulsion” (p. 217). One consequence of this
would seem to be that Allred, or others like or unlike her, would not
face disciplinary action for heretical teachings. While God may or
may not speak to “ecclesiastical leaders,” “they do not have the au­
thority to issue their own commandments” (p. 212). Hence, no one
would be able to ask Allred to cease publishing her heretical opinions
and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. On a more positive note, “we
ought to be open to receiving the truths of God from all our fellow
saints” because “anyone who speaks the deepest truths of her heart is
speaking with the voice of God” (p. 212). Again, I suspect Allred is
commanding the church to accept her teachings on God the Mother.
“I envision,” says Allred, “the church of Christ as an organization that
can be represented by a group of interlocking rings of various sizes
all connected to one great ring” (p. 241). Although Allred suggests
that this ring would be a way of implementing equality, she does not
provide details on how it would work, nor does she provide an ex­
ample of some kind of organization in which such a plan has been
implemented.

In at least one essay, Allred seems to suggest that the church
ought not to be reformed or is perhaps past reformation. She suggests
that all that is necessary for the gospel to continue upon the earth is
for some priesthood holders to remain faithful (see p. 245). Hence
she talks about “invisible or spiritual churches” (p. 245) and suggests
that false prophets and false Christs will deceive many. After quoting
Doctrine and Covenants 64:38–39, she claims, “this can only mean
that some who have been appointed to be or claim to be apostles and prophets will be shown to be false apostles and prophets" (p. 247).  

The gospel according to Janice Allred is the gospel of unconditional love. She does not address the question of why the words unconditional and love do not appear together anywhere in scripture, nor does she distinguish between different types of love mentioned in the New Testament (agape and philia). The "grace of God," declares Allred, "is his unconditional love for us which is manifest in the Atonement" (p. 207). What, precisely, is unconditional love and what does it mean? "Unconditional love is," for Allred, "the foundation for, the condition of, particular love. God loves us in all our particularities because his love does not depend on our possessing certain qualities or meeting some standard of excellence" (p. 207). While Allred insists that it would be a "misconception" to think that unconditional love does not require us to change (I would either add or correct, "require the sinner to repent") (p. 207), she reverses her stance on the next page. "Because God's love for us is unconditional," remarks Allred, "it does not demand that we change" (p. 208). Hence to use compulsion—a key word Allred uses to describe her own excommunication—to control someone would be wrong.

Indeed, it is unconditional love that seems to be the defining concept in Janice Allred's gospel. Those in a condition of grace are those who know, understand, and accept God's unconditional love (see pp. 207, 157). Unconditional love is linked positively to good things like self-esteem (see pp. 115, 121, 125), forgiveness (see p. 194), and living in grace (see p. 213). Through unconditional love "each person [is made] equal to God himself" (p. 214), "no human being is more important than any other," and, rather obviously, authoritarianism is morally wrong (p. 214). Indeed, "human equality is based on God's unconditional love for us" because "we are all equally valuable to God" (p. 240). According to Allred, "certainly Jesus has said

46. Unfortunately, more than one case exists in which this scripture has been fulfilled rather precisely in the history of the church.
and demonstrated that he esteems each of us equally and that his love for each of us is unconditional, and he has told us that if we do not follow him in esteeming each other equally, in loving each other unconditionally, we are not his church” (p. 257). That is a large order and, expectedly, Allred does not offer any support for her opinion. Where, I wonder, do we find language about esteem and unconditional love as conditions for membership (if that is indeed what Allred means) in the church?

The Magical Mystery Tour

There are many, many other problems with this book, and it simply is not possible to address every issue in a review. Very briefly, let me point out a few of them.

Allred quotes Doctrine and Covenants 85:7–8 concerning a man who, steadying the ark of God, would die (see p. 249). She seems to allude to 2 Samuel 6:6–7. She then proceeds to discuss both Noah’s ark and the ark of the covenant, apparently unaware that different Hebrew words are translated as “ark” (רָדִּים and תֶּבַּא respectively). Allred is also careful to quote selectively to remove the scripture from its historical context. I have italicized the materials she excised and included verse 9 for context:

And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;

While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning.

And all they who are not found written in the book of remembrance shall find none inheritance in that day, but they shall be cut asunder, and their portion shall be appointed them among unbelievers, where are wailing and gnashing of teeth. (D&C 85:7-9)

The reference to inheritances might make this revelation applicable to the Saints living in Missouri in 1832 when the letter was written. Indeed, the entire section is about record keeping, consecration, and what to do about those who do not do not receive their inheritances by consecration.

Allred quotes 3 Nephi 16:10 with an editorial insertion, “and shall reject the fullness of my gospel [i.e., the Holy Ghost]” (p. 246). The Book of Mormon nowhere indicates that the fulness of the gospel is the Holy Ghost. Since for Allred the Holy Ghost is the disembodied Mother in Heaven, it is perhaps understandable why she would insert these words.

Allred announces that “the Fall established individual identity” (p. 236) as if that is exactly what the scripture teaches and what the Saints have always believed.

On page 256 Allred informs us that “freedom is the principle which unites equality and diversity.” On page 265 that statement is transformed to “free agency . . . unites equality and diversity.” Are freedom and free agency the same thing or are they different things?

I also have grave doubts about Allred’s attempts to reduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to unconditional love, sentimentality, values, and toleration. Her “principle of polarity” seems more a nod to fashionable popular psychology than to the scriptures she cites in its support (see pp. 20–41). Nor am I comfortable with her introduction of popular psychological notions of “the self,” “self-esteem,” and “subjectivity.” Her thoroughgoing relativism, her philosophical or theological
notions like "transcendent" or "immanent revelation" (p. 225), and her introduction of a Cartesian mind-body dualism to "our spirits" (p. 72) also do not fit into the restored gospel.

Allred's essays do not represent mainstream Latter-day Saint teachings or beliefs. This is not exactly a secret. We have good reason to believe that Allred knows this as well, especially since many of the essays are explicit attempts at changing the church's structure or its fundamental beliefs. For Allred, it is not merely that today's church has lost something or lapsed into forgetfulness on this or that issue; it is that the church from the beginning has been wrong in its fundamental organization, beliefs, and teachings. I will leave it to readers to decide whether Janice Allred or Gordon B. Hinckley is God's prophet. In William J. Hamblin's words: "For me, the choice is quite simple and clear."49

---

48. Philosopher René Descartes held that since the body and the senses are easily deceived, the only way to achieve certainty is through the mind thinking thoughts. Hence his famous maxim: "I think; therefore I am." Allred has transformed Descartes's famous mind-body dualism to a "spirit-body dualism." Both the Cartesian mind-body dualism and Allred's spirit-body dualism are foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ.