

Texas: Exes and Sexes

When Texas Child Protective Services seized the children of mothers belonging to the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints, I wondered if the Independent Republic was turning Yankee. The seizure was an abuse of power against the fundamental institution of all human societies—the family. Fortunately, the ruling on May 23 by the state’s Third Circuit Court of Appeals (confirmed by the Texas Supreme Court on May 29), which condemned the action as illegal, restores my faith in the sanity of Texans.

Naturally, the feminist child-savers at the TCPS are appalled by the ruling, but what did they expect? Their case rested on the allegation that on the FLDS ranch there was a pervasive atmosphere of abuse of children and minors, which entitled them to seize all the children without proving in any one case that a particular child had been abused or even was in imminent danger of abuse. The smoking gun in the case was a telephone call from a girl who claimed to have been abused. When she turned out to be a middle-aged ex-member with a grudge, the case should have fallen apart, but like our Texan President, who kept on changing his excuse for invading Iraq, the prosecutors moved on to other allegations.

I do not know why such a strange religion as Mormonism was ever tolerated outside of Utah, but I do not make the laws. Mormonism is legal, and so is Fundamentalist Mormonism. However repulsive we may find polygamy or marriage with young teenage women, let us remember that the Fundamentalist Mormons are hardly much different from polygamous Mormons down to 1890, when under very serious pressure from the federal government, the LDS renounced—for the time being—polygamy. I have read remarks from so-called Christian conservatives who compare polygamy with homo-

sexuality. Where did such people go to school? King David was on a moral plane with homosexuals?

In America today, I do not see that there is any basis for outlawing polygamy. It certainly cannot be Christian moral law: Christianity can scarcely be mentioned in a public school or government building, and there is hardly any aspect of Christian morality that is enforced by law, even if there are still statutes on the books that retain the impress of the Christians who passed the law. When is the last time that adultery or fornication was punished as such? Prostitution is illegal in most places—with what justification I cannot imagine—but two consenting adults can do pretty much anything in the privacy of one of their homes. Military officers are occasionally punished for adultery, usually with someone under their command or at least in the same service, but that is a question of military discipline. A Michigan court has ruled that the penalty for adultery could be a life sentence, but I know of no one in Michigan serving time for seducing his neighbor’s wife. After *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), adultery became a dead letter. If adultery is not a crime, how can polygamy be punished? A bigamist who lies to his wives is one thing; he may well be regarded as having tricked his second wife into a contractual relationship. But a man who lives openly with two women has, in the eyes of American law today, committed no crime.

Critics of the FLDS also claim to be shocked by the marriage of underage girls with men in their 20’s and 30’s, but if they knew anything about the marriage customs of other ages, they would hardly be surprised. In colonial Virginia, parental consent was necessary for a minor to get married, but with consent a girl of 12 could become a bride. Even in America today, while marriage laws vary from state to state, it is simply not true to say that it

is illegal for a girl of 16 to get married. In Pennsylvania, girls and boys under 18 need parental consent and have to pay a fee, while minors under the age of 16 need the consent both of the parents and of a judge of the orphans court. In Utah, parental consent and permission from the juvenile court is required. In Texas, where the alleged abuse took place, parental consent on an official form or an order from the district court is sufficient. All this noise about the marriage of 16-year-old girls is a complete canard.

State governments routinely promote teenage promiscuous sex in the sex-education programs in government schools and in government-funded counseling centers. Condoms are routinely provided to children on the pretext of preventing the spread of STDs, when everyone knows that the purpose is to encourage teenage sex. And yet, here we have a state agency seizing a large group of children on the grounds that teenage girls are having sex with a man they regard as their husband and to whom they have promised fidelity.

A recent *Chicago Tribune* featured an article entitled “To many girls, sex with adults just part of life,” in which Mary Schmich interviews many young Chicago girls who openly talk about their sexual relations with older men. The young women she interviewed were mostly from the lower strata of society, but our entire culture, from top to bottom, is saturated with images of sexuality and promiscuity. From a little girl’s first Barbie to the social pressure to engage in sex games in middle school to TV shows, such as *Desperate Housewives*, designed to justify and promote adultery, American women are given a consistent message: Do it!

America, as a society, is dedicated to the sexual exploitation of women. The only “crime” committed by the Fundamentalist Mormons is their commitment to marriage. ◊

OLMERT'S TROUBLES

Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has been in trouble many times in the course of his long and colorful political career.

As mayor of Jerusalem, he was suspected of accepting bribes in the "Greek-island affair" involving former premier Ariel Sharon and his son, Omri (who was eventually convicted and jailed for seven months); but the case against Olmert was closed in 2004 without charges. In 2006, an inquiry was opened on the 1999 sale and lease-back of Olmert's house in Jerusalem, which allegedly netted him some \$330,000, leading to a criminal investigation a year later. In January 2007, he was the subject of another inconclusive criminal investigation over accusations that, as finance minister in late 2005, he tried to help a close personal associate buy the state-owned Bank Leumi. Last year, his political opponents accused him of improper business dealings and conflict of interest during his tenure as minister of trade and industry.

In all those cases, however, no smoking gun was revealed, leading Olmert to conclude somewhat smugly that he was "indestructible."

The latest investigation involving Olmert is different. It was opened in early May not in response to media reports or investigations by the state comptroller but as a result of information revealed during earlier probes. According to an Israeli-police statement, "The investigation deals with suspicions that the prime minister received significant sums of money from a foreigner or number of foreign individuals over an extended period of time." A police spokesman named American-Jewish businessman Morris Talansky as a key witness, along with Olmert's long-time secretary, Shula Zaken, and his former law partner, Uri Messer. Investigators are said to have cracked coded notes kept by Zaken of sums given by Talansky, to whom she referred in her notes as

"The Laundry Man."

Olmert denies any wrongdoing and says that he will resign only if indicted. "I look each and every one of you in the eye and say, I never took bribes," he declared in a televised address on May 8. "I never took a penny for myself." He said all the cash he received was legitimate support from Talansky to fund various election bids, including two successful campaigns for mayor of Jerusalem in 1993 and 1998, a failed candidacy for the Likud leadership in 1999, and a further internal Likud election in 2002. He also said Talansky "helped me cover deficits" after elections.

Talansky's Israeli-court testimony on May 27 presented a darker picture, however. Talansky said he had handed over about \$150,000 of his own money to Olmert, directly and through aides, over a 15-year period, and additional sums from fundraising. He did not know how the money had been spent: "I only know he loved expensive cigars. I know he loved pens, watches." According to Talansky, on one occasion Olmert also asked him for a personal loan of \$25,000 for a holiday in Italy. On another, he walked to a bank to withdraw \$15,000 in cash for a loan as Olmert waited in a nearby New York hotel; neither loan has been repaid. Talansky also covered some of Olmert's expenses during speaking tours of the United States, above what Olmert received from the institutions hosting him. In the final years of their relationship, according to Talansky, he brought Olmert ten envelopes stuffed with cash in New York and gave a number of additional envelopes to his secretary.

After Talansky's testimony, Olmert came under pressure to go. Former prime minister Ehud Barak was the first government minister serving in Olmert's coalition to call for his resignation. "Considering the challenges Israel faces, including Hamas, Hizbullah, Syria, Iran, the captured soldiers and the peace process, the prime minister cannot simultaneously lead the

government and conduct his personal affairs," Barak, who holds the crucial defense portfolio, told a press conference in the Knesset. Another minister belonging to Labor, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, called upon Olmert's centrist Kadima Party to do some soul searching and make "difficult decisions," because "an Israeli prime minister must be completely available to deal with the country's problems and not other matters."

Similar calls have come from within Kadima, with Knesset member Amir Dotan urging Olmert to demonstrate "personal leadership" by quitting. Her colleague Ze'ev Elkin declared that "the prime minister must resign... Israel cannot allow such a situation to go on." Even Olmert's staunch loyalists, such as Kadima deputy Yoel Hasson, have said that Olmert should "carefully consider his position in light of the circumstances."

Regardless of Olmert's eventual fate, the loser in the affair is the flagging "peace process" with the Palestinians; but that process was not going anywhere anyway. More interestingly, the announcement that Israel is now engaged in negotiations with Syria may be indicative of Olmert's desire to divert attention from his legal troubles and to earn some brownie points with the "doves." There is a precedent for such a strategy: In the summer of 2005, Ariel Sharon suddenly and unilaterally evacuated Gaza, thus drawing attention away from his own role in the Greek-island affair.

A year ago I talked at some length with a man who knows Olmert well, his advisor on Christian affairs during the second of his two terms as mayor of Jerusalem (1993-2003). Shmuel Eyyatar says that his old boss cannot imagine himself as a *former* politician: "To him, political power is everything, an end in itself, the purpose of his very existence; he is a politician with a big P."

The syndrome sounds familiar, especially after the Democratic primaries, and the prediction is easy to make: