

## Red Square on Temple Square - Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church

# Recovery Board

"Red Square on Temple Square"; Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church [new](#)

Posted by: ^ ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 08:18AM

IT'S BECOME RED SQUARE ON TEMPLE SQUARE

By Mary Ann and Steve Benson  
Special for The Arizona Republic  
22 May 1994

It was November 1993. Over a month had passed since we told the Mormon Church to remove our names from its membership rolls. Church leaders had been imploring us to reconsider, warning of their 'great concern' should we leave 'the Lord's Church.' We insisted that our decision was final. Church authorities eventually relented and decided not to banish us through excommunication, but instead they 'allowed' us to leave.

One morning, the phone rang. It was the bishop of our ward, informing us that for paperwork purposes, church headquarters needed to know our reasons for departure. We did not feel obligated to give any reason, believing that our desire to leave should be reason enough.

But the bishop persisted, saying it was necessary for the 'administrative action form' ordered by the head of the Mormon Church. Uncomfortable with the pressure, we waited a day, then phoned back. We told the bishop we disagreed with the church over doctrine, history, faith and treatment of women. The bishop thanked us and hung up.

Ten minutes later, he called back and asked if we would be interested in selling him our home.

Although we declined his offer, we have, in a very real way, found a new and expansive spiritual, emotional and intellectual abode, free from the choking control of Mormonism.

Still, we value our Mormon friendships established through our lifelong affiliation with the church. We also appreciate the numerous letters and calls we received from across the country – from Mormons and non-Mormons – expressing their love and support. Many have shared with us their painful encounters with the church.

In other Mormon circles, we have been shunned and condemned. One of our children was derided by a Mormon classmate, who said that now that we had left the church, our child would end up 'doing drugs.' Another wanted to leave his Mormon Scout troop because of icy treatment from some of the boys.

Many Mormons have branded us as liars, called us ignorant, denounced us as publicity hounds, declared us to be possessed by the devil and accused us of disloyalty to family. It has even been falsely suggested that we left the church because of sexual infidelity. Still others sent us anonymous hate mail, accusing us of committing spiritual suicide and consigning us to hell.

Because of our decision to deal with the unpleasant realities of Mormonism in an open forum, threats were made to cut us off from the inner family circle even before we left the church. We were warned by family not to talk to the media, and when we did, some kin accused us of having 'no conscience.'

We were fortunate to escape the current Mormon inquisition, before the church's assigned executioners were able to drag us to the chopping block. Others have not been so lucky. In recent months, a spate of feminists, historians, intellectuals and scholars have been cut off from the church for so-called apostasy.

Charges of heresy have ranged from calling for ecclesiastical equality for women to critical analysis of Mormon scripture to writing letters to the editor about controversial aspects of church history and doctrine that Mormon authorities would hope remain unknown to the outside world.

The purge has intimidated many Mormons into silence, who fear being expelled from the church on charges that they are in opposition to 'The Brethren,' the term for the Mormon hierarchy.

Many have been the subject of secret files kept by shadowy church committees; some Utah Mormons have confided to us that they suspect their phones have been tapped. The Berlin Wall may have fallen, but the Mormon KGB is alive and well.

It all reads like a chapter out of a totalitarian history book, only it's actually happening today. We would not allow ourselves to be similarly mistreated, so we left.

After a lifetime of membership in the Mormon Church, we came to regard it as an institution beyond repair, its moral heart eaten out by the worms of deceit, intolerance and blind conformity.

We see Mormonism in a state of significant spiritual and intellectual decay, corrupted by the systematic and unchecked abuse of

ecclesiastical authority at the expense of individual liberty, honesty and truth, and led by men lacking in prophetic vision. It has become tyrannical in its control and authoritarian in its exercise of power; in short, it has become Red Square on Temple Square.

From our own experience, we saw relentless attempts by Mormon Church authorities to compel us to 'pray, pay and obey' at the expense of honesty, integrity and individuality.

In many respects, we saw Mormonism manifesting the classic symptoms of a 'dysfunctional religious group' – what some would call a cult – as described by Kay Porterfield, MA, in her book, *Blind Faith*.

Our oldest son seemed to understand the situation well. Months before we left the church, he made this unprompted observation: 'Dad, I'll tell you why there's religion in the world – to control people by scaring them into believing that if they don't obey, they're going to hell.'

We discovered that the Mormon Church is built on a rigid, top-down, patriarchal power structure, insulated from checks and balances and therefore vulnerable to abuse of authority.

In this regard, we became particularly concerned with efforts by the Mormon patriarchy to stifle and control women. Mary Ann was chastised by a Mormon male leader, who, in all too typical fashion, refused to deal directly with her but instead relayed his criticism through husband Steve.

The leader said it was inappropriate for Mary Ann, in youth Sunday school class, to praise the courage of the female followers of Jesus, who remained at his side even through his death, while contrasting it to the actions of his male disciples, who fled for their lives. 'We wouldn't want the young men to think their priesthood leaders were less than loyal,' he said.

Our teen-age daughter found the discrimination intolerable. One day, she stood up in her Mormon-youth religion class and boldly told the teacher that just as the denial of the Mormon priesthood to black men had been racist, so the denial of the Mormon priesthood to women was sexist. The woman teacher had no adequate answer for the great-granddaughter of the current Mormon president.

Mary Ann was appalled at a Mormon patriarchal system that protected pedophiles and minimized the pain suffered by victims of sexual abuse. She was dismayed by a senior apostle's callous trivialization of the pain felt by abused women as comparable 'in the eternal scheme of things . . . to a very, very bad experience in the second semester of the first grade.'

For the Mormon Church, when it came to women, even Steve was too liberated. He drew a cartoon criticizing the church for denying

women their right to be heard and was sternly ordered by his stake president to 'cease this activity of denigration.' He refused.

Likewise, he felt the hot breath of the church on his neck when he drew cartoons critical of Arizona's Mormon governor, Evan Mecham. One anonymous Mormon Church apostle (whose discontent was relayed through family channels) criticized his cartoon lampooning Mecham's defense of the term 'pickaninny.' The Mormon official feared it would hinder church missionary work in Nigeria.

His drawings skewering Mecham's racist utterances and political bungling prompted more phone calls from outraged local Mormon Mechamites to church headquarters in Salt Lake City. They denounced his work as 'sacrilegious' and demanded he be hauled into church court.

Steve's eventual punishment was a rebuke from his stake president and removal from local church assignments.

Across a broad scale, we learned from our own experience that the Mormon Church intrudes deeply into the personal lives of its members, seizing in long meetings and intense confessionals the time, finances, thoughts and emotions of its flock.

As with most Mormons, we found we had little opportunity to discover the vast and varied world outside the church.

We were simply too busy being ordered about by our leaders on whom Mormons should date and marry, when to show up for church, when and how to have sex, what to eat, when and in what kind of jobs to work, what sort of friends to make, what types of movies to avoid and how to dress. (Mary Ann was reported to her ecclesiastical authorities for wearing a swimsuit under her cover-up en route to the community pool instead of the approved Mormon underwear.)

We became painfully aware that Mormon leaders and their loyal followers often condemn individual thinkers or dissenters as Satan-inspired 'wolves' and 'apostates' whose ideas are to be dismissed or who are to be quickly brought into submission to prevent their voluntary departure from the church.

When Steve spoke out publicly on the church cover-up of the actual health of the church president, his grandfather, Ezra Taft Benson, he and his family were harassed by Mormon leaders, fliers were circulated at church meetings, and prayers were delivered from church pulpits denouncing his statements.

In the name of maintaining faith, church leaders peddled the myth that the Mormon prophet was actively at the helm when, in fact, he was incapacitated. Propping him up for photo sessions as if he were some kind of storefront mannequin was a calculated, conspiring abuse of power, not to mention disrespectful and undignified for a man we love.

Only later, through a press leak, did Mormons learn that total legal authority to run the church had been secretly transferred years earlier from President Benson to his counselors via his signature machine. Yet the church continued to deceptively preach that he was still in charge and only recently admitted he is, in fact, incapable of meaningful leadership.

We also could not condone the willingness of high Mormon leaders to persistently lie, or at the very least, shade the truth, with regard to their involvement in the local disciplining of church members. Church apostles privately acknowledged cases of improper meddling in these matters, but then, in an effort to protect their own, proceeded to deny it in public. We were astounded to hear that they expected us to cover for them.

Further troubling to us was the pathological unwillingness of the Mormon Church to deal forthrightly with its doctrine and history. Our personal study revealed that church canon, history and scripture had been surreptitiously altered, skewed, rewritten, contradicted and deleted.

Examining early church documents that have been studiously hidden from the eyes of most church members, we were disturbed to discover the weakness of Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, for women, drinking and money-digging. Reading Mormon scripture, we found persuasive evidence that it was non-historical and brimming with plagiarisms.

And contrary to Mormonism's claims of being a mainstream Christian sect, we discovered it clung to peculiar and offensive notions of polygamy, racial superiority, blood sacrifice, polytheism and Masonic-cult temple rituals.

It couldn't last. We were unhappy, and our four children could sense it. Something had to give. We decided it was time to take back our lives. When we finally left the Mormon Church, our 6-year-old daughter asked, 'Does this mean now we're Christian?'

In a letter to her Mormon parents, Mary Ann spoke for us both as she explained what our decision to abandon Mormonism means to us and the positive effect the choice has had on our lives:

"I became aware of the unquestioning obedience demanded by church leaders of their members. I was able to see the control the church wields over the minds and lives of Latter-day Saints.

"I grieved as these realizations became clear to me. The betrayal I have felt has, at times, been overwhelming. I have deeply mourned my loss of faith in the church. I place full responsibility for that loss at the feet of its leaders, because the history and doctrine that I was taught to be true are, in actuality, anything but true. In other words, the church claims to be something it is not.

"Given what I know, how could I in good conscience remain a member of a church that I knew was dishonest, deceitful and an enemy to the truth? The answer to that question is, 'I could not.'"

She concluded:

"This search for truth has been painful and exhausting. Yet, it has also been exhilarating and freeing. I have learned the truth about the Mormon Church, and by leaving it, I have been set free – free from the falsehoods, false prophets and false truth.

"I am not asking that you and Dad agree with my decision, although over time I hope you can understand and eventually accept that it is right for me and that I am finally at peace."

(Postscript: Msry Ann and Steve divorced in 2008)

Re: "Red Square on Temple Square"; Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church [new](#)

Posted by: **elderolddog** ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 09:51AM

Are all four of the kids out of the church?

yes (n/t) [new](#)

Posted by: **topped** ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 03:38PM

Re: "Red Square on Temple Square"; Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church [new](#)

Posted by: **baura** ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 04:56PM

^ Wrote:  
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- > We discovered that the Mormon Church is built on a
- > rigid, top-down, patriarchal power structure,
- > insulated from checks and balances and therefore
- > vulnerable to abuse of authority.

That's the advantage of having "insider" connections. You can find out these secret, hidden aspects of the Morg. ;)

**Re: yes** [new](#)

Posted by: **wonderingrightnow** ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 04:56PM

Did the divorce have anything to do with the church? I wanted this story to have a happy ending. So it's basically just another saga about how the church destroyed a family?

**Not really. Left the church cooperatively and together. (n/t)** [new](#)

Posted by: **topped** ( ) Date: August 12, 2016 09:21PM

**Re: "Red Square on Temple Square"; Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church** [new](#)

Posted by: **newcomer** ( ) Date: August 13, 2016 06:27PM

I wonder if Steve was having doubts before he met his wife and if she would have left TSCC without him.

**Re: "Red Square on Temple Square"; Why the Bensons Left the Mormon Church** [new](#)

Posted by: **DebbiePA** ( ) Date: August 13, 2016 06:56PM

Steve, this all happened a long time ago. I'm curious:

Do you still feel like you're suffering the fallout of leaving?

Are there family members and/or friends who never spoke to you again?

Are there family members and/or friends who left the church and came back to thank you?

What, if anything, would you have done differently when all this was going down?

The bishop wanted to buy your house? Really? Where did he think you were going?

**After meeting with Oaks and Maxwell, they decided to leave together. (n/t)** [new](#)

Posted by: **Topped** ( ) Date: August 13, 2016 11:46PM

**Previous RfM entry by Steve Benson on his post-Mo family relations** [new](#)

Posted by: **Topped** ( ) Date: August 14, 2016 12:16AM

(The following was posted on RfM by Steve Benson several years ago)

I have a cordial, but distant relationship with most of my immediate and extended family.

They are up to their puffy white temple hats in the Church, and we don't have a whole lot to talk about since I no longer do green Jello, Priesthood Session or Book of Mormon reading time.

I do occasionally attend family functions or drop in for visits when behind the Zion Curtain (but not often because, frankly, there is way too much Mormonism that entangles and obstructs honest relationships, all of which I find annoying and which bring up old



hurts and anger that will never completely dissipate).

I am in the process of processing and hope to come to some comfort level with them. I have a couple of sibs with whom I am quite close; the others are friendly, but we aren't drinking buddies--yet (heh, heh).

The Mormon Church is the neutron bomb of religion.

It destroys the inner workings of families, leaving people hollow, devastated and incomplete--with the outward appearance of structure.

Having been poisoned by it, I try staying away from it as much as possible.

I am much happier outside its epicenter.

## Re: Previous RfM entry by Steve Benson on his post-Mo family relations [new](#)

Posted by: **Amyjo** ( ) Date: August 14, 2016 07:47AM

Topped Wrote:

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Recovery from Mormonism - [www.exmormon.org](http://www.exmormon.org)