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FROM THE CAMPUS

## ENCOUNTER WITH AN APOSTLE

By John Armstrong



BRANT DAY

ELDER SETLOW DRIVES THE VAN UP and I open the sliding door to let Elder M. Russell Ballard and President and Sister Chen climb in. Elder Setlow nervously pulls ahead, having never chauffeured an apostle before, and I pay attention to the conversation in the back, expecting to hear some light-hearted remarks from our guest about the night's events.

Elder Ballard has just given a seventy-five minute address to the whole Taipei Mission. Obedience. Get up on time. Have a positive attitude. We are warring with Satan's imps. Pray that the Lord will accept your work. Then the challenge: contact ten new people every day.

I expected wrong. The conversation does not turn to something more light-hearted. Instead I hear, "If your missionaries will open

their mouths to the people around them, they will convert more people." Elder Ballard's insisting is met by submissive nods from President Chen.

Once at the hotel, Elder Ballard invites us all to dinner. When our party enters the elevator, a man with an English accent asks, "Which floor?"

"Third," says Elder Ballard. "Come with us and we'll preach the gospel to you." The man doesn't respond, and we get off on three.

Elder Setlow and I seat ourselves across from Elder Ballard. After the waiter takes our orders, Elder Ballard says, "If I could speak this language, I would have had four referrals in this restaurant by now." I feel my heart sink, but both of us keep our eyes attentively on Elder Ballard's, not wanting to appear daunted by his boldness.

"When that waiter comes back, I want you to tell him that you represent the true church of Jesus Christ on the earth today and that you want to teach him the gospel." We nod.

When he comes back, I find myself choking on the commitment pattern. Building relationships of trust, resolving concerns, presenting the message, all go out the window; Elder Ballard wants us to go straight for the invitation. After some awkward introductions, we extend the invitation in an undiluted form. "Will you let us come to your house and teach you the gospel?"

"Sure." He accepts.

Elder Ballard looks on intently, waiting for a translation. I tell him that the man has accepted, and Elder Setlow takes down his phone number and makes arrangements for the discussion. The apostle doesn't say anything, just slightly nods his head.

FIVE months later I am sitting in front of my new mission president with tears in my eyes. Stories have come from the new missionaries about Elder Ballard's MTC talks. I have become part of a motivating story that inspires missionaries to open their mouths, giving everyone the opportunity to hear the gospel. The catch is that Elder Setlow and I are used as bad examples.

From the reports, I understand Elder Ballard to be saying, "They looked at me as if to say, 'Here? Now?!' And as it turned out, the man accepted the invitation for the first discussion."

I'm hurt. I have been working my heart out for twenty months on an island in the South China Sea, dealing with people who have foreign beliefs, eating habits, and driving courtesy, and one of the Lord's anointed holds me up as a bad example. Some of the missionaries even know my name. He mentioned it as he told the story to the Taichung Mission only a few days after the restaurant encounter. The story has been told to the last five groups of new missionaries coming over to Taiwan. "You were the ones he was talking about?!" they would realize. It's funny for them.

"What can I do for you, Elder Armstrong?" asks President Price after a painful silence.

"Nothing." The word sounds garbled.

"I feel like calling him up right now and saying, 'Russ, let's just talk like friends for a minute. I have an elder in my office that is very hurt by the restaurant referral story.' I know he would apologize, Elder Armstrong. He would feel awful."

"I don't want him to feel awful, I just want him to stop telling the story."

"What have you learned from this experience?" inquires President Price.

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## A CHANGED MAN

# THE HYPOCRITES OF HOMOSEXUALITY

By Orson Scott Card

"I've learned that Elder Ballard's story is his interpretation of what took place. I wasn't hesitating to invite someone to hear the gospel. Although he may have thought I was hesitating, I have contacted people in restaurants before. Doesn't he realize that it's not every day a missionary receives an order from an apostle? Aren't I entitled to a surprised look on my face? Sure, the guy accepted the invitation. He was trying to keep us from losing face. He never showed up for the appointment, and Elder Setlow has called him a dozen times since."

I am still upset as I leave his office, but the next day I decide to drop the whole thing. I am torn inside, but I can't blame someone else for making me unhappy. I can't let my own pride ruin my life. Elder Ballard is doing what the Lord needs him to do, and I know that he is not intending to hurt me.

ANOTHER five months later I'm in another office—Elder Ballard's. The secretary asks if we taught the young man we contacted in the restaurant. "No," I reply, "he didn't show up."

"Come on in, Elder." I hear his confident voice.

We visit for twenty-five minutes.

"I've been using the story of our encounter with the waiter in some of my talks," he says.

"That's what I've heard."

He looks a little embarrassed, but I don't pursue it. My feelings have long since healed. I tell him how the mission took his advice on contacting more people and was now baptizing 50 percent more than before his visit. Seeming somewhat satisfied, he remarks that nowhere else in the world is there a group of kids that accomplishes so much as the missionaries of this church. He says, "It would never happen if the Lord wasn't doing the converting."

"I know," is my honest response. ☎



WHEN I WAS an undergraduate theatre student, I was aware, and not happily so, how pervasive was the reach of the under-culture of homosexuality among my friends and acquaintances. After a while I stopped being shocked to discover that someone I had known well, or whose talent I admired, was either moving into or already a part of the not-so-clandestine network of gay relationships. I learned that being homosexual does not destroy a person's talent or deny those aspects of their character that I had already come to love and admire. I did learn that for most of them their highest allegiance was to their membership in the community that gave them access to sex. As a not-particularly-pure-minded heterosexual adolescent, I understood the intensity of sexual desire; as a student of human communities, I have since come to understand how character is shaped by—or surrendered to—one's allegiances.

One thing is certain: one cannot serve two masters. And when one's life is given over to one community that demands utter allegiance, it cannot be given to another. The LDS church is one such community. The homosexual community seems to be another. And when I read the statements of those who claim to be both LDS and homosexual, trying to persuade the former community to cease making their membership contingent upon abandoning the latter, I wonder if they realize that the price of such "tolerance" would be, in the long run, the destruction of the Church.

We Latter-day Saints know that we are eternal beings who must gain control of our bodies and direct our lives toward the good of others in order to be worthy of an adult role in the hereafter. So the regulation of sexual drives is designed not just to preserve the community of the Saints but also to improve and educate the individuals within it. The Lord asks no more of its members who are

tempted toward homosexuality than it does of its unmarried adolescents, its widows and widowers, its divorced members, and its members who never marry. Furthermore, the Lord even guides the sexual behavior of those who are married, expecting them to use their sexual powers responsibly and in a proportionate role within the marriage.

The argument by the hypocrites of homosexuality that homosexual tendencies are genetically ingrained in some individuals is almost laughably irrelevant. We are all genetically predisposed toward some sin or another; we are all expected to control those genetic predispositions when it is possible. It is for God to judge which individuals are tempted beyond their ability to bear or beyond their ability to resist. But it is the responsibility of the Church and the Saints never to lose sight of the goal of perfect obedience to laws designed for our happiness.

The average fifteen-year old teenage boy is genetically predisposed to copulate with anything that moves. We are compassionate and forgiving of those who cannot resist this temptation, but we do not regard as adult anyone who has not overcome it; and we can only help others overcome these "genetic predispositions" by teaching them that we expect them to meet a higher standard of behavior than the one their own body teaches them. Are we somehow cruel and over-dominating when we teach young men and young women that their lives will be better and happier if they have no memory of sexual intercourse with others to deal with when they finally are married? On the contrary, we would be heartless and cruel if we did not.

The hypocrites of homosexuality are, of course, already preparing to answer these statements by accusing me of homophobia, gay-bashing, bigotry, intolerance; but nothing that I have said here—and nothing that has been said by any of the prophets or any of the Church leaders who have dealt with this

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issue—can be construed as advocating, encouraging, or even allowing harsh personal treatment of individuals who are unable to resist the temptation to have sexual relations with persons of the same sex. On the contrary, the teachings of the Lord are clear in regard to the way we must deal with sinners. Christ treated them with compassion—as long as they confessed that their sin was a sin. Only when they attempted to pretend that their sin was righteousness did he harshly name them for what they were: fools, hypocrites, sinners. Hypocrites because they were unwilling to change their behavior and instead attempted to change the law to fit it; fools because they thought that deceiving an easily deceivable society would achieve the impossible goal of also deceiving God.

The Church has plenty of room for individuals who are struggling to overcome their temptation toward homosexual behavior. But for the protection of the Saints and the good of the persons themselves, the Church has no room for those who, instead of repenting of homosexuality, wish it to become an acceptable behavior in the society of the Saints. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, preaching meekness while attempting to devour the flock.

No act of violence is ever appropriate to protect Christianity from those who would rob it of its meaning. None of us are without sin—the casting of stones is not our duty or our privilege. All that must ever be done to answer them is to declare the truth, and to deny them the right to call themselves Latter-day Saints while proclaiming their false doctrine. Even as Christ freed from her accusers the woman taken in adultery, he told her, Go and sin no more.

No community can endure that does not hold its members responsible for their own actions. Being human, we try from childhood on to put the blame for the bad things we do on someone or something else. And to one degree or another, we do accept plausible excuses—enough, at least, to allow us to temper our judgment. The American polity defines the crime of second degree murder to allow for those whose anger was greatly provoked, as distinguished from those who coldly kill for gain. Also, we are willing to alter the terms of confinement of those whose unacceptable behavior clearly derived from mental illness. In short, we recognize the principle that those who have as little control over their own behavior as small children should be treated as compassionately—yet firmly—as we treat small children.

What we do with small children is to

establish clear boundaries and offer swift but mild punishment for crossing them. As their capacity to understand and obey increases, the boundaries broaden but the consequences of crossing them become more severe.

Within the Church, the young person who experiments with homosexual behavior should be counseled with, not excommunicated. But as the adolescent moves into adulthood and continues to engage in sinful practices far beyond the level of experimentation, then the consequences within the Church must grow more severe and more long-lasting; unfortunately, they may also be more public as well.

This applies also to the polity, the community of citizens at large. Laws against homosexual behavior should remain on the books, not to be indiscriminately enforced against anyone who happens to be caught violating them, but to be used when necessary to send a clear message that those who flagrantly violate society's regulation of sexual behavior cannot be permitted to remain as acceptable, equal citizens within that society.

The goal of the polity is not to put homosexuals in jail. The goal is to discourage people from engaging in homosexual practices in the first place, and, when they nevertheless proceed in their homosexual behavior, to encourage them to do so discreetly, so as not to shake the confidence of the community in the polity's ability to provide rules for safe, stable, dependable marriage and family relationships.

Those who would be members of a community must sacrifice the satisfaction of some of their individual desires in order to maintain the existence of that community. They must, in other words, obey the rules that define what that community is. Those who are not willing or able to obey the rules should honestly admit the fact and withdraw from membership.

Thus, just as America, a democratic society, is under no obligation to preserve some imagined "right" of citizens who wish to use their freedom to overthrow that democracy and institute tyranny, so likewise the LDS church, which is founded on the idea that the word of God as revealed through his prophets should determine the behavior of the Saints, is under no obligation to protect some supposed "right" of those members who would like to persuade us that neither God nor the prophets has the authority to regulate them.

If the Church has not the authority to tell its members that they may not engage in

homosexual practices, then it has no authority at all. And if we accept the argument of the hypocrites of homosexuality that their sin is not a sin, we have destroyed ourselves.

Furthermore, if we allow ourselves to be intimidated by our fear of the world's censure into silence in the face of attempts by homosexuals to make their sin acceptable under the laws of the polity, then we have abandoned our role as teachers of righteousness.

The repentant homosexual must be met with forgiveness. Even hypocritical homosexuals must be treated individually with compassion. But the collective behavior of the hypocrites of homosexuality must be met with our most forceful arguments and our complete intolerance of their lies. To act otherwise is to give more respect to the opinions of men than to the judgments of God.

Tolerance is not the fundamental virtue, to which all others must give way. The fundamental virtue is to love the Lord with all our heart, might, mind, and strength; and then to love our neighbor as ourself. Despite all the rhetoric of the hypocrites of homosexuality about how if we were true Christians, we would accept them fully without expecting them to change their behavior, we know that the Lord looks upon sin without the least degree of tolerance, and that he expects us to strive for perfection.

That we must treat sinners kindly is true; that we must courageously and firmly reject sin is also true. Those whose "kindness" causes them to wink at sin are not being kind at all, for the only hope of joy that these people have is to recognize their sin and repent of it. True kindness is to be ever courteous and warm toward individuals, while confronting them always with our rejection of any arguments justifying their self-gratification. That will earn us their love and gratitude in the day of their repentance, even if during the time they still embrace their sins they lash out at us as if we were their enemies.

And if it happens that they never repent, then in the day of their grief they cannot blame us for helping them deceive and destroy themselves. That is how we keep ourselves unspotted by the blood of this generation, even as we labor to help our brothers and sisters free themselves from the tyranny of sin. ☞