

# Not Law, Not Spirit

*Sarah Smith*

EXCEPT FOR STILL BEING AN OFFICIAL MEMBER of record, I severed all links with the LDS church in 1982. No residual attachments did I cultivate—no LDS-related literature, forums, alliances, or associations.

One reason for my disaffiliation is the existence of human tragedy. For the life of me, I cannot comprehend the kind of human tragedy that is antithetical to a God who epitomizes love and mercy—degenerative multiple sclerosis that sculpts a macabre twisted, nonfunctioning body; quadriplegic from a spinal cord injury due to a freak accident; diabetes resulting in blindness among other debilitating symptoms; a mental deficiency that maintains the developmental age of three years old throughout a lifetime; the death of a daughter or son from a skiing accident.

Considering that human nature is flawed, and having learned some head-banging lessons about human nature through my profession of counseling others, little surprises me of what people think and do. Consequently, and this may sound grotesque, I believe that I am better able to understand whence come tragedies inflicted by humans onto others, however heinous, monstrous, depraved, and unforgivable, whether it be a group of soldiers raping, pillaging, and ravaging a village, or a father shaking, beating, and throwing his infant baby against a wall, causing permanent brain damage, or a couple of drug addicts robbing French artist Hugues de Montalembert at knife-point while forcing him to strip and throwing acid onto his face, permanently blinding him.<sup>1</sup>

But senseless, apocalyptically senseless, to me are other tragedies, more related to the very physicalness and fragility of having mortal bodies or living in a world of inflexible natural laws, tragedies not altogether caused by human behavior, that I cannot spiritually or intellectually understand or reconcile.

The bottom-line confession, though, is that I agonize about pain and suffering of many kinds, regardless of cause.

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1. See Hugues de Montalembert, *Eclipse: A Nightmare* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985).

Many will think, You don't know what you're talking about, so naive, idealistic: this is what life is for—to suffer, part of the whole experiential credo of living. Possibly so, for I have had more than a brimming portion.

I am no expert, but I have studied some of the dynamics of suffering, and in my profession I counsel clients who have suffered unspeakably. Of course, I realize the cause-and-effect of suffering is muddled, no clear, precise delineation between human-made and other-induced, and I have read religious literature on suffering which is usually more concerned about defending God's honor and purposes, giving so-called logical evidence that tragedy is good and necessary.

Yet the perpetual thought I extrapolate from such tragedy is, if almighty God is indeed omniscient and omnipotent, the very God who created this earth with wide expanses of ocean, land, and sky, and other worlds more numerous than the sands of a sea, surely he can prevent a child from being born with stubs for arms and legs or a diving accident that produces a quadriplegic unable to feed, dress, or use a bathroom. None of us is immune—such tragedy and suffering is no respecter of persons.

Surely an omnipotent God could have saved Andre Dubus, who stopped one night in July 1986 to help a stranded motorist but in the process was hit by an oncoming car that resulted in one amputated leg and the other damaged beyond use so that he is permanently confined in a wheelchair.<sup>2</sup> Surely an omnipotent God could have prevented the son of Harold Kushner and his wife from being born with progeria, where he would not grow beyond three feet, have no hair on his head or body, look like an old man while still a child, and die in his early teens.<sup>3</sup> Surely he could have saved the lives of those killed in the recent floods in the Midwest or those lives lost in the TWA flight 800 crash, cause still unknown. Where is God who has forsaken these innocent people, many who lived non-parasitic, contributive, rich lives?

What good, or evil, person "deserves" or "needs" to be fed every single bite wearing catheter bags for urine and feces changed at regular intervals? People give me an encyclopedia of opinions and explanations whereupon I say, Be a quadriplegic for a year and then come back. Or blindfold yourself for another year and tell me you didn't starve for plump, juicy colors, or die a little each time you couldn't clip your own toenails or squirt just the right amount of catsup onto your burger.

If God is loving and merciful, I cannot see testimony of that in these wrenching tragedies. Thus one reason for my inactivity in the church—ir-

2. See Andre Dubus, *Broken Vessels* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1991).

3. See Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

reconcilable differences between the two seeming dichotomies. I cannot comprehend the existence of such uncompromising suffering when I believe God has the power to yea or nay it; such irrevocable, consummate suffering flays my spirit and wails a bottomless dirge. I cannot worship a God who "allows" such shattering, skull-spiking suffering that never ends but goes on and on and on, surely as bones can break and dead flesh decays, a God who has chosen to stay his hand.

However, I believe with unflinching certainty that the values and principles taught by Christ and the prophets are true: love, truth, beauty, goodness, integrity, freedom, justice.

One link I have maintained with the church is I attend all my sons' official church events, which includes participating in their missionary farewell sacrament meetings. Only that in the case of my youngest son, his bishop would not allow me to speak. As a result of the anguish, injustice, and helplessness I and my son felt from this bishop's decision, I wrote the following letter to President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Feeling like a prairie dog whose burrow has been flooded, I curse through gritted teeth at having to leave a safe place to stand by the principles I value.

Before any thought of publication, I had written solely for President Hinckley, with copies for the parties involved. Normally modest, I felt I needed to "toot my own horn" since I was a stranger convincing the president of the church that I had done nothing against the church to warrant this bishop's decision. I apologize if parts of the letter sound like a paean for self. (After completing the letter, I learned that my son's bishop and others in his stake presidency hold powerful positions at Brigham Young University and are prominent members of the community.)

*Dear President Gordon B. Hinckley,*

*I am writing to you because I think that with your compassion and understanding concerning the scope of worldwide missionary work, the Church's growth by leaps and bounds, particularly by people of color, and the importance of accepting and working with differences within and without the Church, you may appreciate my perspective on the following situation. At least I believe you will read this with an open heart.*

*I write to express my thoughts about what Bishop \*\*\*\*\* \* \*\*\*\*\* , who resides on \*\*\*\*\* in Orem, Utah, advised my son, David Jonathan Smith. David has been called to serve a mission in Japan, and will be giving his "farewell" talk on April 27, 1997. When David went for his interview to apply for a mission call, Bishop \*\*\*\*\* told David he does not want me to speak at his "farewell," that the stake presidency told him when I spoke previously at my second son's farewell, my talk "detracted from the spirit." It seems that Bishop \*\*\*\*\**

implied to David that his request to exclude me was the stake presidency's decision. I participated at my other two sons' "farewells."

With all due respect, I and others believe Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s and the stake presidency's reasons for this decision are ambiguous, arbitrary, and prejudicial. I have copies of the talk I gave at my second son's "farewell" and invite anyone, Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency, to assess how it "detracted from the spirit." The thesis was "love one another as I have loved you," and accept people despite their differences.

It appears that Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency may harbor prejudice and discrimination against inactive members, divorced members, and/or ethnic minority members, all of which I am—the same status as when I spoke at my other two sons' "farewells." My first son's farewell was under a different bishop, but my second son was with Bishop \*\*\*\*\*. Not being in his ward or stake and his not knowing who I was, my conjecture is Bishop \*\*\*\*\* "allowed" me to speak at my second son's farewell because it was too late to change the program when he discovered the "detractions."

When I called David's stake president on April 1, 1997, to inquire whether it was a church policy to not allow inactive members to speak at sacrament meetings, President \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\* said it was not a church policy but that it was every bishop's prerogative to decide for his ward what he would allow or not allow. He said, "This is Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s call and I support his decision and I won't call him to change it." President \*\*\*\*\* did not invite me to meet with him to discuss my feelings, nor did he say he would talk to Bishop \*\*\*\*\* for further information and clarification.

In addition, not once did President \*\*\*\*\* say anything to the effect of, "this stake presidency decided that it was best not to include you ..." or "we discussed this and advised the bishop to ..." or "it was the consensus of the stake presidency that we advise the bishop to tell David ..." or "this was our decision to ..." or "we feel it best to advise Bishop \*\*\*\*\* to ..." In other words, there was no declaration or implication from President \*\*\*\*\* that Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s decision was a result of the "stake presidency's decision." In our conversation, President \*\*\*\*\* repeatedly said the decision to exclude me was the bishop's call, that bishops know what is best for their wards, that sacrament meetings are entirely the bishop's call on how to organize them, and that he supports all the bishop's decisions.

President \*\*\*\*\* also informed me that no ward "needs to have farewells," that missionaries and their parents "do not have to speak at all," that there is no requirement to have "missionary farewells at all." Nevertheless, after I gathered information from several members of his ward, they believe that during Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s tenure as bishop thus far, all missionaries and their parents have participated in "farewells." It appears Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency did not exclude any other parent.

David is feeling torn and confused about his bishop's request. He desires

both his parents to speak, not understanding the rationale behind my exclusion. We all feel great distress that David is suffering unfairly due to a bishop's and stake presidency's seeming personal vendetta and prejudices.

I am not writing to change Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s decision or to seek intervention. In fact, this letter may only produce apathy and indifference. Or it may produce repugnant, vengeful, and hurtful consequences for my family and me—from you, the stake presidency, and/or Bishop \*\*\*\*\*. By mere expression, we realize I tread dangerous ground loaded with land mines.

I am writing to express my hurt and frustration about Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s arbitrary decision. Whatever his reasons and concerns, it seems appropriate and fair that he could at least have made an effort to meet with me to express them, clarify questions he might have, and obtain feedback from me. If he was concerned about what my talk would be, he could have asked me. If he thought my talk at my second son's farewell was inappropriate, he could have told me and advised changes I could make. If Bishop \*\*\*\*\* had doubts of any kind, he could have met with me to discuss them.

But instead of any attempt to meet with me, to get to know and understand me, Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency made a decision that pains David, my other sons, my friends, and me. In all honesty, David sees no justification for the decision to exclude me. I wonder if Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency understands that this decision influences irrevocably one of David's most important days of his life. Like most missionaries, David desires both his parents to participate—the two most influential people in his life, the two people who bore, raised, and loved him. At this writing, David informed his father that he didn't want one parent to speak and not the other—to spare further anguish for me. His father kindly consented. Therefore, at this writing, the speakers planned are his two brothers and half-sister. However, I encourage David to ask his father to speak—David should at least have one parent speak at his "missionary farewell," at what may be the most important sacrament meeting of his life. Why should David have to suffer due to his church leaders' unjustifiable prejudices against me?

It seems to me, and others, that Bishop \*\*\*\*\*'s and the stake presidency's attitude and behavior is not Christlike, charitable, empathic, or missionary-like. If they were at all concerned about those who have left the fold, or if they were truly concerned about me as a "child of God," they would have been more effective missionaries and servants of God had they acted with kindness, understanding, and compassion. Instead, they chose to turn me away without getting acquainted with me, without inquiring about my spiritual welfare, without asking what my thoughts and feelings are about the church, and in short, ignoring an important missionary, teaching, and pastoral opportunity to maybe make a difference in another soul's life.

An apropos illustration of Christlike behavior was presented by a talk you presented during the priesthood session of General Conference on April 6, 1997.

*My oldest son told me the story of your lifelong fellowshiping of an inactive member from England, and of your devotion despite his never becoming active again before his death. The story moved me, and I am reminded of the scripture, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40, Mosiah 2:17, D&C 42:38).*

*I ask Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency: where is charity for one soul who happens to be different, who may be questioning and searching? Where is "judge not that ye be not judged"? Where is "lengthening your stride" and "going the extra mile" to understand and appreciate another human being who is different from yourself? If this is the attitude and behavior of men like Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and men of this stake presidency, I hate to think how many inactive, different, or non-members they may lose by not acting more Christlike, forgiving, accepting, and compassionate. I hate to think how men who act like Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency can affect people's salvation and their eternal welfare through insensitivity, unrighteous judgment, and conditional acceptance. Imagine the magnitude of their influence for good—or evil. One never knows the breadth and depth one's actions can indelibly affect—a kind word here, an unkind word there, good or poor judgment, reaching out, closing down. Like a stone thrown in water, people's attitudes and actions ripple. Like bells in a cathedral, they reverberate.*

*I ask Bishop \*\*\*\*\* and the stake presidency: where is the practice of the counsel you gave at the April General Conference in 1995: "We are becoming a great global society. But our interest and concern must always be with the individual. Every member of this Church is a man or woman, boy or girl. Our great responsibility is to see that each is 'remembered and nourished by the good word of God' (Moroni 6:4) ... The organization can grow and multiply in numbers, as it surely will. This gospel must be taken to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people ... But with all of this there must continue to be an intimate pastoral relationship of every member with a wise and caring bishop or branch president. These are the shepherds of the flock whose responsibility is to look after the people in relatively small numbers so that none is forgotten, overlooked, or neglected."*

*James said in James 2:8-9, "If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons [i.e., respecter of persons means to feel or show deferential regard for—opposite of "God is no respecter of persons"], ye commit sin ... For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."*

*To my knowledge, I have not given any bishop or any other Church authority official cause to turn against me. I am still an official member of the Church, and have not been cited by the Church for any inappropriate behavior to warrant a change of status.*

*I have never participated in any anti-Mormon movement or function; I have never written or published anything anti-Church, anti-Christ, anti-Mormon. Using Boyd K. Packer's admonition against the following—I am not a homosex-*

ual, Mormon feminist, or Mormon intellectual. In fact, I support the teachings and tenets of the Church, and how they lead people to live more honest, responsible, moral, and humanitarian lives. I tell my sons that if I had more children, I would raise them in the Church. Is there any higher support and praise for the Church than to raise your own precious children in the Church?

Like many mothers, I have a close relationship with my sons. If you ask them, they will tell you that I love them, care about them, and have assisted in their spiritual and moral growth and development, both by word and by example. My sons will tell you that I played a critical role in helping them become strong, devoted members of the Church. In their formative years, it was I who organized weekly family home evenings. I taught and read to them the scriptures and stories about the Gospel. I helped them with their prayers every night. Like many mothers, I taught them to love Jesus, act with kindness and fairness, love the music of the Church as much as I did, love going to all Church meetings, which I did, obey the "word of wisdom," keep the Sabbath day holy, look forward to being missionaries, and marry worthily in the temple. Whenever they participated in Sunday school services, sacrament meetings, Primary, or seminary, I was there. During the entire four years when my first two sons were on their missions, I faithfully wrote every week, sent them gifts during special occasions, and provided other needs.

Like many mothers who day by day and week by week build their children's character brick by brick, my architectural blueprint included plans like limiting their television watching to an hour a day, not allowing any rude words or swearing, not even "shut up," teaching them the importance of being on time and to call when they are going to be late, and "dragging" them to art museums, concerts, and the mountains to help them appreciate "the more abundant life." I can hear them whisper, "Don't tell mom about that trailhead we just saw or we're going to have to hike it." I taught my sons good manners; they say, "Thank you," "Please," and "Excuse me." I taught them to value trustworthiness—to keep their word and follow through, to not lie or cheat, to be scrupulously honest. As they grew older, they have chosen good friends. They do not single-date, they only group-date. They do not watch R-rated movies or explicit TV shows. They are honest, responsible, polite boys. They are clean and pure. I remember teachers fighting to have them in their classes.

I have also encouraged their academic and intellectual development, both by word and example. I, myself, completed a graduate degree, I constantly read and learn from literature, other publications, and the arts, I write fiction and nonfiction, I play violin. Before they were four years old, I taught each of them to read and complete simple math calculations. In elementary grades, my oldest son was double-promoted, and my other two sons were invited to enroll in gifted classes. Two of them have four-year academic scholarships to BYU, and one has a one-year scholarship at BYU.

What I say about my parenting may sound like puffed-up pride and brag-

ging. The truth is I don't feel prideful or proud—because I am not a perfect parent, because I make mistakes. What I feel is inadequacy and imperfection fulfilling the role of mother. What I feel is great humility at having the opportunity to be the parent of such fine, young men. What I feel is I have taken seriously and responsibly the stewardship of parent and have worked hard to magnify the calling; this I can unequivocally say, though I may fall short.

Throughout their lives thus far, I continuously encourage my sons in all their pursuits and interests, encourage them to fulfill their potential, praise them for worthwhile achievements, console them when they feel sad or hurt, build their self-esteem and self-worth in every way I know how, give them wise counsel and wisdom, help them know they are wholly and unconditionally loved by me, and engrave upon their souls that they are choice, valiant sons of God. These young men are truly extraordinary, and I stand in awe of their goodness and purity, their intellect and spirit. I truly feel blessed and privileged to have been a part of their lives.

You, of all people, President Hinckley, understand the worldwide magnitude of the Church's growth and development and the need to be accepting of people's differences—whether they are member or non-member, active or inactive, single or divorced, Russian or Chinese, black or white. Instead of working against differences, I know you would work with them. The following quotes confirm what you already admonish. Elder John K. Carmack in his book, *Tolerance: Principles, Practices, Obstacles, Limits*, published in 1993 by Bookcraft, wrote: "We do not believe that any nation, race, or culture is a lesser breed or inferior in God's eyes. Those who believe or teach such doctrine have no authority from either the Lord or his authorized servants."

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in an address given after the 1978 revelation to give the black race the priesthood, quoted the passage 2 Nephi 26:33 about all being alike unto God and said, "Many of us never imagined or supposed that these passages had the extensive and broad meaning that they do have" (from "All Are Alike unto God," speech delivered, 18 Aug. 1978, in Charge to Religious Educators [Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982], 152).

President Howard W. Hunter said, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ transcends nationality and color, crosses cultural lines, and blends distinctiveness into a common brotherhood ... All men are invited to come unto him and all are alike unto him. Race makes no difference; color makes no difference; nationality makes no difference ... As members of the Lord's church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover the supreme truth that indeed our Father is no respecter of persons" (from "All Are Alike unto God," *Ensign* 9 [June 1979]: 72, 74).

I appreciate your taking the time to read this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely and respectfully,



cc: *President \*\*\* \*\*\*\*, Area President  
President \*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*, Stake President  
Bishop \*\*\*\*\* \*\*, Bishop*

Whether to attend David's farewell was a roller-coaster struggle—one minute, yes, the next, no, it's too painful, I'm too humiliated, what will the ward who knew me back more than fifteen years ago think? What will my former husband's family think, *all* active, my sons' grandparents, now Provo temple president and matron? Everyone will wonder why the mother of David is not speaking, and no one will know the story behind the why.

Above all, though, I mourned that I would not be on the stand sitting beside the three good-looking, righteous young lads whom I bore and raised, proclaiming in public through my presence and participation my love and support for all of them, particularly for David on his special day for which he had meticulously planned since childhood. Could I bear to see them all up there with their father, without me, picture-imperfect? In the end, for David, I went and wept. The bishop wasn't even there—out of town, someone said. The stake president was there but didn't speak to me. At the traditional open house held at my former husband's home, the family members were all kind and friendly, as they usually are—I needn't have worried about them.

My former husband's family, his parents, his siblings and their spouses and children, is an extraordinary family overstocked with righteous and outstanding accomplishments for a family of fifty-eight people, at last count—all active, every jot and tittle along the iron rod, soldered families with soldered family values—missions, temple marriages, college educations, upstanding careers, the kids all bright and moral, like our kids. It must partially be that good old Smith line going back to Asael Smith, Joseph Smith's grandfather, good old-fashioned pioneer stock. I love this family, one legacy my sons say they feel blessed to have.

I'm the only "black sheep," in more than one offense.

Since on my side of the family I was the sole once-active, now-inactive member of the church for generations going farther back than Joseph Smith's birth date, part of my lone LDS-like legacy is that my sons have had to accept and live with differences in a homogenous society, one being an atypical, non-conforming, single parent not of the dominant race nor for all practical purposes of the dominant religion. From me, they have learned more acutely, more pointedly like nails jabbing the underbelly of their conscience, about exercising the spirit of the law when it is the higher law, which translated often means practicing the second great commandment. They have learned that there is a time and season for everything under heaven—a time for law and a time for spirit.

I am delighted and grateful that my sons, including David, believe that the bishop's and his stake presidency's behavior was not based on law or spirit, that their behavior was unfair, undeserving, and unChrist-like.

When a month passed by and then another without hearing from President Hinckley, I gave up hope. Not even a form letter. Then out of the blue I received a phone call from a member of the stake presidency presiding in my area. I discovered that President Hinckley finally did read my letter and had instructed the area president to contact the stake presidency of the region I live in. This stake presidency, with whom I was not acquainted, contacted me on 6 July 1997 to ask for a meeting, which was held 13 July. Each member of this stake presidency had read a copy of my letter. As instructed, they met with me to personally hear my thoughts and feelings about what had occurred, with the intent of reporting back to the area president.

In our meeting this stake presidency was a regalia of handshakes, smiles, and nods. In the spirit of fellowshiping, their demeanor and countenances suggested that the bishop's behavior might be questionable and, when pressed, agreed that if it were they who had any concerns about my speaking in church, it seemed reasonable and fair to arrange a meeting to express their thoughts. In addition, they asked for a copy of the talk that "detracted from the spirit," given 31 July 1994. So later that week I gave the stake president a copy of my talk, and in a letter to him I brazenly requested that he ask the area president for a formal apology from the bishop and his stake presidency on these points.

1. Their attitude and behavior hurt my family and me not only because of their *decision* but also by the manner in which they conducted this procedure. When the bishop informed David at his missionary interview that he didn't want me to speak, he fully expected David to inform me of his decision rather than assuming the responsibility of informing me himself. He and the stake presidency left this responsibility to an impressionable young man, desirous to respect church authority yet also loving his mother, to inform her of a very hurtful decision. Indeed, David couldn't bear to tell me; his brother did.

2. They *never* gave me a chance, if their decision was truly about my talk "detracting from the spirit," to first write my talk for everyone to proofread and revise until it met unanimous approval.

3. Not one of them contacted me in any way after receiving a copy of the letter to President Hinckley. Even if they thought their reasons were legitimate, they did not express remorse, regret, or humanity for the pain they caused me. Naturally I do not expect an apology from the bishop or any of the stake presidency. If anything, I am prepared for apathy, anger, excuses, criticism, non-culpability—I misunderstood, misconstrued, mis-

interpreted, I was mistaken, am wrong.

All I dare hope for at this point is they do nothing to hurt my sons, overtly or covertly. People warn me that by publishing this essay, I risk retaliation for myself and my family for which we can only hope and pray that a higher law and a higher spirit will preside. Like I said, little surprises me about people's behavior regardless of status, education, or economic level, career, genealogy, religion.

Not based on law or spirit, the effect of the bishop's and his stake presidency's attitude and action leaves me feeling like a worthless, faceless anomaly not good or important enough to treat with respect and dignity. What's more, it is demoralizing to realize that men who abuse their authority in the name of performing the Lord's work feel justified, even blessed for exercising their power thusly. If not, how else could they rationalize such behavior in good conscience, unless they have no consciences.

An event took place that strengthens our belief that the bishop's decision may have been prejudice-based, whether racial or other. Two weeks after my son's farewell, another mother in the bishop's ward, also inactive, separated from her husband, and, known by the ward and the bishop for cultivating "interesting ideas," spoke at her son's farewell. Obviously the bishop did not request that she not speak. When I discovered this, I felt even more powerless. If the bishop's decision were based on prejudice of race and ethnicity, he or any other member of the church would never openly admit such a bias so diametrically opposite is prejudice to the first and second commandments upon which "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

I now know better, but at the time I expected "my" stake president to support me in his report to the area president. Rather than say what was expressed to me in our meeting or that he had "found nothing offensive" in my talk, as he had informed me, he was noncommittal in the report. Not only did he not write one word of support, nothing about the inappropriateness of the bishop's actions or that I and my family deserve an apology, he implied that the copy of my talk I gave him might be contrived. He wrote, "She provided me with a copy of her text of the talk to review which I have also done. Of course, not having been present in the meeting, which was held in another ward in a different stake, I cannot speak with authority or knowledge about that."

After receiving a copy of the disheartening report, I called a counselor in this stake presidency to see what exactly his instructions were from President Hinckley. As he understood them, he told me they were to verify that what I had written to President Hinckley was valid and justifiable and to "make things right" with me. I informed him that the report failed on both counts. Not only did the stake president not write that he had

found nothing offensive in my talk, which would have verified that my concern to President Hinckley was valid and justifiable, but I also feel pained by his implication that the copy of my talk was questionable. As a result, I now have even less faith, respect, or trust in ecclesiastical justice and no faith, respect, and trust in this stake president, who lacked integrity and honor in this matter.

Nothing was made right, as President Hinckley had instructed. If anything, the cowardly hypocrisy is vinegar added to salt already searing an open wound. Since I am not knowledgeable in these matters, maybe this is normal protocol, the way the church takes care of people's petty problems. To me, the report reeks of "the old boys' club." Why should this stake president stick his neck out for me, a "nobody?" As long as everyone "made a show of making things right" to placate and pacify me, they did their dirty deed and duty.

I realize that what happened to me is relatively minor compared to what others have suffered, particularly those who have been excommunicated or terminated from employment in the church system. At the same time, my case possibly represents the more "normal" kinds of injustices and abuses that can occur in the church.

Quoting from the talk I gave at my second son's farewell, the one that "detracted from the spirit," I had expressed concern regarding my first son, who was serving a mission in Hong Kong at the time and who was

experiencing hardship in getting baptisms of his own. Like all missionaries going through this non-event, he gets discouraged, but like a supportive parent, I tell him that the most important work he could do there or anywhere is to love the people like himself. If he exercises this principle, the turn of events will follow its natural course like a river or stream. He will do his best work, the kind of performance the Lord expects of him, if he follows the course of loving others as he loves himself.

I reiterate this same admonishment to Daniel [my second son], and all emissaries of the gospel, that the guiding star to the people in the Philippines [his mission] is to love them as he loves himself, baptisms or no baptisms. If Daniel embraces this principle, it will be as if Christ were leading him by the hand, helping him choose the right, keeping him on the straight and narrow. "Love one another as I have loved you" will take the discouragement out of referrals not panning out, it will take the sting out of investigators not passing their interview, it will take the disappointment of someone deciding the night before that they do not want to be baptized.

Except for the quintessential "example and exemplar" of how Christ lived his life, this is the human person I want my sons to emulate. I close with the beautiful, inspired words of Lowell Bennion, who understood perfectly that he could not live the first great commandment without living the second great commandment—the way he conducted his life is a

beating and breathing testimony of his love for God and for humankind. He could not have left a worthier, more holier legacy.

The Church is an essential part of the religious life. There we are taught the gospel, make sacred covenants, and have opportunities to serve one another. But the Church is not the end of the religious life. We are not here to serve the Church but rather to serve people through the Church. Men and women are not made for the Church, but the Church, like the Sabbath, is made for them. We do not teach lessons but people. Ultimately nothing matters in a class, a meeting, an interview, or a church activity except what people take away—ideally, increased hope, faith, knowledge, desire to serve, or resolution to live the teachings of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

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4. "Reflections on the Restoration," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18 (Autumn 1985): 160-67.