

Holiday opponent says King 'exceeded Lucifer'

By Steve Yozwiak

The Arizona Republic

The leader of a drive to erase Arizona's new holiday for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. criticized the slain civil-rights leader in a letter Sunday, saying King "exceeded Lucifer in his ability to deceive the masses with impressive oration and dedication in spite of his addiction to alcohol, tobacco and sex."

Julian Sanders made the remark in a letter addressed to "Dear and Beloved Prophet" and sent to Ezra Taft Benson, president of the Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in which he complains about a church spokesman in Mesa expressing support for the Legislature's approval of a paid state holiday honoring King.

Supporters of the holiday reacted to the letter, a copy of which was obtained Wednesday by *The Arizona Republic*, more with pity for Sanders than with outrage.

And Steve Klein, a spokesman for the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, said Sanders' statements about King

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"are not true in any sense of the word."

House Minority Leader Art Hamilton, a southwest Phoenix Democrat and a leading proponent of the King holiday, said Sanders' letter was "inappropriate, and he ought to be ashamed of himself."

Sanders, head of Arizonans for Traditional American Values and a high priest in the Mormon Church, has launched a petition drive for a referendum to repeal the King holiday. He must gather at least 43,350 valid signatures of registered voters by Dec. 21 to put the issue before Arizona voters at the November 1990 general election.

In the letter, Sanders quotes from past writings by Benson and former church President David O. McKay that are critical of King and communism, and talk about the "duty" of individuals to fend for themselves. Sanders said the church should remain neutral on the King issue.

He writes, "After 30 years of observing and studying the life and works (fruits) of M.L.K. Jr., in the light of President McKay's declarations re: above, I can honestly know that he (King) exceeded Lucifer in his ability to deceive the masses with impressive oration and dedication in

spite of his addiction to alcohol, tobacco and sex."

Sanders writes that John Lyons of Mesa, a church spokesman, was quoted last month in the *Mesa Tribune* as saying, "In the collective wisdom of the Legislature, they seemed to have felt it (the King holiday) was the thing to do, and, obviously, we would support it."

According to the letter, "Here, Brother Lyons would have us believe that the church obviously supports the prostituted moderates and liberals who united in 'collective wisdom' to force upon us a tax-paid holiday honoring the master deceiver of the ages!"

Sanders also criticizes King for favoring the redistribution of wealth, a guaranteed annual income and low-cost housing.

Pat Quaranta, leader of Citizens for the Restoration of Columbus Day, said the tone of Sanders' letter was one of the reasons his organization was hesitant to use Sanders' referendum petitions.

Quaranta's group decided Tuesday to work with the Sanders-led petition drive because it was the easiest way to restore the state's Columbus Day holiday.

In approving the King holiday last month, the Legislature eliminated the

Columbus Day holiday in October, beginning in 1990, so that taxpayers did not have to pay the estimated \$2 million cost of having an 11th holiday each year for state workers.

"He (Sanders) assured me that there would be no racism brought up in this campaign, and this (Sanders' letter to Benson) upsets me tremendously," said Quaranta, president of the 600-member Arizona American-Italian Club.

Quaranta, who on Monday had considered taking out separate petitions to avoid any taint of racism that some associate with Sanders, said Wednesday that he plans to write a letter to Sanders asking him to refrain from any "racial slurs" but will go ahead with the petition drive.

Sanders said that he does not want the Mormon Church to become involved in his efforts to do away with the King holiday and that he was disappointed that his letter to Benson had found its way to a reporter.

However, his letter to Benson says, "Brother Lyons has (lost) credibility with the most loyal, conservative saints here."

Lyons, who also received a copy of the letter, said, "I'm not going to comment on the letter. My comment to the (*Tribune*) reporter was simply to state the essence of our 12th Article



Julian Sanders
/ Says King
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of Faith, and that is to follow the law of the land."

Sanders said it would be "presumptuous" of him to recommend actions be taken by higher church authorities.

"I'm not in a position . . . to ask that anybody do something about it. If someone else wants to do something about it, that's their prerogative," he said.

Don LeFevre, a spokesman for the church in Salt Lake City, said he could not comment on the letter without having seen it.

However, LeFevre said the church did not oppose the King holiday when it passed the Utah Legislature, and the church recognized the holiday with a paid day off for its employees.

Senate Minority Leader Alan Stephens, a south Phoenix Democrat, said of Sanders' letter, "It seems to be a strange crusade that the man is engaged in. He seems to be obsessed by the issue."

Sanders also sent a letter to legislators, bashing King's record and citing past opposition of Arizona's Republican congressmen to the federal King holiday.