

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

a milestone

The latest priesthood revelation is not only a milestone in its own right, but demands serious consideration in relation to Church policies as a whole. Already, ex-Mormons and other critics have raised questions about the Church's right to change those principles handed down to it by an "unchanging" God, with the present issue equated in significance to the abandonment of the United Order and polygamy. In reality, the new change has little in common with its predecessors. The earlier ones amounted to (temporary) retreats necessitated by such practical exigencies as survival of Mormon society and the inability of pioneer Saints to realize the higher spiritual aims of communal economics and plural marriage. The present revelation, on the other hand, represents advancement toward, or restoration of, more or less universal priesthood authority. Such forward or backward steps in Church directives are not necessarily inconsistent with an "unchanging" Revelator, for the Lord's *eternal* goals are not affected in the least—only the progressive timetable required for mortals to reach them.

The connection between blacks' priesthood privileges and the Millennium should not be overlooked either: is not the lifting of Cain's curse yet another presage of the imminent end of the world—with obvious implications for all humankind?

In other words, one should not only stand in awe of divine revelations, but must also ponder them in the light of past and future history.

Michele Mackay
Provo, Utah

mixed blessing?

The announcement allowing all worthy brethren to receive the priesthood and enjoy the blessings of the temple has been lauded as a milestone in the modernization of Mormonism. Now we can use the temple in Brazil and not have to worry about it. Continuous revelation is a mixed blessing. It allows the Church to

reverse policies and practices, yet never be in error. Church denial of priesthood to blacks was official policy before the new revelation, and it was correct. The present policy is correct also, and there is no paradox.

Reversal of policy was just as easy at the time of the Manifesto. The Church never disavowed belief in plural marriage, but simply discontinued the practice. The concept of a new and everlasting covenant of marriage or celestial marriage quickly evolved from meaning plural marriage to monogamous temple marriage, permitting retention of D&C 132. However, John Taylor's alleged revelation of 1886 and the former interpretation of Section 132 were never adequately repudiated, so old beliefs remained. Failure to resolve the doctrinal problems associated with that policy reversal led to confusion, and the practice of polygamy was continued by fundamentalists who are causing embarrassment to the Church.

We are in danger of repeating the history of the Manifesto in the recent revelation on priesthood if we do not disavow our racially prejudiced doctrines but simply suspend their use. Since the wording of the new revelation has not been released, the problems cannot be fully discerned, but scriptures like Moses 7:22; Alma 3:6; I Nephi 12:23; II Nephi 5:21–25, 30:6; III Nephi 2:14–16; and Mormon 5:15 have all been used to connect skin color with a religious curse or segregation.

The "preexistence hypothesis" has long been used to justify the supposition that blacks are inferior. As Joseph Fielding Smith developed this concept he carefully skirted the pronouncements of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Joseph F. Smith that Negroes were not neutral in the preexistence, while initiating the idea that they were less valiant or less faithful. This concept became accepted doctrine through the 1949 statement of the First Presidency and has not been rescinded. Are we to continue believing that blacks were less valiant in the preexistence, and that skin color is God's

method of religious segregation? Failure to resolve these issues will result in continued belief in them and will rationalize persisting racial prejudice against blacks in the minds of many faithful Saints. However, they will be left with the uncomfortable paradox of spirits doctrinally less valiant now sharing blessings equally with the most choice spirits of a chosen generation.

The standard interpretation of Abraham 1:21–27, that the lineage of Ham through Pharoah was denied the priesthood because of race remains unaddressed. Perhaps now we can openly recognize that Facsimile No. 3 shows the Pharoah of Abraham's time was quite white compared to the black slave. Long ago I dutifully corrected this error by coloring Pharoah black in my scriptures; now I need some good black ink remover in order to keep my scripture marking up to date.

An insidious practice accompanying continuous revelation is the incessant effort to adjust history so that it agrees with present policy. While it is true that nearly all Church presidents have stated blacks would receive the priesthood, careful reading of the statements in context makes it abundantly clear that they meant only after all the sons of Adam had their chance, or until after the resurrection. Brigham Young was most emphatic in this regard, even stating that if the Church granted the priesthood to descendants of Cain during this life, God would surely remove the priesthood from the Church and replace it with the curse of Cain.

Now that blacks have participated in interracial temple marriages, we have another embarrassing statement of Brigham Young to consider; his infamous "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."

It will take a united effort to reinterpret such recent history where an apostle questioned the spirituality of concerns such as those the First Presidency say led to the new revelation.

Norman L. Eatough
San Luis Obispo, California

god moves in expedient ways

The racial policies of the Church and the semiofficial "personal opinions" of prominent Church leaders have caused me grief since I first encountered them.

President Kimball's revelation altered doctrine (giving blacks the priesthood) and undermined the two traditional explanations Church leaders have expounded for decades, that the Negro couldn't have the priesthood because of a) the curses of Cain and Ham and b) a supposed lack of valiance in the premortal life. There are many reasons why these two stock answers are not now, and never were, correct. If either were true, the doctrine would be unalterable. It was a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. Indeed, I often found the rationalizations more reprehensible than the actual "doctrine."

We now find ourselves in the position of not having any rational excuse for ever having had the "doctrine" in the first place. To remedy this intolerable predicament I propose the following as the new semiofficial position of the Church.

The reason God forbade the ordination of Negroes in Joseph Smith's day was twofold: a) to not put blacks in positions of leadership over whites and b) to facilitate LDS missionary activity among whites in southern states. There was no element of racism in this. God simply found that policy to be the most expedient. Expediency usually carries bad connotations, but it need not in this case. God merely commands his prophets to do what is best to build his kingdom. If polygamy is necessary, he commands it; when its continuance would destroy the Church he orders(ed) it abandoned. It was the same with the priesthood ban. It served its purpose, and when it became a stumbling block and retarded the growth of the Church he lifted the ban.

There was never anything "wrong" with black men, nor was the policy intended to harm anyone. It was necessary for a time, until most whites matured sufficiently to see that all men are brothers. At that time it (the ban) was discarded, having served its purpose.

From this we see God moves in ways most expedient to the building of his kingdom.

I readily concede this theory has some obvious drawbacks; however, it is a vast improvement over those "semiofficial" opinions that preceded it.

Daryl J. Turner
Santa Cruz, California

too little, too late

I am greatly pleased that the Church has, at long last, divested itself of an intolerable and unjustified practice which has inhibited full black participation in the Church for over 130 years. As a social scientist, I see such a move as indicative of a world which can no longer (if it ever could) afford barriers of any kind to intergroup understanding and communication. And yet, though my initial response to the news of the priesthood extension is positive, I am not yet satisfactorily able to determine what it means to me at this point in time. Nine years ago, when I was a newly returned missionary, it would have provided welcome relief from a "burden" that, as a Church member, I felt partially responsible for. Currently I welcome the extension more as a social phenomenon which bolsters my faith that ultimately "good" prevails. To a much greater extent than I would have nine years ago, I find myself weighing this most positive step against other areas of doubt initiated, at least in part, by the "Negro problem." Assumptions concerning the evolution of man, the literality of the Bible, antiintellectualism, Church ethnocentricity, patriarchal authoritarianism and militarism, not to mention renewed doubt about the origin of the content of the Pearl of Great Price and the Book of Mormon's relationship to known archaeology, present formidable obstacles to a whole-hearted return to consistent and faithful Church involvement.

I find, then, that the change in Church policy regarding blacks and the priesthood has generated a sense of nostalgia for me—a sense of wanting to return to the "fold" and yet a clear recognition of loss of innocence, loss of faith, if you will. One part of me would like to say, "Hey, I'm back," but another part of me hesitates with, "Well, how about. . . ?" Though I recognize a need (at least on my part) for some type of organizing principle in my life that inevit-

ably requires an element of faith, the chasm at this point is too great. In other words, I would suggest that, for me and others like me, the extension of the priesthood to black males is likely too little, too late.

Gary W. Lea
Denver, Colorado

scope and depth

I was happy to see the Summer 1979 issue of *Dialogue*. I continue to be happily surprised at the scope and depth of the material you make available.

It was a particular pleasure to see William Russell's article on the interaction between black Americans and the RLDS Church. As a former and intermittent resident of the Salt Lake Valley, I have had some personal experience with RLDS smugness over our "enlightened" recognition of black males as being worthy to function within the priesthood offices. Brother Russell's comments help show us what a shallow conception that has been on our part, especially when we have fallen into using it as a proof of RLDS validity over and against LDS validity. Perhaps that stance can now end, along with our equally misjudged thoughts that divine revelation is not present within our Utah-based sister church.

Another delight came in reading the reviews of the books by Laura B. Andrew and Marilyn Warenski. Our maturity in reaction to critical works generated outside of our ranks appears to be growing faster than my most optimistic expectations would have allowed as possible. After hearing Marilyn Warenski speak in Ogden, Utah earlier this year, I am convinced that the issues she has sought to deal with demand our attention. Perhaps we can well use such jabs in the side to awaken us both to the "plight" and the potential of our sisters in the community of the Saints.

Dale R. Broadhurst
Delaware, Ohio

atonement or vengeance?

Martin R. Gardner's recent article "Mormonism and Capital Punishment: A Doctrinal Perspective, Past and Present" (Vol. XII, No. 1) was a well done exercise in investigating a delicate area of doctrinal eradication. Mr. Gardner convinced

me that the so-called “blood atonement doctrine” was not ever officially adopted by the Church in our dispensation. However, Joseph Smith’s inspired declaration that truth is “knowledge” of things as they really *were* (D&C 93:24) would force us to admit that “blood atonement” and its more ugly brother “vengeance” were viable beliefs in the pioneer phase of Utah.

I personally would have preferred an inclusive discussion of, and interpretation of, the Howard Egan murder trial in 1851, wherein a member was acquitted of murdering the seducer of his wife on the grounds that (as Apostle George A. Smith, the defense lawyer argued) “The man who seduces his neighbor’s wife must die, and her nearest relative must kill him.” This was regarded as an established principle of justice “in these mountains.” (See *Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 135–36, notes; also entire record of Apostle Smith’s defense argument and Judge Snow’s jury instructions in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 95–103.)

How much of this “justice” of the mountains was *vengeance* and how much *atonement* is a good question. At any rate, doctrine or not, the member-jury regarded this murder as an “execution for the Lord.” Isn’t that the same view many Latter-day Saints have toward capital punishment?

Merle H. Graffam
Indio, California

sweet and sour

I liked Karen Rosenbaum’s “Hit the Frolicking, Rippling Brooks.” Her cheerfully irreverent style appeals to me. Peterson’s “Road to Damascus” struck me as being predictable and pretentious. Remarks about T. Edgar Lyon’s “Old Nauvoosers” speech brought back cherished memories of that memorable occasion. Dennis Lythgoe’s article on J. Bracken Lee intrigued me. I like material which treats the General Authorities as real people. Even today I regard them as remote and godlike beings—super-saintly saints. Living away from the Wasatch Front, I was never exposed to their human side, never saw their patina of perfection tarnished. This emotional response is so deeply imbedded that

even though my head knows they’re human, my soul doesn’t really believe it. I enjoy the lively quotes from still-living people. I thought he handled the controversial aspect of Church influence on politics very deftly.

Robin Hammond
Vallejo, California

old favorites

Dialogue has provided some of the more stimulating reading in my life the past few years, and I have enjoyed sharing many of the issues with professors and non-member and member friends.

“Belief Systems and Unhappiness” (Vol. XI, No. 3) and “The Tables Turned” (Vol. XI, No. 2) have been a couple of my favorites with female psychology and Women’s Studies students.

LaOren Manoghan
Tigard, Oregon

dialogue fix

I find so much to admire in the last two issues; the historical one from a distance because it deals with writers writing about great figures, but the literary issue is warm and alive with writers writing about writing and doing it well. I carry it around and get a fix whenever I have to wait for something—doctors, gas, Blazer scouts. If Wright spent so much time on self-criticism, it can’t be as bad for us as the behaviorists would have us believe. He pulled some fine work out of his torment.

Fran Anderson
Los Angeles, California

81% solution

Gad, I can’t even understand the monthly home teaching report of the elders quorum, which I compile, let alone the resurrected Joseph and the gasoline crisis. As a very special thing, a Christmas present to the Lord or some such reason, we were exhorted to go all out in the month of December and get 100% with home teaching visits. Well, we only got 90%, which is pretty damb [*sic*] good. But then the worm crawled out of the apple. Somehow, this means that we were “dedicated” to getting 90% *every* month. This boggled me, and to compound the confusion, we were advised that our bottom line for April was “inacceptable” to

the stake (81%). So I raised a hand to ask how, if the report was rejected, we were supposed to make it a matter of record—by rushing out in May to do it over again, or what? Of course I am sorely tempted to do it with my pencil, which I'm sure happened with a ward which reported to the *Church News* that it got 100% for a period of fifteen months. But this is like kicking your golf ball out of the rough or becoming a famous author through vanity publishing.

Samuel W. Taylor
Redwood City, California

a reference

Undoubtedly others have written you regarding the "[?]" after Murrell on p. 116 of the Winter 1978 issue.

The reference is surely to John Murrell, the notorious Mississippi River pirate. He was the subject of a book compiled by H. R. Howard and effusively entitled *The History of Virgil A. Stewart, and His Adventures in Capturing and Exposing the Great "Western Land Pirate" and His Gang in Connection with the Evidence: also the Trials, Confessions and Execution of a Number of Murrell's Associates in the State of Mississippi During the Summer of 1835, and the Execution of Five Professional Gamblers by the Citizens of Vicksburg, on the 6th July, 1835.* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836]

That Mormons would be compared to such a lawless gang suggests the strength of the feeling against them.

Larry McDonald
Yuma, Arizona

Note: *You're the first. Thanks.*

striking the balance

The letter from Neil B. Hall (Vol. XII, No. 2) has prompted this informal response.

Any publication is apt to seem condescending at some time to some of its readers. Personally I would have liked the footnotes to King's poetry to be omitted, and I would agree they indicate a low evaluation of the readership, but I suppose it is the poet's privilege to have the final word. I had hoped that Benjamin Urrutia's article on *Star Wars* was ironic, but I suspect it wasn't. There's some validity in Hall's remarks on both these points.

There is certainly more behind Hall's venom and vitriol than mere disenchantment with *Dialogue*. Clearly he has had personal experiences which lead him to think he has been treated unfairly by the Church; whatever the basic facts are, he has a strong emotional conviction that this is the case, and we have to take the letter as an attempt to articulate this feeling and not as a reasoned criticism of *Dialogue*.

On the other hand, in spite of the context of the letter, he does pose questions that deserve serious exploration.

I feel strongly *Dialogue* must keep trying to be on the cutting edge, whatever and wherever that is. No single editor or board of editors can consistently strike the right balance to please multiple constituencies, many of which are in conflict with each other, and the disagreements are often over form rather than substance, but we have to continue to try to strike that balance—and that means trying to satisfy both traditionalists and innovators at the same time.

Robert A. Rees
Los Angeles, California

a protest

I would like to protest your brief review (in Vol. XI, No. 2) of *Zion Town* by Phebe Thurber and Gay Taylor. The review mostly quoted only the negative parts of another review. In fact, this is a book well worth reading, vividly evoking the realities of polygamy and the United Order. I learned long ago to put less than half my trust in reviews. I think most readers would be fascinated by the book.

Vicki Freed Smith
Thousand Oaks, California

ironic avoidance

Stan Larson's essay, "Omissions in the King James New Testament," (Vol. XI, No. 3) left me with many unanswered questions. As a Latter-day Saint, I was rather surprised to find no references to Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible.

Without a doubt, the New Testament contains many passages which are interpolations of later editors, and many original passages have been deleted. Mr. Larson did an excellent job of establishing this point as fact.

However, what was ignored in the essay seems to me to be the critical issue: Do the earliest manuscripts, which Mr. Larson cites as reliable, corroborate with the Joseph Smith translation? Can Latter-day Saints establish, to any extent, the divine authenticity of the Inspired Version? Or, as with so many other areas of Mormon theology (i.e. archaeological harmony with the Book of Mormon), must we rely on faith (solely) and the seemingly reassuring statements of General Authorities.

A service was undoubtedly rendered by Mr. Larson when he documented the Prophet's statement that "ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors" in the Biblical text. Yet it was ironic for Larson to avoid any mention of the Inspired Version.

No missionary would document the great apostasy without going on to the restoration of the gospel. Such an action would, in essence, lay waste his effort. Just as the great apostasy finds its significance in pointing to the restoration, so discrepancies in the King James New Testament are truly significant only as they point to the need (and fulfillment of that need) of an inspired revision, such as rendered by Joseph Smith.

If only other scholars would follow Larson's example while going one step further: illuminating the treasures of the Joseph Smith translation as they affirm the divine calling of the Prophet. This is

the sort of scholarship which is urgently needed in Mormon circles today!

Davis A. Statler
Dun Loring, Virginia

disappointed in *dialogue*

Thus far I am disappointed in *Dialogue*. Controversy seems to be pushed way back in favor of "safer" topics. There is a great gap between the instructions put out by Salt Lake and the lackluster performance shown by timid LDS leaders in the field, and their equally timid wards and stakes.

I had hoped *Dialogue* might fill a little of this void. Poetry—phooey!

W. A. Bernheim
Oroville, California

delighted with *dialogue*

Your magazine has helped me to unite the good values I have received in church and from the scholarly, rather profane world that most of my non-LDS friends belong to. *Dialogue's* mere existence, as well as many of the articles in it, were a small but significant part of my decision to *not* try and renounce or "outgrow" the eternal values I've found in the Church which don't seem too prevalent outside the Church, at least not among organizations. That decision, made several years ago, has helped propel me to the temple, a mission, a faith that feels both mystical and yet very real, and many choice friendships.

Jeff Johnston
Provo, Utah

