

Remarks of Ross C. “Rocky” Anderson

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I was raised in Logan, Salt Lake City, and Ogden, Utah, as an active member of the LDS Church. There was so much of great value I gained from all the years in Primary, Mutual, and the Priesthood. From that association, as well as the great example of my parents and wonderful teachers along the way, I learned many 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 believed that slavery was an institution ordained by God and that, although African-Americans, in Brigham Young’s view, were not to be treated as brute animals, they were to be treated as the servants of servants.

I learned that we were not to question church or civil authority. I recall once hearing someone say from the lectern in my ward that we were to unquestioningly follow the directives of leaders, including military commanders, and that if the directives were immoral, those giving them, not those who followed them, would 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 is harmful to others, is abhorrent, dangerous, and so contrary to the lessons taught by Jesus and other major religious leaders.

Until 1967, antimiscegenation laws in many states prohibited inter-racial 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 – and in 1978, the President of the LDS Church said he had a revelation from God that the exclusion of Blacks 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; I 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 attended a wedding reception just a few days ago for two men, Idaho farmers, who were married in California. They have been together, committed to each other, loving each other, for 30 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 that, frankly, have put mine to shame. And 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.

With the LDS Church’s vast involvement in the passage of Proposition 8, we are seeing a repeat of a tragic and deplorable history – except the bigotry and discrimination is now being directed not at African-Americans but toward gays and lesbians. It is an outrage – and it is an occasion for great sadness for the LDS Church, for its members who are once again being led astray, and for those who are victims of the malicious judgments of those who think they are somehow superior to their gay brothers and lesbian sisters.

Let us all call for greater love, better understanding, and dignity and respect toward all, regardless of race, regardless of faith or lack of faith, and regardless of sexual orientation. Let us all follow, rather than just talk about, the Golden Rule. Let us move beyond the false and hollow judgments that result in such pain, even to the point of suicide, for many LDS youth. And let us embrace each other as brothers and sisters and rid ourselves of the pernicious distinctions on the basis of sexual orientation that, with tragic consequences, have been drawn in the law and in so many hearts.

Just as racial discrimination is now forbidden in the United States, and just as antimiscegenation laws are now nothing more than a shameful part of our nation’s history, we will celebrate full marriage equality some day.

We have come so far in just a few years. There will be obstacles, but reason, fairness, and a higher morality will prevail – if we join together in demanding it.

Let us all keep up the proud fight – the fight for fundamental fairness, the fight for compassion, the fight for love.