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EDITORIAL

David M. Morris

Editor

Since 2007, we have published one volume a year filled with scholarly articles, as well as book reviews. We will of course continue to do this, however, we will begin to publish book reviews directly, to the website and make a selection for each volume. This is to respond to the now numerous books and publications that are coming out.

In this issue, we are excited to publish a lengthy consideration of Mormon identity by Wilfried Decoo, as well as Armand Mauss' article 'From Galatia to Ghana'. Following which, we are able to publish, 'Sacred Secrecy and the Latter-day Saints' by Douglas J. Davies as well as articles by Alan Goff and Kirk Caudle. A number of book reviews also appear, all of which are available on <http://www.ijmsonline.org>. A special appreciation is extended to the contributors for their kindness in making available their submissions.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and as formatively as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at editorial@ijmsonline.org

FROM GALATIA TO GHANA: THE RACIAL DYNAMIC IN MORMON HISTORY¹

Armand L. Mauss

On December 9, 1978, the first Latter-day Saint missionaries (two senior couples) assigned to Ghana from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints entered that country and baptized 89 souls, many of them already converted through their own study of LDS literature.² By the end of the century, there were more than 20,000 members in Ghana, and ten times that many throughout Africa. In geographic terms, those first missionaries came all the way from Salt Lake City. However, in a spiritual and symbolic sense, we might say that the missionaries had arrived from Galatia, in Asia Minor, where the early Saints had once received a letter from the Apostle Paul instructing the Church that all are the children of God by faith in Christ; that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus . . . [and all] . . . Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”³ Acting thus on Paul’s injunction, the newly arrived Mormon missionaries were simply restoring the teachings of the Church, as understood originally by Paul and later by the founding LDS prophet Joseph Smith and his original disciples – and, indeed, as articulated in the *Book of Mormon* itself. Yet, until 1978, the Church did not include Africa in its otherwise universal proselytizing program (except for white South Africa); and its priesthood, otherwise available to all males in the Church, was not extended to persons of black African ancestry in any country. Why were the early Christian and early Mormon teachings about the universality of access to the gospel seemingly held in abeyance in the Church

¹ This is a revised version of a lecture I presented on September 26, 2008, as part of the annual “LDS Lecture Series” in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Wyoming. (See <http://www.uwyo.edu/relstds/guest-speakers/lds-lecture-series.html>, accessed August 29, 2013).

² *Deseret News 2001–2002 Church Almanac* (SLC: Deseret News, 2000), pp. 332–33. They actually entered from Nigeria, where they had been sent a month earlier to open LDS missions in West Africa.

³ Galatians 3:27–29.

for so long before 1978? To answer this question, we will need to recover some often forgotten history.⁴

THE WANDERING FROM GALATIA TO UTAH

For more than a century, the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints about black people had not come from Galatia. Nor were these beliefs ever unique, either in their inception or in their evolution. They had not developed in some kind of special Mormon vacuum or bubble. They began earlier than Mormonism itself, for they were directly and explicitly imported from the surrounding cultural and religious environment by the earliest Mormon converts. That environment itself was nearly 400 years in evolving, starting with the so-called Age of Exploration, when Europeans first began encountering peoples so different from themselves that they seriously considered theories about other creations, besides the one in the Book of Genesis, in order to explain how there could be so many different kinds of people on the earth.⁵ So when Joseph Smith and the early Saints spoke of black people as carrying the curse of Ham or of Cain or both, they were simply passing on biblical folklore that was generally believed by nearly all white Christians, at least in the Protestant

⁴ Perhaps needless to say, I recognize that there is no such thing as “history,” except as an abstract concept. What we encounter in accounts of the past are actually “histories,” in the plural, written from various viewpoints and theoretical premises. Different historical accounts tend to be based upon different selections of facts and guided by different theories about what those facts mean, even when the facts themselves can be reliably recovered and agreed upon. Sacred or divine histories tend to see the hand of Deity in their interpretations of historical facts; materialist histories tend to emphasize class interest in their interpretations; patriotic histories glorify national heroes and heroic movements in giving meaning to facts; and so on. Scholars who write histories sometimes make their explanatory theories explicit, but sometimes they don’t, and their theories must be inferred by their readers and critics. I am not exempting my own work from these generalizations. What I will have to say here will leave plenty of room for inferences of divine intervention in Mormon history but such inferences will have to be provided by the reader. My narrative will reflect mainly one or more theories about how Latter-day Saints, and their Church as an institution, have attempted to understand and explain the place of Africans and their descendants in terms both of religious history and of human history.

⁵ Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

world, until well into the twentieth century.⁶ Slavery was a different matter, however. By the time Mormonism came along, Joseph Smith and most of his followers were among those northern Americans who favored an end to slavery, though on a gradual basis, with black relocation to Africa. For white Americans of the nineteenth century, an all-white society was still preferred, with both blacks and indigenous American Indians relocated outside that society.

Considering that general historical context, no one should be surprised that the LDS Church once placed restrictions on participation for black people. Social equality for black people in those days was advocated by hardly anyone, not even by Abraham Lincoln.⁷ Among the Latter-day Saints, the first restriction actually occurred in 1833 while the Church was in Missouri, when leaders instructed Mormon missionaries and converts not to encourage free blacks to enter that state, as long as slavery was still permitted there.⁸ There was, however, *no restriction against bestowing the priesthood* on male converts of black or mixed ancestry, as long as they were not living in a slave state. Indeed, the priesthood was bestowed upon black men living in the north, starting with Elijah Abel in Kirtland, Ohio, as early as 1836, and clearly under the authority of Joseph Smith.⁹ Restrictions on the priesthood and associated temple ordinances came many years later, after the Saints had settled in Utah. The

⁶ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse on Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷ In recent years there has been some reassessment among African American scholars and journalists as to the actual feelings and motives of Abraham Lincoln in his policies toward slavery and toward racial equality more generally. See, e. g., Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 2000).

⁸ W. W. Phelps, "Free People of Color," *Evening and Morning Star* 2(14): 109 (July 1833).

⁹ Lester E. Bush, Jr., and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), pp. 60 and 102. Abel was ordained an Elder in March and a Seventy in December of 1836. See a more general account of Abel's career by Newell Bringhurst on pp. 130–49. Please note that this Bush and Mauss book consists mainly of a collection of essays published earlier by the editors themselves (respectively) in various issues of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, where these essays would be available to readers who don't have access to the Bush and Mauss collection cited here. In particular,

reasons for those restrictions were never explained, and no particular revelation or scriptural canon was cited by President Brigham Young (also territorial governor) when he declared flatly, in the name of Christ, that negroes were not entitled to the blessings of the priesthood, "and if no other prophet ever spake it before, I will say it now."¹⁰ This declaration came at the opening session of the Utah Territorial Legislature in February, 1852, the same session that passed laws enabling slavery to exist in the Utah territory, both for blacks and for Indians.¹¹

With no more explanation than that, it is hard to imagine why Brigham Young would have reversed a policy, in force during Joseph Smith's lifetime, affording black men the LDS priesthood. It is clear from the historical record that Young himself held deep personal prejudices against black people, as did most white Americans of the time, but he did not personally condone slavery.¹² We know also that during the late 1840s, some few LDS members began questioning access to the priesthood for black men. I would propose that Young's declaration about priesthood for black people was an effort simply to make church policy consistent with the emerging policy of the territorial legislature to permit slavery in Utah. Yet why would they decide to permit slavery, since most of the legislators themselves had originated from non-slave states and presumably had little sympathy for the institution of slavery?

I would offer two possible reasons that the territorial legislature and Governor Young would have passed those laws enabling and regulating slavery in 1852 : (1) Mormon converts from the South were coming

Bush's ground-breaking analysis, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: A Historical Overview" (here on pp. 53–129), first appeared in *Dialogue* 8(1): 11–68 (1973).

¹⁰ See the quotation and discussion in Bush and Mauss, 65–67, and in Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 68–73. A rough version of Young's original speech can be found in "Brigham Young Addresses," Ms d 1234, Box 48, folder 3, LDS Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹¹ For an explanation of the reasons for including Indians in the slavery legislation, see Bush and Mauss, 67–69; and Sondra Jones, *The Trial of Don Pedro Leon Lujan: The Attack against Indian Slavery and Mexican Traders in Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

¹² Bush and Mauss, 66–67; Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves and Blacks*, 69, 112, 119–20; and John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), Chapter 8, esp. Note 35.

to Utah in increasing numbers, and some of them were bringing slaves with them; and (2) LDS leaders had already been pushing for statehood for their territory, which, under the congressional Compromises of 1820 and 1850, had to go alternately to free and to slave states in the new western territories. California had entered the Union as a free state in 1850, so if Utah were to be next, it would have to enter as a slave state. Even though Young and his apostolic colleagues would have preferred entry in the Union without slavery, they were apparently willing to enter as a slave state if that would allow Utah to be next (after California).¹³ This historical and political context suggests a plausible explanation for why the Utah territorial government in 1852 passed a law permitting slavery, and why Brigham Young, who was both governor of the federal territory and president of the Church, would have seen withholding of the priesthood from black people as simply a natural and necessary concomitant of slavery.¹⁴

Whatever the explanation, the official policy of the LDS Church, from 1852 on, withheld the priesthood and temple ordinances from members and converts of black African ancestry. Brigham Young lived another 25 years, and his immediate successors saw no reason to question his policy, especially with national U. S. political policy already transitioning from post-Civil War Reconstruction back toward the "Jim Crow"

¹³ Recently Charles B. Rich, Jr., in "The True Policy for Utah: Servitude, Slavery, and 'An Act in Relation to Service,'" *Utah Historical Quarterly* 80(1): 54–74 (2012), has argued (for example on p.55) that one of three main reasons for the 1852 legislation permitting slavery in Utah was to enhance the chances for early statehood by mollifying the southern states.

¹⁴ A decade ago I was conjecturing about the importance of this second (political) consideration (See my "Dispelling the Curse of Cain," *Sunstone*, October 2004), arguing in part that such an idea was consistent with the earlier discussions of Bringham, 70–72, and of Bush's historical overview in Bush and Mauss, 66–67. More recently I have become convinced that the whole question of slavery in Utah, whether in its civil or its ecclesiastical implications, was driven by the sense of urgency about getting statehood for Utah. The priesthood restriction would simply have been part of the campaign for that larger objective (and certainly in accord with Young's own prejudices). In order to appreciate this sense of urgency, it is necessary to remember that in the U. S. federal system of that time, statehood brought far more independence from federal control than is the case at present. This consideration (fending off federal control) always loomed large in Young's thinking, but never more so than in 1852, when he was contemplating going public with the practice of plural marriage.

laws and racial segregation that were to obtain until the middle of the twentieth century. During that era, hardly anyone, Mormon or non-Mormon, questioned the restrictive policy of the LDS Church. In the American social and political context between the Civil War and World War II, the Mormon policy seemed entirely natural. Indeed, even in denominations that did not have any racial restrictions on priesthood as a general policy, very few blacks were ever ordained in any denomination during this period (except, of course, in the segregated black churches themselves). By the time a second generation of apostles and prophets assumed leadership of the Church at the beginning of the twentieth century, no one could remember when church policy had been otherwise, and it was generally assumed that the policy had originated with founder Joseph Smith.¹⁵

Yet, if we are to make sense out of the discriminatory policy of the LDS Church during those years, there is much more we need to understand about the social and cultural context in the nation as a whole – and, indeed, in the Euro American world more generally. For example, we need to recall that the century starting approximately with the reign of Queen Victoria in 1837 was the century that gave rise in Europe and America to various ideologies of racial superiority, such as the “white man’s burden,” and “manifest destiny.” These ideologies justified and vindicated the imperial ambitions of Europeans and Americans who sought increasing dominance over the brown and black peoples in various parts of the world on the basis of a divine mandate, or of historical inevitability, ostensibly for the benefit of these subjected peoples. Invidious comparisons of different so-called “races” were embraced by prominent scientists, philosophers, scholars, and theologians. Theories abounded in Europe and in America about the glorious origins and destinies of the Anglo-Saxons and other peoples of ancient Germanic or Teutonic stock.¹⁶

¹⁵ LDS ecclesiastical developments pertaining to race during this period are reviewed in Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, 76–91; and in Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), Chapters 20 and 21 (195–214).

¹⁶ The importance of such ideas in the ideological evolution of LDS thinking during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are discussed and documented in Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1–40. Recall also the citations in notes 4 and 5, above.

One of these theories was the doctrine of British Israelism, according to which the British Isles, and much of northwestern Europe, were once settled by the migrating lost tribes of Israel, especially the tribe of Ephraim. This doctrine soon found its way to New England, of course, and it enjoyed growing popularity in both England and North America during the lifetimes of Joseph Smith and his earliest converts. For them, such a doctrine accorded well with what they had learned from the new *Book of Mormon* about the divine destinies of the descendants of Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, and other ancient Israelite tribes. Later in the same century, the sermons of Brigham Young and others identified Ephraim's descendants as Anglo-Saxons and the Latter-day Saints as mainly of the same Israelite lineage. During 1870, the *Millennial Star*, the main official publication of the Church (though published in England), carried monthly articles by George Reynolds showing how such doctrines as British Israelism accorded with the LDS understanding of the scriptures.¹⁷ In 1880, the *Pearl of Great Price* was canonized as official LDS scripture, and sermons thereafter began to include references to the *Book of Abraham* to support claims that people chosen in a premortal existence for special missions in divine history were sent into mortality through special lineages, such as Israelite. The same idea was readily adapted to the argument that others had been chosen to come through cursed lineages such as those of Ham or Cain, so this claim about pre-existence was added to the "explanations" offered for the denial of the priesthood to the few black LDS members.¹⁸

So from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, we have a cultural and ideological context, in Europe and in America, in which racial or ethnic differences are highlighted, with some so-called races widely considered superior and others inferior, not only in the mind of God, but also in the sweep of history. We have imperial regimes colonizing various parts of the world in the name of the "white man's burden" or (in America) "manifest destiny," only temporarily interrupted by the savage civil war in the U. S. over the spread of slavery. This "manifest destiny" included the divine right to control the inferior peoples of color within their midst, whether black or red.

¹⁷ Mauss, *Abraham's Children*, 17–19. See also Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Lineage and Race," *Journal of Mormon History* 25(1): 131–73 (1999).

¹⁸ Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, Chapter 8 (212–30). See also Bush and Mauss, 76–96.

Meanwhile, within the Mormon world specifically, we had a new religious movement seeking the security to pursue its own destiny in the face of unrelenting hostility and disrepute, subject to many regional and national political pressures which it could neither control nor fully escape. Try as it might, the Church could not avoid either the political or the ideological developments affecting the rest of America. Latter-day Saints could, however, interpret some of those developments in ways that might help them to see the divine hand in their own travails. What they came to understand was that they were literally an Israelite people, chosen in the pre-existence to build God's kingdom in these end times; that they were among the superior races of the modern world; and that the persecution and hostility against them from that world only confirmed their superiority – otherwise, why would the minions of the devil be constantly attempting to derail their divine mission?¹⁹ In the context of such assumptions in the world, the nation, and in Mormonism itself, why would any Church leaders have even wondered about the appropriateness of a policy withholding the priesthood from black people in those days? On the other hand, if these leaders were prophets, shouldn't they have known better? Shouldn't they have received revelations challenging such manifestly racist policies? Maybe so, and eventually they did; but they were, after all, products of a certain cultural heritage, as we all are, in which certain questions simply don't seem salient – or maybe the obvious answers to the questions can't break through the intellectual barriers of culture.

Indeed, one might see a parallel here in the New Testament allusions to the vexing predicament faced by Paul, the great apostle to the gentiles, who could not understand why Peter and the Judaizers among the early apostles continued to resist the baptism of gentiles, despite the epiphany that Peter had had in his vision of the "unclean meats."²⁰ Similarly, LDS leaders made the assumptions about the significance of racial or ethnic differences common in their culture throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From all we can learn, none of them even thought about seeking divine guidance in the matter until the 1950s. By that time, the LDS Church had travelled well along the path toward a kind of "racialized" understanding about which peoples were to receive the gospel, and in what order. This was spiritually and intellectually far

¹⁹ *All Abraham's Children*, 1–11.

²⁰ I have in mind here chiefly the second chapter of Galatians and the tenth chapter of Acts.

away from the original universalism of Joseph Smith's *Book of Mormon* (2 Ne.26:33), and of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:7, 29), who were admonished: "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham . . . And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." So how did twentieth-century Mormonism finally discard its accumulated racist notions and travel back to Galatia and to the universalism of Paul and Joseph Smith?

THE LONG ROAD FROM UTAH BACK TO GALATIA

I tell that story in some detail in my book, *All Abraham's Children*. It is a story about how the Latter-day Saints eventually came to see all of humankind as the spiritual children of Abraham, without regard to racial or ethnic differences. To make a century-long story very short, the Saints and their leaders simply learned from the successes and setbacks of their own proselytizing efforts that receptivity to their gospel message did not depend on lineage or ancestry as they had once supposed. Mormons from the 1830s on had come to believe that the Jews and the North American aboriginal peoples were literal descendants of Israel, whose interest in the gospel was natural and could be taken for granted, since it was in their blood. Actual proselytizing experience, however, eventually taught them otherwise.

Similarly, the converts from the British Isles, Scandinavia, and Germany had seemed especially receptive for a while. Eventually they even outnumbered those converts born in America – offering convincing evidence that northwestern Europe too was rich in Israelite blood. Yet, these massive European conversions peaked and then greatly diminished before the end of the nineteenth century. Such a drastic change in missionary prospects caused some to wonder publicly whether the Israelite descendants in that part of Europe had pretty much been converted by then and had already emigrated to Utah!²¹ The Latter-day Saints and their leaders nevertheless continued conscientiously to follow the divine

²¹ Thus could the evolving lineage theory provide the explanation for both rapid increases and rapid declines in missionary success. See, e. g., Franklin D. Richards in *Conference Report*, October, 1898, 33; Frederick S. Buchanan, "The Ebb and Flow of Mormonism in Scotland, 1840–1900," *BYU Studies* 27(2):34 (Spring 1987); and Bruce A. Van Orden, "The Decline of Convert Baptisms and Member Emigration from the British Mission after 1870," *ibid.*, 97-105.

commission to take the gospel into all the world in search of scattered Israel. Indeed, the opening and closing of missions occurred in dozens of locations around the world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sometimes in surprising locales like the Middle East ~ suggesting almost an "experimental" approach to missionizing. The aboriginal peoples throughout Polynesia unexpectedly flocked to the Church in such numbers that success had to be explained by an obscure passage in the *Book of Mormon* about a lost maritime expedition of Israelites.²² In the belief that Polynesian blood might have spread to Asia, a mission was opened in Japan in 1901 but had to be closed two decades later.²³ Missionary work in Mexico began in earnest also at the opening of the twentieth century and spread to much of Latin America during the next few decades with surprising success. Indeed, the contrast between conversion rates among North American Indians and those in Latin America eventually persuaded LDS leaders that far more children of Abraham and Lehi had survived in South America than in North America.²⁴

Thus, as Mormon missionaries and mission presidents visited peoples in various parts of the world during the twentieth century, they came to realize (however gradually) that there was no correlation between racial or ethnic origin, on the one hand, and receptivity to the gospel message, on the other. Earlier notions about special blood, or differential spiritual qualities based on race, which had seemed to explain so much in the nineteenth century, gradually disappeared from Mormon discourse. As the twentieth century was drawing to a close, Apostle and President Howard W. Hunter summed up the official LDS understanding operative by that time: "All men share an inheritance of divine light. God operates among his children in all nations, and those who seek God

²² Alma 63: 5–8. For a conventional LDS elaboration on this obscure scriptural passage, see (e. g.) Robert E. Parsons, "Hagoth and the Polynesians," in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: Alma, The Testimony of the Word*. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1992): 249–62.

²³ The 1901 dedicatory prayer, with which Apostle Heber J. Grant opened the Japan Mission, made explicit reference to the possible Lamanite and Nephite origins of the Japanese people. See the account by Elder Alma O. Taylor, one of three elders present with Grant for that dedication: Reid L. Neilson, *The Japanese Missionary Journals of Elder Alma O. Taylor, 1901–10* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2001), 48–49 (a published version of Neilson's BYU Master's thesis).

²⁴ Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, Chapter 5, esp. 136–38.

are entitled to further light and knowledge, regardless of their race, nationality, or cultural traditions. . . . [T]he validity, the power, of our faith is not bound by history, nationality, or culture. It is not the peculiar property of any one people or any one age. . . ." ²⁵

The process leading to the official change in the policy toward black people *specifically*, however, had begun many years earlier within the highest councils of the LDS Church, where remonstrances for change were already being received from nationally prominent church members. Even more important, as early as the 1950s, hundreds of West Africans, who had learned about Mormonism almost by accident, were petitioning Church headquarters for missionaries and literature.²⁶ This created an anguishing predicament for Church leaders, who were still convinced that it was God who was withholding the priesthood from people of African ancestry; and they didn't see how the Church could be established in West Africa without extending the priesthood to Africans on the same basis as everyone else. To understand how that predicament was finally resolved in 1978, we must look back again at the American historical context, where the Church suddenly found itself at odds with a burgeoning national Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.²⁷

It has been tempting for many commentators on that period of LDS history to offer the facile explanation that the Mormons, like everyone else, eventually succumbed to the political pressures generated by the Civil Rights Movement, and in 1978 finally ended its priesthood restriction under the "cover" of a divine revelation. There is no doubt that throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Mormon practice of denying the priesthood to its few black members created a public relations nightmare for the Church and its members in the United States.²⁸ This discriminatory policy, ironically, was made especially conspicuous by another

²⁵ Howard W. Hunter, "The Gospel -- A Global Faith," *Ensign*, November 1991.

²⁶ See the account in James B. Allen, "Would-Be Saints: West Africa before the 1978 Priesthood Revelation," *Journal of Mormon History* 17: 207–47 (1991); and Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride*, 201–02, and Chapter 24 (236–45).

²⁷ Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," pp. 149–92 in Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, OR in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14(3): 10–45 (1981).

²⁸ Stephen W. Stathis and Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Mormonism in the Nineteen Seventies: The Popular Perception," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10(3):95–113 (1977); see especially 106–09.

Church policy that was unusually *universalistic* – namely that of a lay priesthood generally bestowed on all male members over the age of twelve. As an operational reality, very few black people had received clergy ordinations in any other Christian denominations either (except, of course, for the so-called black churches). Most denominations required seminary training for ordination, and the seminaries, like most professional schools until recent decades, admitted few, if any, black students; hence there were but few black men who ever became priests or ministers in most denominations. The LDS Church, lacking professional seminaries, couldn't use them as gate-keepers, so its denial of the priesthood to black members was up front and conspicuous.

National and regional public opinion polls of the 1960s, however, revealed that Mormons in Utah and elsewhere differed but little from other Americans in their attitudes toward such secular, civil rights issues as school or housing segregation, public accommodations, equal employment opportunities, and voting rights.²⁹ However, with respect to such Church policies as priesthood access, most Latter-day Saints believed that the racial restriction was entirely an internal matter that could be resolved only by divine revelation, not by political pressure. And pressure there surely was, as universities broke off athletic relationships with BYU, Tabernacle Choir performances around the nation were cancelled, picketing of LDS general conferences was threatened, and unfavorable media coverage became nearly universal.³⁰ For the first time, the stereotype “racist” seemed to displace the stereotype “polygamist” for Mormons in the popular mind. As the public pressure increased, the LDS leadership appeared to dig in its heels all the more, insisting that Church policy would be guided by revelation, not by political expediency. By the end of that decade, however, public pressure had diminished, as the nation seemed simply to give up on the obstinate Mormons, and the Viet Nam

²⁹ Angus Campbell, *White Attitudes toward Black People* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1971), esp. Chapter 7; Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), esp. p. 168, where there appears an extensive table on attitudes toward “Negroes”); Armand L. Mauss, “Mormonism and Secular Attitudes toward Negroes,” *Pacific Sociological Review* 9 (Fall 1966), 91–99 (Later renamed *Sociological Perspectives*). Also, Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, 1–8.

³⁰ *Bush and Mauss*, 154–60; OR Mauss, “Fading of the Pharaohs’ Curse,” 14–19.

War began to compete with Civil Rights as the most urgent national issue.

Then, quite unexpectedly, Church leaders announced, in early June, 1978, that the necessary revelation had been received, and that henceforth the priesthood and temple privileges would be accessible to all without regard to race or ethnicity. Unexpected as that development seemed to the outside world, it would have been less surprising to anyone aware of internal Church developments since the late 1960s. In fact, a number of harbingers of change had appeared without much public notice:

(1) Church leaders in the 1960s were already discussing the feasibility of bestowing at least the Aaronic or lesser priesthood on African converts and had tried to send missionaries to Nigeria in 1963, but the Nigerian government had refused them visas.³¹

(2) A rather rapid turnover had occurred in the leadership of the Church. President McKay had remained somewhat ambivalent about changing the priesthood restriction, despite the urging of his two main counselors, and he died in January, 1970, without having received the revelation he sought. His two immediate successors, both on record as strongly *opposing* change in the priesthood policy, also died within only four more years, bringing to office Spencer W. Kimball at the beginning of 1974. President Kimball had long been the chief advocate in the Church leadership for integrating the Native American Indian populations, especially in the West, and improving their conditions.³²

(3) In response to initiatives from members of the small black LDS community in Utah, the Church had established the Genesis Group in 1971 as a support group to supplement the participation of the black Saints in their regular wards, and to provide opportunities for them to socialize and discuss constructive ways of coping with the priesthood restriction while remaining faithful to the religion.³³

(4) Official Church statements on the reasons for the priesthood restriction had long since dropped all the theological folklore about marked and cursed lineages and claimed only that the restriction had

³¹ Allen, "Would-Be Saints."

³² Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 74, 82–84, 237.

³³ Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, 163–64. See also the websites, <http://www.ldsgenesisgroup.org/> and <http://www.blacklds.org/> (accessed August 30, 2013).

been imposed “for reasons . . . known to God but which He has not made fully known to man.”³⁴

(5) The Church had grown so large in Brazil, especially among its black and mixed populations, that in 1974, President Kimball and the Twelve made the unprecedented decision to build a temple in Brazil (publicly announced in March, 1975). It seems very unlikely that such a decision would have been made without due consideration for its implications regarding priesthood access.³⁵ Indeed, when the priesthood restriction was finally dropped in 1978, Apostle LeGrand Richards explicitly gave, as one of the reasons, the faithfulness of the Brazilian Saints in providing so much of the funding and labor to build the new temple.³⁶

When the policy change was finally announced in mid-1978, it was attributed to an explicit revelation received collectively by the apostles and the First Presidency of the Church during a specific meeting in the Salt Lake Temple. Their comments on this revelatory event indicates that it was experienced as a powerful charismatic process, but no explicit text was issued for the actual content of the revelation.³⁷ Instead, President Kimball announced simply that the Lord “has confirmed” that the

³⁴ Statement of the First Presidency of the Church, December 15, 1969, widely published in, i. a., *Dialogue* 4(4): 102–3 (Winter 1969). For more about the immediate historical context, see Bush and Mauss, 156–58.

³⁵ Edward Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride*, devotes five chapters (20–24) to his father's engagement and deliberations in the process that eventually overturned the racial restrictions on priesthood and temple access. I found it strange that the decision to build the temple in Brazil was not mentioned anywhere in those chapters -- at least not in the printed text. However, the text is accompanied by (and usually sold with) a CD which contains, among other things, a much larger "working draft" of this book, and the predicament presented by the Brazil temple is mentioned in passing at the top of p. 2 of Chapter 22 in that CD version (like many other interesting details and footnotes omitted from the printed version!). See also, Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*, 165, 172.

³⁶ Mark L. Grover, "The Mormon Priesthood Revelation and the São Paulo, Brazil, Temple," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23(1): 39–53 (1990); see especially p. 48.

³⁷ The collective and strongly emotional nature of this revelatory experience for President Kimball and his colleagues is apparent from the public comments that he made about it. See Edward Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride*, Chapter 22 (215–24) and the corresponding sections of the "working draft" on CD. The president's remarks on the event are preserved also in video form in a *Mormon*

time has come for the priesthood to be extended to all peoples of the earth without regard to race or color.³⁸ Reactions from pundits and commentators outside the Church ranged from appreciation and congratulations to cynical dismissals about politically convenient revelations, as might have been expected. The cynicism would only have been more widespread had the revelation come a decade earlier, when the Church was still under considerable political pressure. Yet, as my references to Africa and Brazil have indicated, the most important pressures leading to the revelation came from *inside* the Church, and (perhaps ironically) from *outside* the United States.

It this connection, it is important to keep in mind how the process of revelation is understood in the LDS tradition: Mormon prophets do not sit around waiting for revelations. The process of revelation is highly dialogical. It is sometimes attributed to spontaneous divine initiative, but more often it begins with *human* initiative. A prophet, like any other person, takes a proposition to Deity in prayer and seeks confirmation for that proposition. Only when it is confirmed by an intensely positive feeling does the petitioner decide to act on it.³⁹ No matter how this process begins, it will, of course, likely be influenced, constrained, or even delayed by the assumptions, presuppositions, and cultural baggage possessed by the human petitioners. Latter-day Saint prophets, like people generally, are products of their own cultural heritage and sometimes victims of their own presuppositions. Remarkable things can happen when leaders break through all of those constraints to bring history-changing revelations to the Church and the world, but such breakthroughs are very rare in human history. So for Mormons, revelation is typically a *process*, rather than an event, and sometimes rather a long process involving much prayer and meditation, and often some re-education, as well. The end of that process is experienced as divine confirmation of a proposition, and it is significant that President Kimball used precisely that term (*confirmation*) when he announced the 1978 revelation.

Newsroom excerpt on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13uvDGlcQ8o>.

³⁸ "Official Declaration 2," June 8, 1978 (bound with the *Doctrine and Covenants*). The operative passage reads: "Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color."

³⁹ One symptom of divine confirmation has been described as a "burning in the bosom" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 9:8).

THE BAGGAGE DISCARDED ALONG THE ROUTE FROM UTAH TO
GALATIA

The journey from Utah to Galatia has not been an easy one, for it has been encumbered by decades of accumulated baggage containing the racist conceptions and practices inherited from the European and American past, as well as from the Mormon past itself. Much of this baggage has been gradually abandoned along the route, especially (but not only) where black people are concerned. Yet a certain amount of nostalgia about the old racist teachings seems to remain in Mormon culture, at least in the U. S., causing occasional embarrassment for the public relations apparatus of the Church, and for much of the membership besides.⁴⁰ Especially visible in this connection has been the durability and recurrence of the traditional folklore once used (both by the folk and their leaders) to "explain" and justify the denial of the priesthood and temple privileges to people of African descent. I refer, of course, to doctrines about divine marks, curses, and premortal transgressions, which were so pervasive in the Church during the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite the efforts made by Church leaders and their spokesmen in Public Affairs to distance themselves from such folklore,⁴¹ they have never taken the step of officially and publicly repudiating it as false and pernicious doctrine.⁴² Since it remains in several authoritative books still sold under

⁴⁰ The BYU Religion faculty seems to have been a particular stronghold of such traditional ideas. Nearly to the end of the twentieth century, two prominent members of this faculty collaborated on a book rife with the traditional ideas about special lineages: Robert L. Millet and Joseph F. McConkie, *Our Destiny: The Call and Election of the House of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993).

⁴¹ As early as February 4, 1979, Elder Howard W. Hunter delivered a powerful message, entitled "All Are Alike Unto God," before the BYU student body, including the following passage: "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. Sometimes we unduly offend brothers and sisters of other nations by assigning exclusiveness to one nationality of people over another." This address was eventually published in the June, 1979, official magazine *Ensign*.

⁴² The damage done by this racist folklore has been a topic of my concern since my very first article in *Dialogue*, "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," 2(4): 19–39 (Winter 1967), and for many others as well during the intervening years.

Church auspices, it can still be referenced by well-meaning but uninformed members ~ and, indeed, by critics and antagonists of the Church, as the 2012 Romney political campaign learned to its sorrow.⁴³

The standard Church response to questions and criticisms about this folklore has been simply to claim that "we don't know" why the Church began the practice of withholding the priesthood from people of African descent, and to deny that the racist folklore was ever official Church doctrine.⁴⁴ Yet the potential for damage from the continuing circulation of this folklore has become increasingly clear to Church leaders beginning at least as early as 1997 (two decades after the end of the priesthood restriction), when a leading member of the Seventy undertook to get an official and explicit repudiation of the folklore, an effort that was derailed by a leak to the press.⁴⁵ For decades, actually, LDS academics, commentators, and even some local priesthood leaders, have urged the Church leadership to issue such a repudiation, but it has not yet happened. On some occasions, it has seemed on the verge of occurring, such as in the Priesthood session of the 2006 April General Conference, when President Hinckley deplored the "racial slurs and denigrating remarks . .

⁴³ For example, McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), a reference book popular among grass-roots Mormons, continued to be reprinted with its racist passages until 2010, when finally it was allowed to pass out of print. See, e. g., Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Landmark 'Mormon Doctrine' goes out of print," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Religion Section), May 21, 2010, p. 1. See also the article by John G. Turner (recent biographer of Brigham Young), "Why Race is Still a Problem for the Mormons," *New York Times Sunday Review*, August 18, 2012 (Opinion Pages): http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/19/opinion/sunday/racism-and-the-mormon-church.html?_r=0 (accessed August 29, 2013).

⁴⁴ Here is an example of the official statement normally offered: "The origins of priesthood availability are not entirely clear. Some explanations with respect to this matter were made in the absence of direct revelation and references to these explanations are sometimes cited in publications. These previous personal statements do not represent Church doctrine." *LDS Newsroom*, accessed August 28, 2013, at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/race-church>. The newly written introduction to Official Declaration 2 in the *Doctrine and Covenants* includes this passage: "Church records offer no clear insights into the origins of this practice" (i. e. of denying the priesthood to blacks).

⁴⁵ See the detailed account of this episode in my memoir, *Armand L. Mauss, Shifting Borders and a Tattered Passport: Intellectual Journeys of a Mormon Academic* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2012), 107–110. See the account also in Richard and Joan Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999), 103–05.

. sometimes heard among us. I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ, nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the Church of Christ. How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood, whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?"⁴⁶ (One wonders if President Hinckley might have meant his rhetorical question to be retrospective as well: i. e., "was once ineligible?")

One later step along the path to a total and official repudiation was provoked, ironically, if also predictably, by a venerable professor of religion at BYU, who spouted all the old doctrinal folklore yet again during a February, 2012, interview with a reporter for the *Washington Post*. From there it reached a national audience, of course, in the midst of the Romney political campaign.⁴⁷ Widespread outrage and ridicule followed, and none was more immediate than the statement from *LDS Newsroom*, which took the unprecedented step of naming the BYU professor, deploring the ideas attributed to him, and insisting that those ideas "absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. BYU faculty members do not speak for the Church." After another paragraph protesting any such resort to "speculation and opinion" about the unknown origins of the early priesthood restriction, the statement concluded, "We condemn racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church."⁴⁸ This is the closest that LDS Church officials or spokesmen have yet come to a repudiation of such "speculation and opinion" as actually false and pernicious. Yet, even on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the 1978 revelation, calls persisted, even among the faithful, for the Church to take that final step.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Priesthood Session, General Conference, 1 April 2006. See *Ensign*, May 2006, for the full statement, which is actually quite stern.

⁴⁷ Jason Horowitz, "Genesis of a church's stand on race," *Washington Post*, February 28, 2012, accessed August 28, 2013, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZXyfR_story.html.

⁴⁸ *LDS Newsroom*, February 29, 2012, accessed August 30, 2013, at www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Concerns persist about history, explanations of ban," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 7, 2013, at <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/56422550-80/church-lds-black->

However, if the Church has been reluctant to disavow fully the racial doctrines so authoritatively taught in the past, it has been far more forthcoming in practical worldly and political terms, with obvious efforts to make amends for past slights and offenses, at least to African Americans. These have included celebrations every five or ten years to commemorate the 1978 elimination of the racial restriction on priesthood (with the twenty-fifth and thirtieth anniversary events in the Salt Lake Tabernacle under official Church auspices); sponsorship by various LDS stakes of events celebrating Martin Luther King Day; special workshops and seminars under LDS auspices on African American genealogical research; and the erection of large new LDS Church buildings in the central sections of cities with heavy African American and other minority populations (such as New York and Philadelphia), well before the actual LDS membership growth in those areas would have justified such buildings. Since I have described and documented those outreach efforts quite extensively elsewhere, I will not prolong this essay by recounting them here.⁵⁰ As another anniversary came and went, some commentators were pointing to even more outreach efforts that might be appropriate⁵¹

FINALLY: ON TO GHANA AND AFRICA

Spiritually and intellectually, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has thus come full circle back to the teachings of the

god.html.csp; and (same author), "35 years later, priesthood ban is gone, but some pain still lingers for black Mormons," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 7, 2013, at <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/56418444-80/black-church-says-lds.html.csp>, both accessed August 30, 2013.

⁵⁰ See details in my *All Abraham's Children*, Chapter 9, especially 241–55. See also the updating of that information in my essay "Mormonism and Race" (especially the second half, starting with the subheading, "Building Relationships with the African American Community"), in Richard Sherlock and Carl Mosser, editors, *The Mormon World*, a reference work in the series *Routledge Worlds* (New York and Abingdon, UK, forthcoming in 2013).

⁵¹ See, e. g., Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Ways to improve Mormon race relations," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Lifestyle Section), June 7, 2013, accessed August 30, 2013, at <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/lifestyle/56422575-80/black-church-mormon-race.html.csp>

Apostle Paul and of Joseph Smith, where it began. In a spiritual and intellectual sense, it has traveled from Utah to Galatia to rejoice anew in Paul's declaration to the Saints there that the gospel of Christ is for all humankind, and that those who can accept it are all the children of Abraham and of Abraham's God, irrespective of race or lineage. Having thus rediscovered Galatia, the Church was finally prepared, both spiritually and geographically, to travel on to Ghana, which it did within weeks of the change in priesthood policy. There, as in Nigeria and much of the rest of Africa, the Church found a pervasive receptivity that it had rarely seen since the 1840s in the British Isles.⁵² With so many West Africans having waited for LDS missionaries for at least two decades, the rapid growth of the Church there seemed to reflect a pent-up demand. Thirty-five years after the revelation to President Kimball, the LDS membership in Africa has exceeded 300,000, more than the entire membership of the Church a century ago.⁵³

Church growth in Africa has brought issues of its own, of course, mainly in the form of the logistical and organizational problems resulting from rapid growth, as well as from certain culture clashes. This is not the place to consider these problems but only to emphasize the radical significance of the unintended African destination in the journey of the LDS people and their religion from early Utah's preoccupation with race and lineage to the soteriological universalism of Pauline Christianity. Many developments outside the LDS world facilitated that journey considerably, not least the decline of Euro American colonialism and the movement for civil rights in the U. S. and elsewhere. Yet ultimately, it was the differential and shifting fortunes in the global LDS missionary program itself that freed Church leaders and members from their traditional preoccupation with race and lineage; and restored to the Church the fundamental gospel teaching that the race and lineage of one's birth has no salience whatever. Potentially we are all the children of Abraham and of Abraham's God in the only sense that really matters.

⁵² Allen, "Would-Be Saints."

⁵³ For a recent official overview of growth in Africa, see the *LDS Newsroom* release of February 22, 2011: <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormons-africa-bright-land-hope> (accessed August 29, 2013). For more historical information, see Allen, *op. cit.*, and Alexander B. Morrison, *The Dawning of a Brighter Day: The Church in Black Africa* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990).