

# Book Causes Clamor in Church

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PHOENIX — When Deborah Laake was married, her Mormon husband pulled her through a bed-sheet-like veil in a symbolic representation of the way he would later bring her into the afterlife.

When she got a civil divorce nine months later, she learned it would last only until death, when she would rejoin her husband in eternal union.

And when she wrote a best-selling book about these and other experiences as a budding feminist in a male-dominated religion, she was excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.

"They treat me as if I am satanic. I don't regard these people as my enemies, and apparently they see me as theirs," the Phoenix-based journalist said in a recent interview. "It's pretty remarkable for people to hate you so much because you write your story."

The book, which has caused a stir in Mormon circles here and in Salt Lake City, is "Secret Ceremonies: A Mormon Woman's Intimate Diary of Marriage and Beyond."

In it, the 39-year-old Laake recalls her youthful devotion to her faith, then reveals secret church rituals and the penalties for breaking their vow of silence. She explores her life as student, wife and divorcee in a religion where only men are entrusted with the priesthood — a pipeline to God.

"This book talks about genuine social ills that pervade the church," Laake said. "I wrote it to help people who have problems."

The church in which Laake grew up is not pleased.

"'Secret Ceremonies' misrepresents the purpose of our most sacred beliefs," church spokesman Don LeFevre said from Salt Lake City. "We are disappointed that they would be commercially exploited."

"Secret Ceremonies" has been on *The New York Times* best seller list for eight weeks. The July 25th list ranked it No. 11. Laake said she didn't think it would be particularly successful and denied writing it for financial gain.

Laake writes of secret marriage



AP Laserphoto

DEBORAH LAAKE, 39, of Phoenix, wrote "Secret Ceremonies: A Mormon Woman's Intimate Diary of Marriage and Beyond." The contro-

versial book about the Mormon Church stands at No. 11 on *The New York Times* best seller list.

rites in which she learned secret handshakes, was given a code name by which her husband would recognize her in the afterlife, was anointed with oil and was equipped with a neck-to-knees undergarment that would protect her from the devil.

Her betrothed, whom she called Monty, sported white clothes, a fig leaf apron and a hat that looked like it belonged to a chef.

Laake says she had once tried to break her engagement but changed her mind because Monty said their union was sanctioned by God. She said she believed him because he was a man, and God communicated with men.

After the civil divorce, Laake, unlike her ex-husband, was condemned by Mormon General Authorities, who scrutinized her private life and prevented her from participating in certain Mormon services, like weddings.

After "Secret Ceremonies" was published, she was excommunicated by local church officials, who refused to discuss specifics. Her excommunication letter says she was ejected because of her apostasy.

Beverly Campbell, the church's director of international affairs, said she doesn't recognize the organization Laake describes. She accused the author of trashing men and destroying institutions.

LeFevre said Laake doesn't speak for most Mormon women.

"For every Deborah Laake in the church, there are many thousands who have had the opposite experience — for whom their church memberships and marriages have been beautiful and positive experiences," he said. "My wife certainly does not feel like she is ignored. Her experience, from what she tells me, has

been absolutely opposite of what Deborah Laake says."

Laake, who now writes for the *New Times*, an alternative weekly in Phoenix, said the most difficult part of writing "Secret Ceremonies" was its effect on her family.

"It's saddened me because it hurt my parents," she said. "Their beliefs dictate that I won't live with them in heaven, and they feel like they've lost a child. They'd always maintained hope that someday I'd come back."