

The below opinion piece was submitted to *The Salt Lake Tribune* for publication. The piece questions what appears to have become *The Tribune's* practice of printing articles that are devoid of any newsworthy information but simply amount to a regurgitation of propaganda supplied to it by FLDS leaders. *The Tribune* did not publish the opinion.

After the opinion piece was submitted, a very significant and newsworthy event undermining the FLDS Church's effort to hide evidence of child abuse took place in a San Angelo, Texas courtroom. At a multi-day hearing presided over by 51st District Court Judge Barbara Walther, Judge Walther rejected a challenge ostensibly by Teresa Jeffs's mother to replace Natalie Malonis, the court-appointed guardian ad litem who had been assigned to protect Teresa's interests. Ms. Malonis had incurred the wrath of the FLDS Church when she would not back down from her efforts to protect her teenage client, whom she believed was in danger of further sexual abuse.

The hearing was pivotal in that it served as a test case whether the court or the mother of an alleged sexual abuse victim (and the person alleged to have allowed the abuse to occur) would be able to determine who would represent the interests of the child. The hearing was all the more significant in that it was widely believed that it was the FLDS Church (the group accused of facilitating the abuse) that was actually orchestrating the effort to have Ms. Malonis removed.

At the hearing, it was revealed in fact that at least one of the attorneys advocating for Ms. Malonis's removal had been hired by the FLDS Church, and had been giving church leaders regular updates about their efforts to remove Ms. Malonis throughout the course of the hearing. This prompted questioning how attorneys purporting to represent an alleged sexual abuse victim could also represent the very individuals accused of facilitating the abuse. In the end, Judge Walther dismissed the Church's effort to remove Ms. Malonis and ordered its attorneys to stay away from Teresa Jeffs.

The judge's ruling dealt a blow to the FLDS Church's campaign to undermine efforts to protect children at risk of abuse and generated multiple news articles published in various newspapers, including at least two by the *Deseret News*. *The Tribune*, however, chose not to inform the public about Judge Walther's precedent-setting ruling.

Where Does *The Tribune* Really Stand on Child Abuse?

The Tribune's recent front-page story detailing the anguish of a young girl being separated from her mother by Texas Child Protective Services appears designed to foster sympathy for the FLDS in general and this mother's plight specifically. The story is replete with quotes from the young girl taken from a video supplied by the FLDS such as "Mother, mother, please don't let me go" and "How can I leave my mother." As sad as this scene is portrayed to be, the story fails to remind readers of the saddest fact of all: this is the *second* time this little girl was taken from her mother's arms, the first being when she was given in a "spiritual marriage" (an illegal, abusive union) at age 12 to a man in his fifties—with her mother's blessing. That man, of course, was Warren Jeffs, who, along with the girl's father, Merrill Jessop, swapped their preteen daughters with one another, thus becoming each other's fathers-in-law. These repulsive facts were either glossed over or completely omitted from the story.

Because the girl's mother made no effort to assure a Texas court that she would protect her daughter from further abuses, including other physical abuses that had been alleged, the court had no choice but to put her in an environment where she would be protected. There is no question that little girls belong with their mothers, but it is far better that they be taken into protective custody than be taken into an illegal union where they will be subjected to sexual abuse. Much, if not all, the attention focused on the FLDS would evaporate if parents, including mothers, would simply stand up and protect their children from these abuses.

Unfortunately, this has not happened yet, and having no defense for their actions, FLDS leaders have embarked on a smear campaign to discredit anyone taking part in the effort to stop these abuses. The FLDS have been greatly assisted in this campaign by *The Tribune*, which continues to publish articles that simply regurgitate the propaganda supplied to it by FLDS leaders.

For example, prior to last week's article, *The Tribune* reprinted FLDS propaganda attacking Dr. Dan Fischer, a private citizen, who had recently provided compelling testimony to the United States Senate Judiciary Committee about abuses occurring among the FLDS. *The Tribune* apparently concluded that the wild accusations of conduct allegedly occurring upwards of 30 years ago manufactured by those still under the control of Warren Jeffs and other FLDS leaders were not only newsworthy but deserving of prominent front-page placement.

Prior to that, *The Tribune* published a story attacking Natalie Malonis, one of the Texas attorneys ad litem who had been assigned to protect a young FLDS girl. Ms. Malonis's work on behalf of the girl posed a threat to FLDS leaders and, in response, they disseminated false information about Ms. Malonis's private life to undermine her efforts to help the girl (who may eventually have disclosed more evidence about the sect's abuses). *The Tribune* later reprinted this provocative yet inaccurate—and wholly irrelevant—information. Although *The Tribune* was eventually forced to retract this article, the FLDS had succeed once again in having *The Tribune* do its bidding.

Not too long ago, *The Tribune* published an editorial calling on law enforcement to do something about the abuses occurring among some polygamous groups. It is now time for *The Tribune* to stop undermining these efforts by publishing the propaganda of perpetrators, and instead return to publishing only newsworthy facts in an impartial manner so that the public knows where *The Tribune* really stands on child abuse.

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