

# LETTERS

## *A Call for Compassion*

I was raised in Logan, Salt Lake City, and Ogden, Utah, as an active member of the LDS Church. I gained so much of great value from all the years in Primary, Mutual, and the priesthood quorums. From that association, as well as the great example of my parents and wonderful teachers along the way, I learned many positive lessons that have formed the foundation of my life.

I learned that we should all love and care for each other—that we are all brothers and sisters and should treat each other accordingly. I learned that perhaps our highest calling is to help those who are in need and to be compassionate and kind toward those who are faced with difficult challenges. I learned, generally, that hatred, prejudice, and meanness toward others should be rejected in favor of love, inclusiveness, and kindness. Those seemed to be the fundamental moral messages from my church.

However, I learned other, very different, lessons as a young Mormon boy. I learned that discrimination against African Americans, including their exclusion

from the priesthood and their exclusion from worshipping in LDS temples, was compelled by God because their skin color was the mark of Cain as a result of their wrongdoing in an earlier life. I even learned that Brigham Young maintained that slavery was an institution ordained by God, that a white person who “mixed his seed” with a “Negro” should be killed, and that African Americans were not to be treated as brute animals, but were to be treated as the servants of servants.

I learned that we were not to question religious or civil authority. I recall once hearing someone say from the lectern in my ward that, according to the Twelfth Article of Faith, we are to unquestioningly follow the directives of leaders, including military commanders, and that if the directives are immoral, those giving them, not those who follow them, will be held responsible on judgment day. Even as a young boy, I recall being appalled at that call for individual moral abrogation. The idea that we are all to fall in line when ordered, even when doing

so harms others, is abhorrent, dangerous, and contrary to the most fundamental lessons taught by Jesus and other major religious leaders.

Until 1967, antimiscegenation laws in many states prohibited interracial marriages. An African American and a white, like Barack Obama's parents, could not marry each other under those laws. Society advanced, and the laws caught up with those advances. In 1978, the president of the LDS Church said he had a revelation from God that the exclusion of black men from the LDS priesthood was to be lifted.

I learned another thing as a young boy: I was taught that gays and lesbians—they were called “homosexuals” in those days—were inferior people engaged in perverse wrongdoing. It was common for many people to use derogatory terms like “homo,” “queer,” or “faggot.”

Since then, I have learned to liberate myself from those bigotries. I have learned that I can grow—and that, as I do, not only do I treat others better but I also become a better person myself. My life is enriched as I learn about others who are different from me and as I learn to value, not just tolerate, those differences.

I know many gay and lesbian people who have married. In fact, I recently attended a wed-

ding reception for two men, Idaho farmers, who were married in California. They have been together, committed to each other, loving each other, for thirty years. So many of the gay and lesbian couples I have known are loving and committed, and have demonstrated a remarkable stability in their relationships—a stability that has so far eluded me in my relationships. These good people, and those who love them, are hurt every day of their lives when they are treated under the law as second-class citizens and as they face the sort of prejudice, discrimination, and hatred generated by such measures as Utah's Amendment 3 and California's Proposition 8.

The LDS Church is repeating a tragic and deplorable history through its vast involvement in the passage of Proposition 8—except that the bigotry and discrimination are now being directed not at African Americans but toward gays and lesbians. It is an outrage—and it is an occasion of great sadness for the LDS Church, for its members who are once again being, and allowing themselves to be, led astray, and for those who are victims of the hurtful judgments of those who think they are some-