

News Updates

NOT SO BRIGHT FUTURE FOR MISS CLEO?

While popular psychic Miss Cleo concentrates on the future of her clients, Florida's Attorney General is more focused on her past. Miss Cleo, who rose to fame on television infomercials, tells her millions of viewers that she's a Jamaican shaman. The state of Florida thinks otherwise.

Jennifer Vaughn, an investigator for Florida's Attorney General's office, has identified "Miss Cleo" as Youree Harris, a 39-year-old woman residing in an upscale area of South Florida. Apparently, Miss Cleo has better insight into her patrons' future than her own. When Vaughn tried to serve Harris with a subpoena in February, Harris (Miss Cleo) made a 911 call that brought a Broward County sheriff's deputy to the scene. The police officer warned Harris "about calling 911 and trying to dodge a subpoena." Harris then accepted the court summons from Vaughn.

Assistant Attorney General Dave Aronberg said people who are spending millions of dollars have a right to know the truth about Miss Cleo. "That's important because the whole concept of Miss Cleo is premised on her being a shaman from Jamaica. If she's from the Bronx instead, that would be fraud," Aronberg said in a *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* report. Officials have publicly stated that they do not expect that either Miss Cleo or the various corporations with which she is affiliated will be able to document that she is the "world-renowned or acclaimed master psychic" she claims to be.

The state of Florida is not the only fog that may eventually cloud Miss Cleo's crystal ball. Just hours after the Florida indictment, the Federal Trade Commission filed its own lawsuit charging Miss Cleo's psychic network is "permeated with fraud." The FTC made its move after it had received a "high volume of consumer complaints." Miss Cleo has been the recipient of previous investigations and/or lawsuits by the attorneys general in Missouri, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania.

On popular commercials, and more lengthy infomercials, Miss Cleo incites viewers to make a "free" call to learn more about their spiritual journey or future, including their love life. The first three minutes are free, but it is claimed that during that time, callers are put on hold or questioned for basic personal information. After that the call is forwarded to a 900-telephone number which charges \$4.99 a minute. Some callers have racked up charges as much as \$300. According to the FTC, the average bill is about \$60. The lawsuit also charges that Miss Cleo's "readers" are paid for the amount of time

they spend on the phone with callers. These "readers" (or operators who answer the phones) are paid on a per-minute basis and are fired if they are not able to keep patrons on the line for a minimum of 12 minutes, the FTC lawsuit said.

—MKG

THE HIGH PRICE OF EXORCISM

A Fort Worth jury has found pastor Lloyd McCutchen, former youth pastor Rod Linzay, and several other members of the Pleasant Glade Assembly of God Church of Colleyville, Texas, liable for an exorcism gone wrong. The jury awarded a \$300,000 judgment to Laura Schubert. Schubert brought suit against the church for two exorcism attempts made on her in June 1996. She was seeking more than \$500,000 in damages.

Schubert, who was 17 at the time of the incident, claimed that as many as eight youths pinned her to the church floor while trying to exorcise demons, as adults from the congregation watched. Schubert, now 23, and other witnesses testified that she kicked and tried to break free as the church's youths tried to expel the demons. "This was not a situation of prayer. They were trying to commit an exorcism on me," she told jurors.

David Pruessner, an attorney for the church, argued that Schubert had exhibited a pattern of overdramatization and had developed a mental disorder. "Laura Schubert breathes in attention the same way we breathe in air," Pruessner told the court. "Before she showed up at the church, she had a pre-existing personality disorder," he said. The attorney said the hardship of periodic uprooting and travel because of her missionary parents contributed to her condition.

Schubert's attorney, Bill Wuester, disputed Pruessner's claims, stating the teenager was a model student at her high school, worked at a job, and had paid for her own car. "The girl had no problems. ... She had a great life," Wuester said.

An earlier court ruling in the lawsuit prohibited jurors from hearing any religious aspects of the case, including explicit details of the two exorcisms. According to a *Star-Telegram* report, Schubert's original indictment described "a bizarre night in which church members anointed the sanctuary with holy oil, rapped on pews and propped a cross against the church doors to keep or drive demons out." However, the "jurors heard none of

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be people living longer because they have not thrown away their medicine or neglected their child's medical care. There would be fewer people suffering and dying alone (without the help of their television idol) because they would have been connected to a pastor and church family that would be with them personally in their crisis times. The gain would be spiritually enormous and the glory of God would be enhanced in lives. The Bible would be elevated and the idolatry, heresy, and confusion slowed to a crawl, rather than a gallop. May God have mercy on us and help us.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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that," the Fort Worth newspaper stated.

McCutchen, who is liable for half of the judgment, said the verdict will not destroy his congregation. "The church will go on," he stated.

—MKG

UTAH RANKS FIRST IN ANTIDEPRESSANT USE

Utah ranks number one in the use of anti-depressant drugs, according to a recent nationwide study. "Antidepressant drugs are prescribed in Utah more often than in any other state, and at a rate nearly twice the national average," the report said.

The study, conducted by Express Scripts Inc., a St. Louis-based pharmaceutical management company, also said antidepressant use in Utah was twice that in California and nearly three times greater than in New York or New Jersey. Maine and Oregon also ranked high on the list.

While the report did not record antidepressant use by gender, statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health show that nearly twice the number of women suffer from depression than men.

According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, "the pressures of Mormonism" may be the cause for the highest national average. "Utah's large families — the biggest in the nation, according to the 2000 Census — are often cited as a contributing factor to depression," the newspaper stated.

Dr. Curtis Canning, president of the Utah Psychiatric Association, said, "In Mormondom, there is a social expectation — particularly among the females — to put on a mask, say 'Yes' to everything that comes at her and hide the misery and pain. ... You are supposed to be perfect because Mrs. Smith across the street can do it and she has three more kids than you and her hair is always in place. I think the cultural issue is very real. There is

the expectation that you should be happy, and if you're not happy, you're failing."

Seventy percent of Utah's population claim membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

—MKG

HARE KRISHNAS FILE CHAPTER 11

Facing a \$400 million lawsuit over alleged sexual abuse by leaders in its schools, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy law. The Hare Krishna group hopes the move will lead to the dismissal of the lawsuit.

The 94 plaintiffs in the lawsuit, which was filed in Dallas, say they were abused during the 1970s and 1980s while living at Hare Krishna *gurukulas* (boarding schools) in India and the United States. Hare Krishna children were placed in such schools to allow their parents more time to proselytize. Children as young as five were also sent to the boarding schools so that they would become pure devotees of the Hindu-based religion.

In 1998, after the accusations were made public, the Krishna organization established the "ISKCON Office of Child Protection," devoting \$1 million to a multiyear program to help the children of its members who suffered physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. (See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1999.)

Krishna representative Anuttama Dasa defended the bankruptcy move. "We don't believe that innocent members and congregations should be held accountable for the deviant behavior of individual acts committed 20 or 30 years ago." ISKCON also announced plans to establish a compensation fund for those who were abused at its schools.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

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movement, including Albert Mohler, John MacArthur, Michael Horton, Os Guinness, and G.A. Pritchard.

Crucial sections in the book include chapters on psychology (with several pages of key fundamental differences between psychology and Scripture), the content of preaching, and the pivotal role of music.

Far too many pastors (and their congregations) look to growth as a sign of God's favor. Gilley sounds a necessary alarm that we cannot measure God's blessing by success. This is a much-needed book to wake up a Church inspired by pragmatism.

—MKG