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Blacks and the Mormon Priesthood

Twenty-six years ago, in June of 1978, the LDS Church announced the end of its priesthood restrictions for blacks. Since one of the foundations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the claim that priesthood is essential to act in God's behalf, the change opened the way for blacks to be on an equal basis with other members. In the LDS manual *Gospel Principles* we read:

We must have [LDS] priesthood authority to act in the name of God when performing the sacred ordinances of the gospel, such as baptism, confirmation, administration of the sacrament, and temple marriage. If a man does not have the priesthood, even though he may be sincere, the Lord will not recognize ordinances he performs. (*Gospel Principles*, p. 81, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995 edition)

Since almost every male in the Mormon Church has some sort of priesthood office, the restriction on blacks meant that they could not participate in any leadership position. In addition to this, Mormonism teaches that a person must be married in the temple in order to achieve the highest level of heaven, or eternal life (see *Gospel Principles*, p. 297). However, the priesthood ban on blacks meant that they could not have a temple marriage, thus keeping them from achieving eternal life, also referred to as exaltation.

While the ban has been lifted the LDS Church has yet to clarify its theological view on race or why the ban was ever instituted.

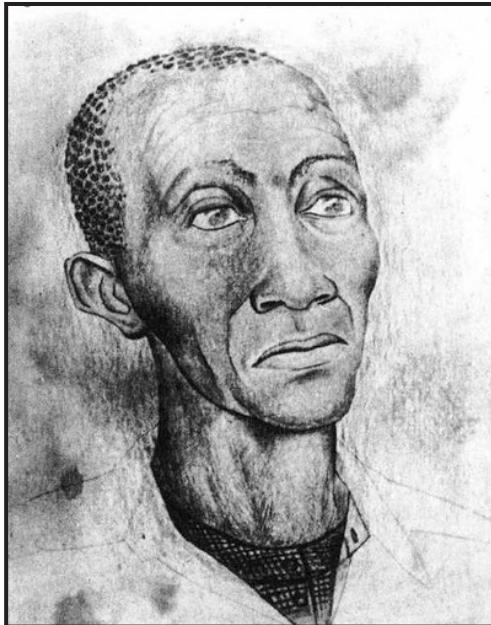
Racism in Early Mormonism

Joseph Smith seems to have accepted the prevalent view of his day that darker skinned people were not as favored by God as white skinned people. This attitude is reflected in the *Book of Mormon*, which tells the story

of a group of Israelites who fled Jerusalem about 600 BC and came to America. They soon divided into two groups, the righteous Nephites, who were "white", and the wicked Lamanites, who were cursed with "a skin of blackness" (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 5:21). The story claims that when Lamanites converted to Christianity

"their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites" (3 Nephi 2:14-16). The Introduction to the current *Book of Mormon* maintains that the Lamanites "are the principal ancestors of the American Indians."

Even though early Mormonism reflected many of the same racial attitudes of the larger community, they did not restrict church participation on the basis of race. Viewing the Native Americans as descendants of the *Book of Mormon* people, Joseph Smith referred to them as "Lamanites." In 1830 he inaugurated a mission to the Indians in Missouri (see *Doctrine and Covenants* 32:2).



Elijah Abel
First black to hold LDS Priesthood

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Armand Mauss commented:

In assessing the significance of Mormon relationships with the Indians during the lifetime of Joseph Smith, one must concede the part that these relationships played in inciting the hostility of other Americans against the Mormons, especially in Missouri . . . Prophecies in the unique Mormon scriptures, as well as some Mormon commentary on those prophecies, seemed to justify such suspicions. When the Book of Mormon has Christ promising that the “remnant of Jacob” (i.e., Indians) shall go among the unrepentant Gentiles “as a young lion among the flocks of sheep” (3 Nephi 21:12-13), it would make the Gentiles wonder. Nor would they likely be reassured by public proclamations warning the unrepentant Gentiles that God is about to sweep them off the land because of the “cries of the red men, whom ye and your fathers have dispossessed and driven from their lands” . . . As part of an emerging separate ethnic identity, the Mormons began to define their destined homeland as extending from Wisconsin down to Texas and from Missouri across to the Rockies and even beyond, with the Indians as partners in building Zion throughout that entire region. (*All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*, by Armand L. Mauss, University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 55)

Soon after publishing the *Book of Mormon* in 1830 Joseph Smith began working on the Book of Moses (printed in the *Pearl of Great Price*) which reflected the same community concept that blacks descended from Cain (see Moses 7:8, 12, 22). Even though the Mormons at that time accepted the common idea that blacks were from the cursed lineage of Cain they did not view this as restricting their church participation. A few blacks were baptized and at least two were ordained to the priesthood.

When Mormons started settling in Missouri in the early 1830's their attitude toward Native Americans and blacks became a concern of their neighbors. Many Missourians worried that Smith's church, founded in New York, was anti-slavery (see *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 12).

To appease their slave-holding neighbors, on July 16, 1833, the Mormons published an article in their newspaper stating:

“. . . our intention was not only to stop free people of color from emigrating to this state, but to prevent them from being admitted as members of the Church.” (*Evening and the Morning Star*, July 16, 1833)

Writing in 1836 Joseph Smith stated:

I do not believe that the people of the North have any more right to say that the South *shall not* hold slaves, than the South have to say the North shall. . . . It is my privilege then to name certain passages of the Bible . . . “And he said,

Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren . . . ” (Gen. IX:25) . . . I can say, the curse is not yet taken off from the sons of Canaan, neither will be until it is affected by as great a power as caused it to come . . . (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, p. 438)

Oddly, right at the time Smith seems to have been developing his racial doctrines he allowed the ordination of a black named Elijah Abel. Although there may have been at least one other black ordained to the priesthood during Joseph Smith's life, Elijah Abel was the only one mentioned by LDS historian Andrew Jenson:

Abel, Elijah, the only colored man who is known to have been **ordained to the priesthood** . . . was ordained an elder March 3, 1836, and a seventy April 4, 1841, an exception having been made in his case with regard to the general rule of the church in relation to colored people. (*L.D.S. Biographical Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, p. 577, 1901-1936, *Deseret News*)

Even though Elijah Abel was allowed to retain his priesthood and go on a mission after the Mormons came to Utah, he was not allowed to participate in the temple endowments (see *Dialogue*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 28-29).

In 1842 Joseph Smith published his Book of Abraham, which is part of the *Pearl of Great Price*, in the church-owned *Times and Seasons*. This new work reflected Smith's growing racist attitude towards blacks and priesthood:

Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, . . . From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land. (*Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham 1:21-22)

Further on in the same chapter we read that Pharaoh, being a descendent of Ham, could not have the priesthood:

Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood . . . (Book of Abraham 1:27)

LDS author Stephen Taggart observed:

With the publication of The Book of Abraham all of the elements for the Church's policy of denying the priesthood to Negroes were present. The curse of Canaan motif borrowed from Southern fundamentalism was being supported with the Church by a foundation of proslavery statements and attitudes which had emerged during the years of crisis in Missouri. . . . (*Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins*, by Stephen G. Taggart, pp. 62-63, University of Utah Press, 1970)

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Doctrine of Pre-Existence

During this time Joseph Smith started formulating his doctrine of man's pre-earth life. Preaching in 1844, Joseph Smith taught:

The mind of man is as immortal as God himself . . . God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 310-311)

The Book of Abraham explains that those who were "noble" in their pre-earth life [man's first estate] were to be the "rulers" on earth [man's second estate] (*Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham 3:22-23). This led to an interpretation that everyone's birth on earth is a direct result of his/her worthiness in a prior life in heaven. Thus those less valiant were born black while the righteous were born white, with the most worthy being born into Mormon families. In 1845 LDS Apostle Orson Hyde explained that blacks were inferior spirits in the pre-earth state:

At the time the devil was cast out of heaven, there were some spirits that did not know who had authority, whether God or the devil. They consequently did not take a very active part on either side, but rather thought the devil had been abused, . . . These spirits were not considered bad enough to be cast down to hell, and never have bodies; **neither were they considered worthy of an honourable body on this earth**: . . . But those spirits in heaven that **rather lent an influence to the devil**, thinking he had a little the best right to govern, but did not take a very active part any way were required to come into the world and take bodies in the accursed lineage of Canaan; and **hence the Negro or African race**. (*Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, delivered before the High Priests' Quorum, in Nauvoo*, April 27, 1845, printed by John Taylor, p. 30)

Seed of Cain

After the Mormons moved west, Brigham Young, the second president of the church, became very adamant in his disapproval of blacks. Preaching in 1859, at the October Conference of the LDS Church, President Brigham Young declared:

Cain slew his brother . . . and the Lord put a mark upon him, which is the **flat nose and black skin**. . . . How long is that race [blacks] to endure the **dreadful curse** that is upon them? That curse will remain upon them, and **they never can hold the Priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promises** and enjoyed the blessings of the Priesthood and the keys thereof. Until the last ones of the residue of Adam's children are brought up to that favourable position, the children of

Cain cannot receive the first ordinances of the Priesthood. They were the first that were cursed, and they will be the **last** from whom the curse will be removed. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 290)

On another occasion Brigham Young declared:

Shall I tell you the **law of God** in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is **death on the spot**. This will always be so. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 10, p. 110)

Preaching in 1882, John Taylor, the third president of the LDS Church, taught:

Why is it, in fact, that we should have a devil? Why did not the Lord kill him long ago? . . . He needed the devil and great many of those who do his bidding just to keep . . . our dependence upon God, . . . When he destroyed the inhabitants of the antediluvian world, he suffered a **descendant of Cain** to come through the flood in order that he [the devil] might be properly represented upon the earth. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 23, p. 336)

LDS Attitudes toward Blacks in the Twentieth Century

Scholar Armand Mauss observed:

Finally, in an important 1931 book, *The Way to Perfection*, the scholarly young apostle Joseph Fielding Smith . . . synthesized and codified the entire framework of Mormon racialist teaching that has accumulated . . . Integrating uniquely Mormon ideas of premortal decisions about lineage with imported British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism, [Joseph Fielding] Smith in effect postulated a divine rank-ordering of lineages with the descendants of ancient Ephraim (son of Joseph) at the top (including the Mormons); the "seed of Cain" (Africans) at the bottom; and various other lineages in between. (*All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*, by Armand L. Mauss, p. 217, University of Illinois Press, 2003)

Writing in 1935 Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, who later became the 10th president of the LDS Church, explained the curse on Cain:

Not only was Cain called upon to suffer [for killing Abel], but because of his wickedness he became the father of an **inferior race**. . . . Millions of souls have come into this world **cursed with a black skin** and have been denied the privilege of Priesthood and the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel. These are the descendants of Cain. (*The Way to Perfection*, by Joseph Fielding Smith, Genealogical Society of Utah, 1935, p. 101)

Elder B. H. Roberts, of the council of Seventy, wrote:

. . . I believe that race [blacks] is the one through which it is ordained those spirits that were not valiant in the great rebellion in heaven should come; who, through their indifference or lack of integrity to righteousness, rendered themselves unworthy of the Priesthood and its powers, and hence it is withheld from them to this day. (*Contributor* 6:297, as quoted in *The Way to Perfection*, p. 105)

LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, son-in-law of President Joseph Fielding Smith, wrote:

Those who were less valiant in pre-existence and who thereby had certain spiritual restrictions imposed upon them during mortality are known to us as the Negroes. Such spirits are sent to earth through the lineage of Cain, the mark put upon him for his rebellion against God and his murder of Abel being a black skin. (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1958 edition, pp. 476-477; second edition, 1966, p. 527)

In 1949 the LDS Church First Presidency issued an official statement on priesthood denial to blacks:

The attitude of the church with reference to the Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord on which is founded the **doctrine of the Church** from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time. (As quoted in *Black Saints in a White Church*, by Jessie L. Embry, Signature Books, 1994, p. 24)

Civil Rights Movement

During the 1960's and early 1970's there were demonstrations and extensive articles denouncing the LDS teaching on blacks.

In January of 1963 the LDS Church announced a mission to Nigeria but it was aborted when the *Nigerian Outlook* printed articles attacking the Mormon position on blacks and the Nigerian government refused to grant visas to LDS missionaries.

From 1968 through 1970 students at various colleges protested against the LDS position on race. Tensions mounted against BYU and its sports department to the point that in 1969 Stanford University announced it would end participation in any sporting events with the Mormon school. *The Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

The Stanford University Student Senate has voted overwhelming approval of the institution's ban against sporting events with Brigham Young University over a **racial** question. (*The Salt Lake Tribune*, Dec. 25, 1969)

Stanford's policy of not scheduling games with BYU stayed in place until after the 1978 revelation. Gary Bergera and Ron Priddis commented:

At the time of the [1978 priesthood] announcement, only four American blacks and a handful of Africans were enrolled at BYU. During the three years following the announcement, the number of blacks rose to eighteen American and twenty-two foreign blacks . . . As a direct result of the priesthood revision, Stanford University decided in 1979 to remove its ban against athletic competition with BYU. (*Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, by Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, Signature Books, 1985, p. 303)

One Drop Disqualifies

One of the problems for the Mormons regarding the priesthood restriction was their stand that anyone with black ancestry was barred. Speaking at BYU on August 27, 1954, Apostle Mark E. Petersen explained:

We must not inter-marry with the Negro. Why? If I were to marry a Negro woman and have children by her, my children would all be cursed as to the priesthood. . . . If there is **one drop of Negro blood** in my children, as I have read to you, they receive the curse. (*Race Problems—As They Affect the Church*, speech by Mark E. Petersen, BYU, August 27, 1954)

With the mixed racial profile of many people in South Africa and South America, especially Brazil, it was becoming obvious that some priesthood holders had black ancestry. LDS scholar Jessie L. Embry discussed the struggle that had been going on in Brazil:

. . . church membership in Brazil had grown enormously during the 1960's and 1970's. Determining who was black had always been a sensitive issue in the racially mixed country. In 1978 a temple, from which blacks would be excluded, was under construction. (*Black Saints in a White Church*, p. 28)

Through the years there had been numerous private meetings of LDS Church leaders discussing these issues and trying to resolve the problems. When the church announced in 1975 that a temple would be built in Brazil some of the leaders must have realized that the priesthood ban would have to come to an end once the temple was dedicated (see *All Abraham's Children*, p. 237).

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Prelude to Revelation

LDS scholar Lester E. Bush, Jr., observed:

The 1970's will be a challenge to historians for years to come: Black activist harassment of BYU; the Genesis Group; litigation with the Boy Scout movement; Roots-spurred interest in genealogy; heightened leadership awareness of the historical antecedents of current Mormon beliefs; and once again questions over the identification of the cursed lineage, this time with reverberations in both Brazil and the U. S. Congress. . . .

The greatest challenge to future historians, and that of most interest and importance, will be 1978 itself, about which very little can now be said with confidence. There are a few tantalizing hints. That the forthcoming dedication of the Brazilian temple figured conspicuously in the deliberations leading up to the revelation is clear from some published comments. LeGrand Richards, for example, is quoted as saying, "All those people with Negro blood in them have been raising the money to build the temple. **Brother Kimball worried about it.** He asked each one of us of the Twelve if we would pray—and we did—that the Lord would give him the **inspiration** to know what the will of the Lord was. . . ."

Beyond this the story is hazy and intriguing. According to his son Edward, President Kimball was "exercised about the question" for "some months at least," during which time "he could not put it out of his mind." **He solicited individual written and oral statements from the Twelve**, conveying, to Apostle Richards, the impression that "he was thinking favorably toward giving the colored people the priesthood." That any such disposition followed a great internal struggle is evidenced by a statement from President Kimball himself, in an interview with the Church News: ". . . I had a great deal to fight, of course, myself largely, because I had grown up with this thought that Negroes should not have the priesthood and I was prepared to go all the rest of my life till my death and fight for it and defend it as it was." Indeed, according to son Edward, his father "could not comfortably debate things about which he felt deeply."

Whatever the contributing factors, President Kimball apparently was persuaded even before the June first revelation—as Richards suggested—that a change in the priesthood policy was indicated. . . .

The "revelation and assurance came to me so clearly," Kimball later said, "that there was no question about it." The revelation thus appears to have been a **spiritual manifestation in confirmation of a decision made after a period of lengthy and profound study and prayer**. This "spiritual witness" was reportedly experienced by all present at that time as well as a week later when the First Presidency presented their official statement to the Twelve. (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 12, no. 2, Summer 1979, pp. 10-11)

Historian D. Michael Quinn discussed this process. He observed that President Kimball had

met privately with individual apostles who expressed their "individual thoughts" about his suggestion to end the priesthood ban.

After discussing this in several temple meetings and private discussions, Kimball wrote a statement "in longhand removing all priesthood restrictions on blacks" and presented it to his counselors on 30 May. (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, p. 16)

The next day, on June 1, 1978, the group prayed in the temple and received personal confirmation that it was time to change the policy. Gordon B. Hinckley explained:

No voice audible to our physical ears was heard. But the voice of the spirit whispered into our minds and our very souls. (as quoted in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, p. 16)

Quinn goes on to explain the events leading up to the public announcement:

On 7 June 1978 Kimball informed his counselors that "through **inspiration** he had decided to lift the restrictions on priesthood." In the meantime he had asked three apostles . . . to prepare "**suggested wording**" for the public announcement of the decision." The First Presidency used the three documents to prepare a **fourth preliminary statement** which was "then reviewed, **edited**, and approved by the First Presidency. This document was taken to the council meeting with the Twelve on Thursday, June, 8, 1978." The apostles made **additional "minor editorial changes"** in the nearly final statement which was then presented to all general authorities the next day, just hours before its public announcement. (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, p. 16)

This process hardly sounds like a direct revelation from God to the prophet. In what way does this chain of events equate with a "revelation"? How is this process any different from any other religious leader praying for divine guidance and then acting on those spiritual promptings?

The 1978 Announcement

For over a hundred years the Mormon leaders had taught that blacks could not be given the priesthood until the millennium. In 1854 Brigham Young taught:

When all the other children of Adam have had the privilege of receiving the Priesthood, and of coming into the kingdom of God, and of being redeemed from the four quarters of the earth, and have received their resurrection from the dead, then it will be time enough to remove the curse from Cain and his posterity. He deprived his brother of the privilege of pursuing his journey through life, and of extending his kingdom by multiplying upon the earth; and because he did this, **he is the last to share the joys of the kingdom of God.** (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 143)

Yet on June 9, 1978, the Mormon Church's *Deseret News* carried a startling announcement by the First Presidency of the church that stated a new revelation had been given and that blacks would now be allowed to hold the priesthood. Although the ban was lifted in June, the declaration was not presented to the church for formal acceptance until September 30, 1978 at the Fall Conference. N. Eldon Tanner, counselor to President Kimball, read the declaration to the congregation:

To Whom It May Concern:

On September 30, 1978, at the 148th Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the following was presented by President N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor in the First Presidency of the Church:

In early June of this year, the First Presidency announced that a **revelation** had been received by President Spencer W. Kimball extending priesthood and temple blessings to **all worthy male members** of the Church. President Kimball has asked that I advise the conference that after he had received this **revelation**, which came to him after **extended meditation and prayer** in the sacred rooms of the holy temple, he presented it to his counselors, who accepted it and approved it. It was then presented to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who unanimously approved it, and was subsequently presented to all other General Authorities, who likewise approved it unanimously.

N. Eldon Tanner then read President Kimball's letter to the priesthood:

Dear Brethren:

As we have witnessed the expansion of the work of the Lord over the earth. . . This, in turn, has inspired us with a desire to extend to **every worthy member** of the Church all of the privileges and blessings which the gospel affords.

Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God's eternal plan, **all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood**, . . . we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

He has heard our prayers, and by **revelation** has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when **every faithful, worthy man** in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, . . . Accordingly, **all worthy male members** of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood **without regard for race or color**. . . .

Sincerely yours,

SPENCER W. KIMBALL
N. ELDON TANNER
MARION G. ROMNEY

The declaration was then presented to the assembly who gave it their full support.

Declaration 2, in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, was obviously carefully crafted by church officials. As a matter of fact, it never even mentions that it was the blacks who had been discriminated against prior to the revelation.

In stating that they "pleaded long and earnestly" for the change implies that God has been a racist for thousands of years, and that Mormon leaders "by pleading long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the upper room of the Temple" finally persuaded God to give blacks the priesthood.

The Bible, however, informs us that "God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). It was the Mormon leaders who kept blacks under a curse.

Finally, when missionary efforts around the world were being hampered by the doctrine, Mormon leaders were forced to change their position. Historian Jan Shipps commented on the reason for the announcement:

The June 9 revelation will never be fully understood if it is regarded simply as a pragmatic doctrinal shift ultimately designed to bring Latter-day Saints into congruence with mainstream America. . . . This revelation came in the context of worldwide evangelism rather than . . . American social and cultural circumstances. (as quoted in *Black Saints in a White Church*, p. 27)

Questions Remain

Was the original ban based on scripture or revelation? Many Mormons have maintained that the priesthood ban was a policy, not established by revelation. If it was only a policy, why did it take a revelation to end it?

If a revelation was received in June of 1978, why isn't the specifically worded revelation published instead of a statement about a supposed revelation? Declaration 2 is not the revelation.

If Declaration 2 represents a revelation to the church, why wasn't it numbered with the other sections of the *Doctrine and Covenants*? The two Declarations at the back of the *D&C* seem to be policy statements putting an end to practices, but neither contains the words "thus saith the Lord" or repudiates the doctrine behind the practice. If the revelation included a repudiation of past teachings on race and color why isn't it published?

Another contradiction is the fact that the revelation was given too early. According to Brigham Young, the priesthood would not be given to the blacks until after the resurrection:

. . . they [descendents of Cain] never can hold the Priesthood or share in it until all the other descendants of Adam have received the promises. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 290)

This was obscured in the 1978 declaration that said “Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God’s eternal plan, all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood.” Past leaders had said that blacks would eventually receive the priesthood, but they maintained that it would be after everyone else had had a chance to receive it.

Teaching Not Renounced

Reporter William Lobdell wrote:

It took until 1978—14 years after the Civil Rights Act—before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lifted the ban following what leaders said was a revelation from God to make the priesthood available to “every faithful, worthy man.”

The new doctrine came without an apology or repudiation of the church’s past practice. . . . Mauss and others believe that a church repudiation of past policies would help, but that would be difficult because it was never clear whether the racism was a divine revelation—which couldn’t be apologized for—or man-made law. (“New Mormon Aim: Reach Out to Blacks,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2003)

Armand Mauss observed:

Certainly these old doctrines have not appeared in official church discourse for at least two decades. . . . However, as long as these doctrines continue to appear in successive reprintings of authoritative books and are freely circulated at the Mormon grassroots, they will continue to rankle many of the black Saints. (*All Abraham’s Children*, p. 252)

On page 262 Mauss continues:

To repudiate any of the cherished religious lore of their immediate ancestors seems to some Mormons, especially the older ones, to be almost a repudiation of the grandparents themselves, to say nothing of *their* teachers, who might have walked with God. . . . One need point only to the struggle in Utah even now over plural marriage: Despite the long arm of the law and the church’s strenuous repudiation of polygamous *practices*, the traditional *doctrines* underlying plural marriage still survive even in mainstream Mormonism. Why should traditional racial doctrines be any easier to set aside? (*All Abraham’s Children*, p. 262. Italics in original.)

Writing in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Peggy Stack pointed out:

For most white members, the ban controversy is over, but the issue continues to haunt many black members, especially in the United States. They are constantly having to explain themselves and their beliefs—to non-Mormons, other black converts and themselves. And no matter how committed to LDS teachings and practices they are, they must wonder: If this is the true church, led by a prophet of God, why was a racial ban instituted in the first place? (“Faith, Color and the LDS Priesthood,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, June 8, 2003, pp. A1, A12)

Blacks in the LDS Church

Since 1978 LDS missionary work in the United States has gained a small but significant number of black converts. However, there seems to be a problem with retention. Mauss observed that “Mormon missionary work among American blacks does not seem to be thriving, even after the 1978 change in priesthood policy” (*All Abraham’s Children*, p. 261). Their greatest success among blacks has been in Brazil and Africa.

On the news page for the official Mormon web site, www.lds.org, is an article on their growth in Ghana. They report that in 1978 Ghana had about 400 Mormons. In December of 2003 they dedicated a new temple in Ghana to serve the approximately 23,000 members in that country.

Most of the blacks who join Mormonism are not aware of the past racist teachings of its prophets and leaders. When they read the earlier statements they are usually upset and want an explanation from the church.

A black convert, participating in a roundtable discussion on race and Mormonism, observed:

We can say what we want to say in this room today, but nothing is going to change until somebody says in General Conference meeting, “Racism in the Church is wrong.” By not saying it, they’re condoning it. They’re condoning Brigham Young’s statements; they’re condoning John Taylor’s statements; they’re condoning things that need to be repudiated. A statement may not stop everything, but it will make people think, because, by not saying it, they’re condoning it. (“Speak the Truth, and Shame the Devil,” *Sunstone*, May 2003, p. 33)

Darron Smith, a black convert, wrote:

. . . even though the priesthood ban was repealed in 1978, the discourse that constructs what blackness means is still very much intact today. . . . Hence there are Church members today who continue to summon and teach at every level of Church education the racial discourse that blacks are descendants of Cain, that they merited lesser earthly

privilege because they were “fence-sitters” in the War in Heaven, and that, science and climatic factors aside, there is a link between skin color and righteousness. . . .

Further anchoring the early LDS appropriation of negative notions concerning blackness are several Book of Mormon teachings that associate dark skin with that which is vile, filthy, and evil, and white skin with that which is delightsome, pure, and good. . . .

I did not find out about the priesthood ban on blacks until after I had joined the Church, and, sadly, I passed on much of the folklore while serving an LDS mission in Michigan. Looking back on that experience, I venture to say that had I known about such teachings in the Church, I might not have joined. . . .

Blacks who do move toward Mormonism should not be made to feel that blackness is synonymous with curses, marks, or indifference. And this can be accomplished only by a formal repudiation, in no uncertain terms, of all teachings about Cain, the pre-mortal unworthiness of spirits born to black bodies, and any idea that skin color is connected to righteousness. (“The Persistence of Racialized Discourse in Mormonism,” by Darron Smith, *Sunstone*, March 2003, pp. 31-33)

Conclusion

While the LDS Church is to be commended for its humanitarian work in Africa and among minorities, it does not offset the damage done by racial teachings of its past leaders. The teachings in the *Book of Mormon* and *Pearl of Great Price* associating dark skin with a mark of God’s judgment, along with racist statements of past prophets and apostles, need to be officially repudiated.

The Bible offers eternal life to all mankind, regardless of race. Jesus told his disciples to go “into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

(For more on this topic, see *Curse of Cain? Racism in the Mormon Church and Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?*, ch. 21, by the Tanners.)

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Facts on the Mormon Church

In 1830 six men met to organize the Church of Christ, later renamed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see *D&C* 15:3-5). At the end of 2003 the LDS Church claimed 11,985,254 members with 56,237 missionaries.

The LDS Church operates 116 temples throughout the world. Even though there are less than 200,000 Mormons in all of Africa, the Mormons have just dedicated their second temple on the continent. They have one in South Africa and a new one in Ghana. Another is under construction in Nigeria.

Below is a breakdown of the LDS membership as of December 31, 2002, by areas, from the official LDS website, www.lds.org.

Membership Distribution (31 December 2002)

United States - 5,410,544
Canada - 163,666
Mexico - 952,947
Caribbean - 129,776
South America - 2,738,037
Central America - 503,857
South Pacific - 381,458
Europe - 426,944
Asia - 825,997
Africa - 188,322

At the April 2004 general conference of the LDS Church it was announced that there had been 242,923 convert baptisms in 2003. Significantly, this is the lowest number in the past eight years. The number of converts has been dropping since 1996 and the current number of missionaries has fallen to the level of 1997. The average number of converts per missionary in 1996 was 6.7. In 2003 the average had dropped to 4.3.

While the LDS Church publishes the number of converts to the church they refuse to publish the number of people requesting their membership to be terminated or give the percent of active members.

	Members	Converts	Missionaries
1996	9,694,549	321,385	52,938
1997	10,070,524	317,798	56,531
1998	10,354,241	299,134	57,853
1999	10,752,986	306,171	58,593
2000	11,068,861	273,973	60,784
2001	11,394,522	292,612	60,850
2002	11,721,548	283,138	61,638
2003	11,985,254	242,923	56,237

By Whose Authority? Problems in LDS Priesthood Claims

In the February 2004 *Ensign* LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley laid out the four cornerstones of Mormonism. The first is Jesus Christ and his plan of salvation, second is Joseph Smith's first vision, third is the *Book of Mormon* and fourth is priesthood authority.

The LDS Church claims that those holding its priesthood are the only ones recognized by God to perform baptisms and ordinances of the gospel. Mormonism rejects baptisms done by any other church. The LDS manual *Doctrines of the Gospel* explains:

What is the [LDS] Priesthood? It is nothing more nor less than the power of God delegated to man by which man can . . . act legitimately; not assuming that authority, nor borrowing it from generations that are dead and gone, . . . (*Doctrines of the Gospel*, Student Manual, Religion 231 and 232, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986, p. 67)

The LDS Church teaches that this authority must be acquired by the proper means. In *Doctrines of the Gospel* we read that every priesthood act must be done "in the proper way, and after the proper order" (p. 68).

This raises the question as whether or not Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were baptized and ordained by proper "priesthood authority" in the "proper way"? Joseph Smith's account of the event is published in the *Pearl of Great Price*:

We [Smith and Cowdery] still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May, 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the [Book of Mormon] plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying:

Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.

He said this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter; and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and that afterwards he should baptize me.

Accordingly we went and were baptized. I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me—after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood, and afterwards he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same Priesthood—for so we were commanded. . . . It was on the fifteenth day of May, 1829, that we were ordained under the hand of this messenger, and baptized. (*Pearl of Great Price*, Joseph Smith—History 1:68-71)

How could the angel, elsewhere identified as John the Baptist, ordain them to the priesthood before they were baptized? According to LDS doctrine today, a man must be baptized by someone holding the LDS priesthood authority before he can be ordained to the priesthood.

If John the Baptist's ordination was valid, why did Joseph and Oliver need to baptize each other and then reordain each other to the same priesthood? Why wouldn't the angel baptize them first and then ordain them?

Researcher Hal Hougey observed:

This absurd and contradictory account could have been completely avoided if Joseph Smith had simply said that the angel first baptized them, and then conferred the priesthood on them. And this is what he would have said if the story were true. Why, then, did he give us the account we have? It seems likely that the part about the angel is simply an embellishment later added to what actually occurred. Joseph and Oliver were about to start a church. In order to get the people to listen to their claims, it would be advisable for them to be baptized and ordained. Since they did not want to go to any existing church for these credentials, they proceeded to give them to each other. Read the account, leaving out the part about the angel, and one has a believable narrative of what two men might do to create credentials for themselves as ministers of God. (*Latter-Day Saints—Where Did You Get Your Authority?*, by Hal Hougey, Pacific Publishing Co., 1969, p. 4)

Merrill J. Bateman, one of the top leaders in the LDS Church, emphasized the necessity of restoring proper priesthood authority to Joseph Smith:

One of the remarkable evidences of the Restoration is the testimony of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery regarding the manner in which the priesthood and its directing powers were returned to earth. . . . John the Baptist brought back the Aaronic Priesthood with the keys of repentance and baptism. Peter, James, and John restored not only the Melchizedek Priesthood but also "the keys of [the] kingdom." . . .

Near the end of His ministry, Jesus promised Peter "the keys of the kingdom," knowing that Jesus would soon leave and that priesthood keys were needed by the Apostles if they were to direct the work after His ascension. . . .

In contrast, 19th-century ministers in the Palmyra environs, not understanding the great Apostasy that had taken place, believed in an entirely different process for priesthood reception. They believed that the power to preach came through an inner calling to a priesthood of believers. ("Priesthood, Keys, and the Power to Bless," *Ensign*, Nov. 2003, p. 50)

If such keys were needed why didn't Peter, James and John restore both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods? Mormonism claims that they held the authority for both. Why would John the Baptist need to come at all?

When Did it Happen?

In his story printed at the back of the *Pearl of Great Price* Joseph Smith stated that on May 15, 1829, the Aaronic Priesthood was conferred on him and Oliver Cowdery. Yet there is no date given for his ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood. The *History of the Church*, by Joseph Smith, shows that there is real confusion as to when Peter, James and John supposedly appeared. The footnote on p. 61 states:

... before the 6th of April, 1830, and probably before that very month of June, 1829, had expired Peter, James and John had come and conferred upon Joseph and Oliver the keys of the Melchizedek Priesthood, ... (*History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 61)

Historian D. Michael Quinn explained:

According to **current** tradition, both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods functioned in the church after the spring of **1829** when Smith and Cowdery were visited first by John the Baptist, who restored the lesser or Aaronic priesthood, and then by Peter, James, and John, who restored the higher or Melchizedek priesthood. A **closer look at contemporary records indicates that men were first ordained to the higher priesthood over a year after the church's founding**. No mention of angelic ordinations can be found in **original** documents until **1834-35**. Thereafter accounts of the visit of Peter, James, and John by Cowdery and Smith remained vague and contradictory. (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, by D. Michael Quinn, Signature Books, 1994, pp. 14-15)

If Joseph Smith could name the specific date when the Aaronic Priesthood was restored why didn't he give the date for the Melchizedek Priesthood ordination?

The earliest historical documents show that the concept of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were products of Joseph Smith's evolving theology and were not taught prior to 1831. Historian Dan Vogel commented:

The early Mormon understanding of restored authority **evolved** as the events of the restoration unfolded. . . . Only gradually did Mormonism's description of apostasy, restoration, and authority become clearly lineal-legal. In addition, the concepts of "two orders of priesthood" and "lineal priesthood" were not introduced into Mormonism until after its founding. . . .

Indeed, nothing in the Book of Mormon stipulates a lineal-legal notion of authority. The Book of Mormon's description of the apostasy did not include the charge that the latter-day clergy lacked priesthood authority. Rather, it indicted them with religious hypocrisy and spiritual poverty. Similarly, the Book of Mormon's description of the restoration included no promise of the return of priesthood authority but rather of spiritual renewal. (*Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism*, by Dan Vogel, Signature Books, 1988, pp. 101-102)

Mormonism maintains that when John the Baptist appeared to Smith and Cowdery in 1829 they received the Aaronic Priesthood, which included the offices of deacon, teacher, and priest. When Peter, James and John supposedly appeared a short while later, they conferred on Smith and Cowdery the Melchizedek Priesthood, which included the offices of elder, seventy, High Priest, Bishop, Patriarch, Apostle and Prophet.

While one can find mention of such offices as elder or teacher in early LDS documents, these were not considered part of a larger priesthood system such as Melchizedek or Aaronic. Smith seems to have initially used these designations in the same way that other churches of the day would have used such terms.

High Priesthood Added

People reading the current edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* assume that the revelations read the same as they were originally printed. However, there have been important revisions relating to priesthood.

The first printing of Smith's revelations in book form was in 1833, in a work titled *Book of Commandments*. Later, in 1835, a new edition was prepared, changing many of the original revelations and adding new ones. The title was also changed to *Doctrine and Covenants*.

Chapter 24 of the 1833 *Book of Commandments* gave instructions about elders, priests, teachers and deacons but made no mention of two priesthoods. When this revelation was reprinted in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* (section 20 of a current edition) dozens of words were added to the text to include such offices as high counselors, high priests and high priesthood. Researcher H. Michael Marquardt commented:

In the Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ [*Book of Commandments*, chapter 24] is listed the following offices in the church: elder, priest, teacher, and deacon. The Articles and Covenants were read and received by a vote of the congregation at the first church conference on 9 June 1830 at Fayette, New York. At this time some men had been ordained to three of the four offices: elder, priest, and teacher. It was prior to 25 October 1831 when the first known deacons were ordained. As the church grew, **additional offices** or callings became part of the ecclesiastical structure. By 1835 it was felt necessary to add these offices to the Articles and Covenants, though such a step created an anachronism. (*The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text & Commentary*, by H. Michael Marquardt, Signature Books, 1999, pp. 67-68)

The revisions were made in the 1835 printing of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. On the next page is a photo of part of chapter 24 of the *Book of Commandments* (now section 20 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*) with the revisions noted in the margins.

LDS historian Gregory A. Prince wrote:

Although in the Mormon church today the term “priesthood” refers to this bestowed authority, such a relationship did not develop **until years after the founding of the church**. Initially authority was understood to be inherent in what are now termed “offices.” Three offices—elder, priest, and teacher—were present by August 1829, as were the ordinances of baptism, confirmation, and ordination, but the word “priesthood” was not used in reference to these for another three years. (*Power From On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood*, by Gregory A. Prince, Signature Books, 1995, p. 2)

Prince explained that while the *Book of Mormon* contains references to “higher authority” they were not understood in terms of “priesthood.” He concluded:

It was not until several months after the June 1831 general conference, when the “high priesthood” was conferred, that the term “priesthood” entered Mormon usage at all. (*Power From On High*, p. 12)

Thus we see that at the time of the founding of Mormonism in 1830 there was no teaching or awareness of Joseph Smith claiming to have received either the Aaronic Priesthood or the Melchizedek Priesthood in 1829.

Other Revelations Changed

Another example of the changes can be found by comparing the current *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 27, dated August 1830, with the 1833 printing of this revelation in the *Book of Commandments*. The current version mentions John the Baptist and Peter, James and John, but the 1833 edition (chapter 28 of the *Book of Commandments*) did not contain any mention of priesthood restoration.

On the next page is a photo of chapter 28 of the *Book of Commandments* (now section 27 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*) with the revisions noted in the margins. Note the interpolation of priesthood concepts.

Also, sections 2 and 13 of the current *Doctrine and Covenants*, which mention priesthood, were not printed in the 1833 *Book of Commandments*. They were extracted from Joseph Smith’s history, started in 1838, and added to the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1876.

As Joseph Smith’s church began to grow so did the need for clearer delineation of authority, thus the backdating and insertion of priesthood claims into the revelations. David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the *Book of Mormon*, related the following concerning the addition of priesthood concepts:

Authority is the word we used for the first two years in the church . . . This matter of two orders of priesthood in the Church of Christ, and lineal priesthood of the old law being in the church, all originated in the mind of Sydney Rigdon. . . . This is the way the High Priests and the “priesthood” as you have it, was introduced into the Church of Christ almost two years after its beginning—and after we had baptized and confirmed about two thousand souls into the church. (*An Address To All Believers in Christ*, by David Whitmer, 1887, p. 64)

Whitmer also condemned the LDS leaders for endorsing the rewriting of Smith’s revelations between their first printing in the *Book of Commandments* in 1833 and the second printing in the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1835.

You have changed the revelations from the way they were first given and as they are to-day . . . to support the error of Brother Joseph in taking upon himself the office of Seer to the church. You have changed the revelations to support the error of high priests. You have changed the revelations to support the error of a President of the high priesthood, high counselors, etc. (*An Address to All Believers in Christ*, p. 49)

In H. Michael Marquardt’s study, *The Joseph Smith’s Revelations: Text & Commentary*, we read:

In recent years there has been a growing willingness on the part of some writers to admit the existence of variant readings of the early revelations. Part of this openness responds to the criticisms of some early rank-and-file members who harbored grievances against church leaders, including charges of textual revision. . . . Jonathan B. Turner in his 1842 book [*Mormonism in All Ages*] also dealt with changes in the 1835 D&C:

It would have been well for the world if Smith’s divinity, instead of giving him a pair of spectacles, had given him a divine

BOOK OF COMMANDMENTS - Chapter 24
COMPARE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS - Sec. 20:49-68

BOOK OF COMMANDMENTS - Chapter 28
 COMPARE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS - Sec. 27

WHEN THERE IS NO ELDER PRESENT;
BUT WHEN THERE IS AN ELDER PRESENT,
HE IS ONLY TO PREACH,
TEACH, EXPOUND, EXHORT, AND
BAPTIZE, AND VISIT THE HOUSE
OF EACH MEMBER,
EXHORTING THEM TO
PRAY VOCALLY AND IN
SECRET AND ATTEND
TO ALL FAMILY DUTIES.

IN ALL THESE DUTIES
THE PRIEST - T.C.

IF OCCASION
REQUIRES - W.A.

W.D.

HE IS TO - W.A.

OR MAKE THE LEAD OF
MEETINGS; NOT MAKE OF
OTHERS; BUT WHEN THERE IS AN ELDER PRESENT,
HE AND GOD IS TO ASSIST THE ELDER.

W.D.

33 The teacher's duty is to watch over the church
always, and be with them, and strengthen them,
and see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither
hardiness with each other, neither lying back-
biting, nor evil speaking;

39 And see that the church meet together often,
and also see that all the members do their duty;

40 And he is to take the lead of meetings in the
absence of the elder or priest, and is to be assisted
in all his duties in the church by the
deacons.

W.D.

41 But neither teachers nor deacons have au-
thority to baptize, administer the sacrament, or
to warn, exhort, and teach, and invite
all to come unto Christ.

42 Every elder, priest, teacher or deacon, is to be
ordained according to the gifts and callings of God
unto him, by the power of the Holy Ghost, which is
in the one who ordinates him.

43 The several elders composing this church of
Christ, are to meet in conference once in three
months, or from time to time as they shall direct or
appoint to do church business whenever it is nec-
essary.

44 Each priest & teacher who is ordained by
a master, is to take a certificate from him at the time
of ordination, which will present him to another
conference, which shall authorize him to perform the
duties of his calling.

45 The duty of the members under they are receiv-
ed by baptism.

W.D.

AND HE IS TO BE
ORDAINED - W.A.

OR LAY ON HANDS;
THEY ARE, HOWEVER,
TC.

W.A.

AND SAID CONFERENCES
ARE - W.A.

W.D.

MAY - T.C.

CERTIFICATE - W.A.

(TO - W.A.)

DUTIES - T.C.

W.D.

TO BE DONE AT THE
TIME THE ELDERS ARE
TO RECEIVE THEIR
LICENSES FROM OTHER
ELDERS, BY VOTE OF
THE CHURCH TO WHICH
THEY BELONG, OR

FROM THE CONFERENCES
W.A.

OR DECISION - W.A.

SHALL ENTITLE
T.C.

W.D.

16 The clerks or priests are to have a sufficient
or he may receive it from a conference, no person is to be ordained to any office in
this church, where there is a regularly organized branch of the same, without the
vote of that church; but the presiding elders, traveling bishops, high councilors, high
priests, and elders, may have the privilege of ordaining, where there is no branch of the
church that a vote may be called. every president of the high priesthood (or
presiding elder), bishop, high councilor, and high priest, is to be ordained
by the direction of a high council or general conference.

BOOK OF COMMANDMENTS - Chapter 28
 COMPARE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS - Sec. 27

AND TAKE UPON YOU MY
WHOLE ARMOR THAT YE MAY
BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND
THE EVIL DAY, HAVING
DONE ALL, THAT YE MAY
BE ABLE TO STAND.
STAND, THEREFORE, LOINS GART
ABOUT WITH TRUTH,
HAVING ON THE BREAST-
PLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,
AND YOUR FEET SHOD
WITH THE PREPARATION
OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE,
WHICH I HAVE SENT MINE
ANGELS TO COMMIT
UNTO YOU; TAKING THE
SHIELD OF FAITH WHERE-
WITH YE SHALL BE ABLE
TO QUENCH ALL THE
FIERY DARTS OF THE
WICKED; AND TAKE THE
HELMET OF SALVATION,
AND THE SWORD OF MY
SPIRIT, WHICH I WILL
POUR OUT UPON YOU,
AND MY WORD WHICH
I REVEAL UNTO YOU,
AND BE AGREED AS
TOUCHING ALL THINGS
WHATSOEVER YE ASK
OF ME.

printer, and a divine press, and such types that he might have been enabled to fix the meaning of his inspired revelations, so that it would be possible to let them stand, at least two years, without abstracting, interpolating, altering, or garbling, to suit the times. But the ways of Smith's providence are indeed mysterious. (*The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text & Commentary*, by H. Michael Marquadt, Signature Books, 1999, p. 18)

On page 14 of this newsletter is another example of such rewriting. In 1834 the LDS newspaper, *Evening and Morning Star*, printed an 1831 revelation which differs significantly from the current version known as section 68 in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Again, we see the addition of priesthood material.

Researcher LaMar Petersen concluded:

The student would expect to find all the particulars of the restoration in this first treasured set of revelations [the 1833 Book of Commandments], the chronological order of which encompassed the bestowals of the two Priesthoods, but they are conspicuously absent. . . . The notable revelations on priesthood in the Doctrine and Covenants before referred to—Sections 2 and 13—are missing, and Chapter 28 gives no hint of the restoration which, if actual, had been known for four years. More than four hundred words were added to this revelation of September 1830 in Section 27 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the additions made to include the names of heavenly visitors and two separate ordinations. The Book of Commandments gives the duties of Elders, Priests, Teachers, and Deacons and refers to Joseph's apostolic calling, but there is no mention of Melchizedek Priesthood, High Priesthood, High Priests, nor High Councilors. These words were later inserted into the revelation on church organization and government given in 1830, making it appear that they were known at that date, but they do not appear in the original, Chapter 24 of the 1833 Book of Commandments. Similar interpolations were made in the revelations now known as Sections 42 and 68.

There seems to be no support for the historicity of the restoration of the priesthood in journals, diaries, letters, nor printed matter prior to October 1834. (*The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry*, by La Mar Petersen, Freethinker Press, 2000, p. 145)

For more on the historical and theological problems relating to LDS priesthood claims, see our web site <http://www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/mclaims6.htm> and the article "Fabricating the Mormon Priesthood: By God or By Man" at www.bcmmin.org/priestod2.html. The most complete historical study of LDS priesthood is *Power From On High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood*, by Gregory A. Prince, available on our booklist.

[Digital images of the 1833 *Book of Commandments* can be seen at <http://www.irr.org/mit/BOC/1833boc-1835d&c-index.html>. Photo reprints of the 1833 *Book of Commandments* and the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants* can be purchased from our book list, see *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, vol. 2.]

Priesthood and the Bible

In the sixth Article of Faith of the LDS Church we read:

We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, viz., apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc. (*Pearl of Great Price*)

The LDS Church has two divisions of priesthood, Aaronic and Melchizedek. The LDS manual *Gospel Principles* states:

The greater priesthood is the Melchizedek Priesthood. . . . The lesser [Aaronic] priesthood is an appendage to the Melchizedek Priesthood. (p. 79)

Further on the manual explains:

The offices in the Aaronic Priesthood are deacon, teacher, priest, and bishop. (p. 81)

The offices of the Melchizedek Priesthood are elder, seventy, high priest, patriarch, and apostle. (p. 82)

Since the Mormon Church makes the specific claim that their priesthood is the same as the New Testament church we need to compare their offices with those mentioned in the Bible.

Aaronic Priesthood

The Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament was restricted to Aaron's descendants, who were of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:1-10, 8:5-22; Exodus 38:21). Mormons do not claim to be descended from Aaron. Many of them believe they are from the tribe of Ephraim but this would not make them eligible for the Aaronic priesthood.

Even Jesus could not hold the Aaronic priesthood because he descended from the tribe of Judah. Hebrews 7:14 explains: "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."

The priesthood of the Old Testament was brought to an end with the death of Christ. In Hebrews 7:11-12 we read:

If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need

COMPARISON: *The Evening and Morning Star* - October 1832, page 3 and *Doctrine and Covenants* - Section 68

THE EVENING AND THE MORNING STAR.

VOL. 1.

Independence, Mo. October, 1832.

No. 5.

A REVELATION, GIVEN NOVEMBER, 1831.

HYDE-W.R.

ORDINATION-T.C.

JOHNSON-W.A.

JOHNSON-W.A.

HYDE-W.A.

E. M'LELLIN-W.A.

COVENANTS-T.C.

W.D.

THEY-T.C.

REMAIN-T.C.

ARE-T.C.

PRIESTS-T.C.

W.D.

THEY-T.C.

**THE PRESIDENCY OF
THE CHURCH-T.C.**

THIS PRESIDENCY-T.C.

**COVENANTS AND
COMMANDMENTS-T.C.**

**OR IN ANY OF HER
STAKES WHICH ARE
ORGANIZED - W.A.**

**HIGH PRIEST WHO
T.C.**

**AND IF HE REPENT HE
SHALL BE - T.C.**

SHALL ALSO - T.C.

**OR IN ANY OF HER
STAKES WHICH ARE
ORGANIZED - W.A.**

HEADS-T.C.

COWDERY-W.A.

My servant, Orson, was called, by his ordinance, to proclaim the everlasting gospel, by the spirit of the living God, from people to people, and from land to land, in the congregations of the wicked, in their synagogues, reasoning with and expounding all scriptures unto them: And behold and lo, this is an example unto all those who were ordained unto this priesthood, whose mission is appointed unto them to go forth: And this is the example unto them, that they shall speak as they are moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and whatsoever they shall speak, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost, shall be scripture; shall be the will of the Lord; shall be the mind of the Lord; shall be the word of the Lord; shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation: Behold this is the promise of the Lord unto you, O ye my servants: wherefore, be of good cheer, and do not fear, for I the Lord am with you, and will stand by you; and ye shall bear record of me even Jesus Christ, that I am the Son of the living God; that I was; that I am; and that I am to come. This is the word of the Lord unto you my servant, Orson, and also unto my servant, Luke, and unto my servant, Lyman, and unto my servant William; and unto all the faithful elders of my church: Go ye into all the world; preach the gospel to every creature; acting in the authority which I have given you; baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned; and he that believeth shall be blessed with signs following, even as it is written: And unto you it shall be given to know the signs of the times, and the signs of the coming of the Son of man; and of as many as the Father shall bear record, to you it shall be given power to seal them up unto eternal life: Amen.

And now, concerning the items in addition to the laws and commandments, they are these: There remaineth hereafter in the due time of the Lord, other bishops to be set apart unto the church, to minister even according to the first; wherefore it shall be an high priest who is worthy; and he shall be appointed by a conference of high priests. And again, no bishop or judge, which shall be set apart for this ministry, shall be tried or condemned for any crime, save it be before a conference of high priests; and in as much as he is found guilty before a conference of high priests, by testimony that cannot be impeached, he shall be condemned or forgiv'n, according to the laws of the church. And again, in as much as parents have children in Zion, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance; faith in Christ the Son of the living God; and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, when eight years old: the sin be upon the head of the parents, for this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, and their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of hands: and they also shall teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord. And the inhabitants of Zion shall also observe the sabbath day to keep it holy. And the inhabitants of Zion, also, shall remember their labors, in as much as they are appointed to labor; in all faithfulness, for the idler shall be had in remembrance before the Lord. Now I the Lord am not well pleased with the inhabitants of Zion, for there are idlers among them; and their children are also growing up in wickedness: They also seek not earnestly the riches of eternity, but their eyes are full of greediness. These things ought not to be, and must be done away from among them: wherefore let my servant Oliver carry these sayings unto the land of Zion. And a commandment I give unto them, that he that observeth not his prayers before the Lord in the season thereof, let him

be had in remembrance before the judge of my people. These sayings are true and faithful: wherefore transgress them not, neither take therefrom. Behold I am Alpha and Omega, and I come quickly: Amen.

**THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
OF THE MELCHIZEDEK
PRIESTHOOD, EXCEPT THEY
BE LITERAL DESCENDANTS
OF AARON. AND IF THEY BE
LITERAL DESCENDANTS
OF AARON, THEY HAVE A
LEGAL RIGHT TO THE
BISHOPRIC, IF THEY ARE
THE FIRSTBORN AMONG
THE SONS OF AARON;
FOR THE FIRSTBORN
HOLDS THE RIGHT OF THE
PRESIDENCY OVER THIS
PRIESTHOOD, AND THE
KEYS OR AUTHORITY OF
THE SAME. NO MAN HAS
A LEGAL RIGHT TO THIS
OFFICE, TO HOLD THE KEYS
OF THIS PRIESTHOOD, EX-
CEPT HE BE A LITERAL
DESCENDANT AND THE
FIRSTBORN OF AARON.
BUT, AS A HIGH PRIEST OF
THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIEST-
HOOD HAS AUTHORITY TO
OFFICIATE IN ALL THE
LESSER OFFICES HE MAY
OFFICIATE IN THE OFFICE
OF BISHOP WHEN NO
LITERAL DESCENDANT OF
AARON CAN BE FOUND,
PROVIDED HE IS CALLED
AND SET APART AND
ORDAINED UNTO THIS
POWER, UNDER THE
HANDS OF THE FIRST
PRESIDENCY OF THE MEL-
CHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD.
AND A LITERAL DESCEND-
ANT OF AARON, ALSO, MUST
BE DESIGNATED BY THIS
PRESIDENCY, AND FOUND
WORTHY, AND ANOINTED,
AND ORDAINED UNDER
THE HANDS OF THIS PRES-
IDENCY, OTHERWISE
THEY ARE NOT LEGALLY
AUTHORIZED TO OFFICI-
ATE IN THEIR PRIESTHOOD.**

**BUT, BY VIRTUE OF THE DECREE CONCERNING THEIR
RIGHT OF THE PRIESTHOOD DESCENDING FROM FATHER
TO SON, THEY MAY CLAIM THEIR ANOINTING IF AT ANY
TIME THEY CAN PROVE THEIR LINEAGE, OR DO AS-
CERTAIN IT BY REVELATION FROM THE LORD UNDER
THE HANDS OF THE ABOVE NAMED PRESIDENCY. -T.C.**

was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

Deacons

God set the minimum age of the Aaronic priesthood at twenty-five (Num. 8:23-25), and there were only priests and high priests. The Old Testament has no mention of deacons. The LDS Church ordains young men deacons, their first office in the Aaronic priesthood, at the age of twelve. The New Testament, however, states deacons are to be mature men and “the husbands of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:8-12).

Teachers

As part of the Aaronic Priesthood in the LDS Church a young man is ordained a Teacher at the age of fourteen. (This office is separate from the assignment of teaching a class such as Sunday School.) The New Testament passages about teachers do not make them part of a special priesthood. Teachers should be mature Christians “able to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2), not teenagers.

Priests

In the LDS Church a young man is ordained a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood at the age of sixteen and does not need to be a descendant of Aaron. This was never done in the Old Testament. There are Jewish priests mentioned in the New Testament, but an office of priest is never mentioned in the Christian church.

Melchizedek Priesthood

Melchizedek is mentioned in Genesis 14:17-20 as the King of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God who blessed Abraham. In Psalm 110:4, a promise was given that his priesthood would be forever. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ as indicated in chapters five through seven of Hebrews where Melchizedek is identified as a type of Christ. Christ is the only one “after the order of Melchisedec.” In the Book of Hebrews we read:

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec . . . Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. . . . But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. (Hebrews 5:9, 10; 7:16, 24)

The only Christian priesthood mentioned in the New Testament is the spiritual priesthood of every believer. Peter wrote:

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. . . . But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people. (1 Peter 2:5-9)

Notice that men are not singled out as the only ones holding this priesthood. It is for every Christian.

Elders and Bishops

In Mormonism, a man is ordained an elder upon entering the Melchizedek Priesthood. While the New Testament mentions elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-6; 1 Peter 5:1-3), they are never referred to as part of a priesthood system. In 1 Timothy 3:1 and Titus 1:7 the word **bishop** appears in the *King James Version* of the Bible. But in the *New International Version* it is translated **overseer**. A bishop is not a separate office in the church but a continuation of Paul’s instructions about elders.

When Paul gave instructions to Timothy about leadership he did not mention anything about ordaining men to either the Aaronic or Melchizedek priesthoods. Instead, the emphasis was on choosing mature Christians:

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Seventy

In the LDS Church a Seventy is a specific office in their Melchizedek Priesthood. He is a type of missionary and overseer of a given area of the church (*D&C* 107:25). Joseph Smith evidently read about Christ sending out seventy men in Luke 10:1 (KJV. The NIV Bible gives it as seventy two.) and turned this event into an ordination of men into a specific office of the priesthood. However, there is no mention in the New Testament of anyone ever being appointed to be a replacement of any of these men. Surely if such an office was to be part of the church it would have been mentioned in Acts or Paul’s letters.

High Priest

While there are thousands of High Priests in the LDS Church, there was only one Jewish High Priest at a time. The High Priest was part of the Aaronic Priesthood.

Hebrews 5:1 explains that the duties of the Jewish High Priest were to “offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Mormon High Priests do not offer any sacrifices so they are not following the Old Testament pattern. The Jewish High Priest served as an “example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5).

Christ fulfilled this “when he offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:22-27). He is the only High Priest in the Christian church. Because Christ lives forever his priesthood can never pass to another. There are no references in the New Testament to any Christian holding the office of High Priest.

Pastors

Mormons will often use Ephesians 4:11 when trying to prove their system of priesthood. This verse reads: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” The LDS Church, however, does not have any pastors. One of their apostles explained, “The term pastor does not refer to an order in the priesthood, like deacon, priest, elder . . . a bishop is a pastor; so is an elder who has charge of a branch . . .” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, by Joseph Fielding Smith, vol. 3, Bookcraft, 1956, pp. 108-109).

It is strange that the Mormons insist the words **apostles** and **teachers** are specific offices of the priesthood, but do not believe that **pastor** or **evangelist** are priesthood offices.

Evangelist or Patriarch?

Ephesians 4:11 mentions evangelists yet there is no such office in the Mormon Church. Instead, they claim that the original meaning has been lost and that an evangelist is supposed to be a patriarch. Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “An evangelist is a patriarch . . . The Patriarch to the Church holds the keys of blessing for the members of the Church” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 3, pp. 108, 170).

LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie claimed:

Having lost the true knowledge of the priesthood and its offices, . . . the false traditions of the sectarian world have applied the designation evangelist to traveling preachers, missionaries, and revivalists. (*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 242)

There is no evidence that the Greek word **evangelist** ever carried the meaning of **patriarch**. The Greek word translated **evangelist** carries the meaning of someone who proclaims the good news, not one who gives prayer blessings to church members.

In the LDS Church a patriarch gives a blessing to a member as a sort of spiritual blueprint for his/her life (*D&C* 107:39-56).

Apostles and Prophets

In Mormonism the president of the church is considered a prophet and apostle. LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie stated:

Apostles and prophets are the foundation upon which the organization of the true Church rests. (*Mormon Doctrine*, by Bruce R. McConkie, Bookcraft, 1966 edition, p. 606)

In trying to establish the need for apostles and prophets in the church Mormons appeal to 1 Corinthians 12:28:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

However, if one reads the entire section from verse 27 to verse 31 it is obvious that Paul is discussing various ministries or gifts in the early church, not listing specific offices of priesthood.

After Judas betrayed Christ there was one man chosen to replace him as part of the twelve apostles (Acts 1:21-23). To qualify for this position the person had to be an eyewitness to the full ministry of Jesus, including his resurrection. There is no evidence in the New Testament that anyone else was chosen to replace one of the twelve. Due to the requirements given in Acts apostles could not continue after the first generation of Christians.

Notice also that Paul lists apostles first and prophets second. In Mormonism the highest calling is the prophet of the church with the apostles serving under him. Also in Mormonism the office of teacher is bestowed on fourteen-year-old boys, not a man third in rank to the prophet and apostles.

Another problem for the LDS position is the concept of having three apostles in its First Presidency that oversees the Twelve Apostles. This adds up to fifteen apostles and is not the same as Jesus’ twelve apostles. If Mormonism is going to insist that the church today must be set up exactly as it was under Christ then they have too many apostles. The Mormons cannot have it both ways. Either they are a “restoration” that is exactly like the New Testament church or they are setting up something different from the early Christian church.

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Conclusion

Thus we see that beside the problems with the historical claims of LDS priesthood restoration, Mormon priesthood concepts are not in accord with the New Testament. If they want to truly follow the New Testament model they will need to renounce their claims to Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.

[Words in **Bold** in the quotes were done for emphasis and did not appear in the original.]

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Illinois Leaders Apologize to LDS

In an article in *The Salt Lake Tribune* on Thursday, April 8, 2004, we read:

Nearly 160 years after religious persecution in Illinois launched the Mormon exodus to the West, a delegation from the Land of Lincoln met Wednesday with LDS Church and state leaders to formally extend its regrets.

It was in 1844 that a mob murdered LDS Church founder Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in a jail in Carthage, Ill. Two years later, thousands of Smith's followers were expelled from Nauvoo and began the 1,200-mile trek to the shores of the Great Salt Lake.

For more background information on the reasons for the Mormon expulsion from Illinois, we recommend the following titles:

No Man Know My History, by Fawn Brodie
Cultures in Conflict: Mormon War in Illinois, by John Hallwas and Roger Launius
Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited, edited by Roger Launius and John Hallwas

Extracts from Letters and Emails

July 2003. Wow!!! You guys must really be making a killing bashing some religion. Can i write a book and get in on it.

July 2003. I have, on many occasions, witnessed to Mormons with some of the same critical, blaming, and at times, downright offensive results that you yourselves have received. They are desperate people, seeking what Christians possess. Keep up the good work regardless of the reaction. Jesus would have it no other way. Thank you for your ministry.

July 2003. I just wonder what it will be like for you on your judgement day with all that has been said on this site!

July 2003. . . . firstly, thank you so much for posting everything you do on line - I rely on the internet to answer most questions I have and my life would have been completely taken over by the LDS church had it not been for your material.

July 2003. Thank you so much for all the research that you and your husband have done. . . . my favorite is *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book Of Mormon* [Now incorporated in *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible*]. I wanted to thank you for writing it. After studying Mormonism and witnessing to Mormons for over 19 years, this book has really impressed me more than any other that the BOM was a fraud.

July 2003. I find it sad and depressing that you feel united not for something, but against something. . . . I KNOW that the Church of Jesus Christ is the ONLY true church, I KNOW Joseph Smith is the prophet of God, and I also KNOW that God would never leave us, that is why he sent us the latter day prophets. . . .

Aug. 2003. . . . I grew up Mormon here in Texas. I have been away from the Mormon church now for about 8 years. I just however, sent in a letter to the bishop to get off the church records. My parents were devastated. We're still talking though. . . . My husband and I are believing and praying for a absolute miracle from God to free my family for the deception of Mormonism. . . . Thank you for all your hard work and for doing it in a loving, Christlike way. . . .

Aug. 2003. If you have questions about my church why don't you ask instead of twisting the truth? . . . I know my church is true 150% it makes sense. I know I have Heavenly parents who love me and want the best for me. I KNOW THAT!!!

Aug. 2003. Beginning in 1978 the Lord led us to your publications. My wife and I had begun to study the Mormon church in depth, seeking answers to doctrinal questions originating in our examination of the Lectures on Faith, "The Changing World of Mormonism," and then "Mormonism: Shadow or Reality" soon became essentials in our search to know the truth of Mormonism, revealing raw and little known details about Mormonism drawn from Mormon sources that we would never otherwise have encountered, even after entire lifetimes as Mormons. . . . The Lord strengthened us to leave the Mormon church, together with our entire family, and we've thanked Him every day since for setting us free through believing faith in Him and His Way, His Truth, and His Life, as He is set forward Biblically.

Aug. 2003. You are some seriously disturbed individuals. I don't know what happened to you and after reading all the lies you have purpotrated on the Mormon faith, I really don't care. . . . Your site only serves to strengthen my belifs in my faith. I KNOW the gospil is true.

Sept. 2003. First, thank-you for the incredible focus and drive. . . . Twelve years after I discovered the truth about Mormonism, I am still floored that one, gifted orator and a few cohorts could spin a lie that has lived so long and grown so big.

Even more shocking is that most of the people I know and love are Mormon, and I can never seem to get over the depth of the indoctrination or the complete irrationality that arises if engaged in civil discourse regarding the history of the church.

Sept. 2003. . . . Just wanted to tell you that I appreciate your website, I have had a chance to read a great deal over the last week or so and I really value the research . . . I am currently leaving the Mormon church as I have finally quit blindly accepting everything and started researching the questions that I have had for years. Over the last couple of months I have found out that my suspicions were correct and that the church as we know it is, for lack of a better word, a Scam.

Sept. 2003. I just came across your website for the first time today. In the past years I have done my own research on the LDS faith, and nothing I found compares to the information you have on your website. I find it thoroughly researched and informative to read. Keep up the good work.

Sept. 2003. . . . I have read many of the letters to the editors and there seems to be a prevalent theme among them by members of the Church. That being "if I don't know about it, it must not be true". They expect to argue with you and yet have not taken the time to see the GLARING contradictions and changes that have taken place. It is easy to bare testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet and that he restored the true church of Christ when you have not read statements by his own pen contradicting what we have today, when you have not seen the changes made to the Doctrine and Covenants that can bring a person only to one conclusion.

That conclusion being that if you give anyone enough time, and enough chances to change their stories, eventually it will become a great story. . . . I have the Gospel Link program and have kept your site in check by checking references (where available) and have found your research to be impeccable.

Oct. 2003. Thanks for your ongoing work to expose the truth. It amazes me that so many people will turn a blind eye, after all the facts have been laid out before them. They continue to walk in darkness and curse the light. We all need to remember to never put our trust in man, but instead to place our trust in the Lord. . . . They continue to exchange the truth for a lie; choosing to believe a man made organization and a false prophet over God.

Oct. 2003. Dear Mr. & Mrs. Tanner,

. . . I would like to commend you on your dedication to shining the light in the dark places. . . . I want to thank you also for your dedication on a personal level since the materials you have produced over the years are directly responsible for my leaving Mormonism and educating as many people as I can about the "Church". Had your book *The Changing World of Mormonism* not fallen into my hands, I would probably still be trapped in the web spun by the Church. I am eternally grateful to you both and look forward to the day in Heaven when I can meet you in person . . . and thank you face-to-face.

Oct. 2003. I was active LDS for 30 years, including the mission thing and the other "must dos." Lots of serious research convinced me it just wasn't true. Just thought I'd share with you a comment my former LDS wife made during an attempted discussion about our belief differences and a last-ditch effort at reconciliation. She looked at me and said. "I don't WANT to know what you know. It might change who I am." So much for integrity...either intellectual or spiritual. Mormons are wonderful people, but they are not (as a group) noted for their craving of "truth at all costs."

Oct. 2003. I find it interesting that so many mormon defenders base part (if not all) of their testimony on the fact that there are millions of mormons. What!? On judgement day is God going to count the number of members in each religion, declare the one with the most members the truth and reject the others?

Oct. 2003. I just now finished perusing your website. . . . It is a well-organized, easy-to-navigate site. Sadly, it is full to the brim with false doctrine and slander. Although I did not feel it was an overly vindictive or malicious site, which seems to be the general M.O. of anti-Mormon organizations, it still preaches falsehoods. . . . Truly, your site has strengthened my testimony of Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (see JS-H 1:33).

Oct. 2003. . . . I just found the disturbing truth about the church aprox. a month ago. I want you to know you are in our prayers and we hope we can someday help you in your mission. We have made a personal decision to wage our own personal war against the lies. We will show the truth to whoever will listen (and even those who don't) regardless of how many friends we loose or what the church tries to do to us.

Nov. 2003. Shame on you! Why don't you spend your efforts promoting a religion of your choice instead of wasting time picking ours apart?

Nov. 2003. In 1998 I returned from my LDS mission . . . I had been skeptical of the veracity of church history and church doctrine from the age of 17, but accepted my "call to serve" anyway, hoping I'd "receive a testimony." Well, I never did, despite endless praying, fasting, and obeying.

Upon my return home, I began a very intense study of church history and doctrines, and with the help of several organizations, including Utah Lighthouse Ministry, have successfully liberated my mind from the clutches of a "church" that refuses to follow the principle of honesty in regards to its own controversial past. . . . I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your well-documented research. Such a wealth of information has been very instrumental in my transition to a life free of mind-control.

Dec. 2003. I came across your website quite by accident, my biggest concern is that you are persecuting mormons and its not fair, . . .

Jan. 2004. As a person who was raised in a Christian home, but later fell into the trap of Mormonism, I am very thankful for you and the true information that you provide for others. I do not wish to 'bash' the Mormons, in fact, I am very prayerful for them. My husband and I have just recently been born again, and for the first time in our lives, we are seeing the whole picture of how the Mormon people are blinded by the twisted, half and complete untruths that they are taught.

Jan. 2004. On Tuesday, January 20, 2004, it will be one year since my name was removed from the records of the LDS church. I thank God everyday that I was able to find the strength and courage to be a true Christian and to recognize that I am truly one of His children. Thank you so much for your amazing resources! You provided much of the information that allowed me to make my decision.

Jan. 2004. First, let me say how wonderful your ministry is! I have come a long way in my search for truth, since leaving the church. I grew up a Mormon, and when I finally left home, I began to research for myself all about the church. My mother gave me your book . . . Shadow or Reality . . . and I use it all the time. . . .

Feb. 2004. I do believe that you need to re-read the Book of Mormon for yourself and pray sincerely about its truthfulness. I am an LDS member and can testify to you that this church is the one and only true church on the earth today, with all of the correct and proper principals of God's church in ancient days. The structure of the church is even still the same as it was then, having a true prophet of the Lord lead us.

Feb. 2004. I was a mormon for 12 years. I converted when I was 18. I married a returned missionary in the temple . . . Seeds of doubt were planted in me shortly after joining the church but, it was 12 years later, at a woman's conference that I realized the mistake I had made. I cannot remember the exact point the speaker was trying to make, just the sick feeling I had when I knew what I had lost over the last 12 years . . . I am now enjoying a close, intimate, relationship with God.

Mar. 2004. Hello, I just wanted to contact you and thank you for the work you are doing. I am a new Christian having left the LDS faith last July. I am in the process of having my name removed from their records. My entire family has followed me (and in some cases lead me) to do this and we are much happier now.

Mar. 2004. i dont know what is wrong with you people, you spend all your time trying to find bad in everyone elses faith. joseph smith had many prophecy's about deceivers in the last days. he is a true prophet and one day you will awake and see. dont waste our time and yours.

Mar. 2004. I was a member of the LDS church for over 20 years, temple endowed, the works. To make a very long story short God revealed himself to me and I am now a born again Christian . . .

Mar. 2004. your quotes are intended to mislead those who you know don't take the time to look them up or who you know do not have access to LDS materials. your quotes are copy pasted and hacked from one page to another and you know they are. only you know why you do it. to make a living, but why else? truly, i pity your fate. you are true enemies to the kingdom of God and you know you are.

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