

*Once we have dispensed with the “old explanation” for
the priesthood ban, what can we offer instead?*

DISPELLING THE CURSE OF CAIN

OR, HOW TO EXPLAIN THE OLD PRIESTHOOD BAN WITHOUT LOOKING RIDICULOUS

By Armand L. Mauss

Forget everything I have said, or what . . . Brigham Young . . . or whomsoever has said . . . that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.¹

THIS STATEMENT BY ELDER BRUCE R. MCCONKIE in August of 1978 is an apt characterization of the doctrine and apologetic commentary so pervasive in the Church prior to the revelation on the priesthood earlier that year: that is, it was based on limited understanding. Yet, it is not clear how wide an application Elder McConkie intended for his reference to “limited understanding,” for ironically, the doctrinal folklore that many of us thought had been discredited, or at least made moot, through the 1978 revelation, continued to appear in Elder McConkie’s own books written well after 1978, and continues to be taught by well-meaning teachers and leaders in the Church to this very day.² The tragic irony is that the dubious doctrines in question are no longer even relevant, since they were contrived to “explain” a church policy that was abandoned a quarter century ago.

Indeed, it was apparent to many of us even four decades ago that certain scriptural passages used to explain the denial of priesthood to black members could not legitimately be so interpreted without an *a priori* narrative.³ Such a narrative was



ARMAND L. MAUSS is professor emeritus of sociology, Washington State University and member of the Dialogue Foundation board of directors. He is the author of many articles and several books, including *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (University of Illinois Press, 2003).

gradually constructed by the searching and inventive minds of early LDS apologists. With allusions to the Books of Genesis, Moses, and Abraham, the scenario went something like this:

In the pre-existence, certain spirits were set aside, in God’s wisdom, to come to earth through a lineage that was cursed and marked, first by Cain’s fratricide and obeisance to Satan, and then again later by Ham’s *lèse majesté* against his father Noah. We aren’t exactly sure why this lineage was set apart in the pre-existence, but it was probably for reasons that do not reflect well on the premortal valiancy of the partakers of that lineage. Since the beginning, the holy priesthood has been withheld from all who have had any trace of that lineage, and so it shall be until all the rest of Adam’s descendants have received the priesthood, or, for all practical purposes, throughout the mortal existence of humankind.

Neat and coherent as that scenario might seem, the scriptures typically cited in its support cannot be so interpreted unless we start with the scenario itself and project it retrospectively upon the scriptural passages in proof-text fashion. For if we set aside the darkened glass of this contrived scenario, we see that the Book of Abraham says nothing about lineages set aside in the pre-existence, but only about distinguished individuals (Abraham 3:22–24).⁴ The Book of Abraham is the only place, furthermore, where any scriptures speak of the priesthood being withheld from any lineage; but even then it is only the specific lineage of the pharaohs of Egypt, and there is no explanation as to why that lineage could not have the priesthood, or whether the proscription was temporary or permanent, or which other lineages, if any, especially in the modern world, would be covered by that proscription (Abraham 1:25–27). At the same time, the passages in Genesis and Moses, for their part, do not refer to any priesthood proscrip-

tion, and no change of color occurs in either Cain or Ham—or even in Ham’s son Canaan, who, for some unexplained reason, was the one actually cursed! (See Genesis 9:18–25.) There is no description of the mark placed on Cain, except that the mark was supposed to protect him from vengeance. It’s true that in the seventh chapter of Moses we learn that descendants of Cain became black (Moses 7:22) but not until the time of Enoch, six generations after Cain—and even then only in a vision of Enoch about an unspecified future time (Moses 7:2–4). There is no explanation for this blackness; it is not even clear that we are to take this literally.

Much of the conventional “explanation” for the priesthood restriction was simply borrowed from the racist heritage of nineteenth-century Europe and America, especially from the justifications for slavery used in the ante-bellum South.⁵ Understandable—even forgivable—as such a resort might have been for our LDS ancestors, it is neither understandable nor forgivable in the twenty-first century. It is an unnecessary burden of misplaced apologetics that has been imposed by our history upon the universal and global aspirations of the Church. Until we dispense with this explanation once and for all, it will continue to encumber the efforts of today’s Church leaders and public affairs spokespersons to convince the world, and especially the black people of North America, that the Church is for *all* God’s children, “black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33).

Once we have dispensed with the old “explanation,” however, what can we offer instead? How can we explain the situation to those inside and outside the Church who ask us about the Church’s erstwhile doctrines and policies on racial matters? Let me answer that question by asking you to listen in on an imaginary conversation between me and one of my college students. (I have never had precisely this conversation, but it is a composite of many that I have had over the years with members, non-members, and LDS youth confronting this issue for the first time). In the dialogue that follows, “Q” will stand for Questioner and “A” will stand for me, Armand.

Q: I hear that the Mormon Church is racist, or at least that many Mormons are. Anything to that rumor?

A: I guess most white people in America have grown up with some racist beliefs, and Mormons have had their share. However, national polling data for more than a decade have revealed that Mormons are actually less likely than other Americans, on average, to support racist ideas and policies.⁶

Q: But aren’t black people unwelcome in the Mormon Church, or subjected to some kind of second-class status?

A: Not for the past twenty-five years. It is true that from the middle of the nineteenth century until 1978, the relatively few black people who joined the Church could not be given the priesthood or access to temple rites.

Q: Why was that?

A: The reasons are not entirely clear, but the policy seems to have begun officially in 1852 with an announcement by Brigham Young, who was Church president at that time. He made the announcement as part of deliberations by the Utah

territorial legislature over the legal status of both blacks and Indians, and in particular over whether slavery should be permitted in the territory.⁷

Q: So, was slavery permitted?

A: Yes, for about a decade.⁸

Q: That sounds pretty racist to me. How can you justify that?

A: I don’t try to justify it. Slavery in America was a racist institution. Brigham Young himself did not actually want slavery in Utah, but he did believe that black people were not the social or intellectual equals of white people, and that slavery should be tolerated for Mormon slaveholders moving to Utah as long as it was tolerated elsewhere in the United States.⁹

Q: Why would Brigham Young believe such things?

A: Because he was a nineteenth-century American and hardly any white people of that time, North or South, believed in equality for blacks. Slavery was still an unsettled issue throughout the nation, with some even in the South opposed to it and many even in the North willing to tolerate it. Brigham Young’s ideas were really right in the mainstream of American thinking at that time. They were very close to the ideas of other prominent Americans from Thomas Jefferson to Abraham Lincoln, who himself did not even free all slaves with his Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁰

Q: I thought most Americans of that time believed in God and in the Bible. Where was God in all this?

A: I doubt that God had anything to do with it. Many Americans of the time, including Brigham Young and most other Mormon leaders, believed that the scriptures justified the subordination of black people because they were descendants of Cain or of other Biblical figures who had sinned egregiously. Latter-day Saints do not believe that God takes responsibility for the evil in the world, nor that he condones the use of his name or of the scriptures to justify evil. Yet he has granted human beings their agency, either to operate a society according to his principles or to pay the consequences. The Civil War and continuing racial strife since then have been the consequences of slavery.

Q: But don’t Mormons believe that their Church is led by prophets of God? How could prophets have permitted racist ideas and practices to become part of their religion?

A: Prophets are not perfect and don’t claim to be; nor do they always act as prophets in what they say and do.¹¹ People in all ages, including those who become prophets, grow up without questioning much that is assumed by everyone else in their respective cultures, unless some experience motivates them to seek revelation on a given matter.

Q: Well, maybe so, but racism is such an obvious evil that I would think authentic prophets would have been more sensitive to it.

A: Why? It seems obvious to all of us now, but not to people who believed in Manifest Destiny, the White Man’s Burden, and “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” Even the original apostles of Jesus assumed that non-Jews could not become Christians unless they first accepted Judaism and circumcision. The apostle Paul disputed that, but the idea persisted.¹²

Q: Did all the early Mormon leaders hold racist ideas?

**Not many
institutions
in American
society,
including
religious
institutions,
can be very
proud of
their historic
treatment of
black people.**

A : Pretty much—like all other Americans. But there was a range of opinion. Not all of them embraced all of the racist ideas in the culture. For example, Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of the LDS Church, saw no reason to keep black people from holding the priesthood, even though he shared the conventional idea that they were descendants of Cain and Ham. We have no record that he ever sought a special revelation on the question; he just accepted blacks into the priesthood.¹³ He also believed that the innate inferiority of blacks, so widely assumed at that time, was as much a result of inferior environment and opportunity as of lineage.¹⁴

Q: *So why didn't Joseph Smith's views on such matters prevail in the Mormon Church?*

A : Joseph Smith was assassinated while still a young man, and well before the race question led to the Civil War. We can't be sure whether or how his ideas would have changed later. We do know that his successor, Brigham Young, had somewhat different ideas, though not necessarily based on revelation, and he headed the Church for

more than thirty years.

Q: *Didn't anyone question Young's views during all that time or later?*

A: All of Brigham Young's successors tended to assume that he had had a good reason for withholding the priesthood from black members and had probably gotten the policy from Joseph Smith. A few black members questioned the policy a time or two, but when they did so, Church leaders reconsidered and simply reiterated it. By the time the twentieth century arrived, no church leaders were living who could remember when the policy had been otherwise.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the nation as a whole had become permeated with so-called Jim Crow laws restricting all kinds of privileges for blacks. In that environment, the Mormon restriction on priesthood seemed entirely natural.

Q: *But other religious denominations were critical of such racial restrictions, weren't they?*

A: Eventually they were, but not until the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Prior to that time, only a minuscule number of blacks were ordained in any denomination—except, of course, in the so-called black denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) tradition and the predominantly black Baptist groups.

Q: *But wasn't the Mormon racial policy more pervasive and severe than in other religions?*

A: Not really. In the Mormon case, the policy was simply more conspicuous because of the universal lay priesthood that Mormons extended to all males except blacks. In other churches, the racial restrictions were more subtle. Ordination to the ministry in all major denominations required access to the professional seminaries. Before the civil rights movement, the seminaries, like the schools of law and medicine, were the gatekeepers to these careers, and blacks were rarely admitted to any of the professional schools, including seminaries (except, again, in the black denominations). Most of today's religious critics of the erstwhile Mormon racial restriction belong to denominations in which there were scarcely any more black ministers or priests than in the Mormon Church.¹⁶ Not many institutions in American society, including religious institutions, can be very proud of their historic treatment of black people.

Q: *So you are saying that the Mormons were really no worse than others in their teachings and policies about black people?*

A: That's about right, small comfort though that might be in retrospect. National surveys comparing Mormons with others in racial attitudes indicate that Mormons in the west, at least, were close to the national averages in all such measures during the 1960s and 1970s—more conservative than some denominations but more liberal than others.¹⁷

Q: *When did the Mormon Church finally change its policies about blacks?*

A: 1978.

Q: *That seems a little late. Didn't most churches and other institutions drop all their racial restrictions a lot earlier than that?*

A: Yes, generally a little earlier. But even LDS leaders had the matter under consideration for at least twenty years before 1978.¹⁸

Q: *What took so long? Why couldn't the prophet just change the policy?*

A: Especially in such important matters as this one, a prophet or president in the Church is not inclined to act alone. The president, his two counselors, and the twelve apostles are all considered “prophets, seers, and revelators,” and they usually act as a body when deciding on fundamental doctrines and policies. This process is by definition a conservative one, since it requires a relatively long period of discussion, deliberation, and prayer in order to reach a consensus—in order to feel that they have all been moved by the Holy Spirit toward the same decision. The prophets came close to consensus more than once across the years before they finally achieved it in 1978.¹⁹

Q: *That seems like a very cumbersome process, which might actually constrain God in getting through to the prophet with a revela-*

tion. Why couldn't God just speak to the president or prophet and tell him what to do?

A: Well, of course, God *could* do anything he wanted to do. In the Mormon tradition, however, the revelatory process normally (not necessarily always, but normally) begins with human initiative, whether that of a prophet or of any other individual seeking divine guidance. The individual formulates a question or proposal and takes that to God in prayer for divine confirmation. This was the pattern followed by Joseph Smith himself in what Mormons call "the Sacred Grove." It is the pattern also in Mormon scriptures such as Doctrine and Covenants section 9 and Moroni 10:4-5. Mormon prophets do not sit around waiting for revelations. They typically take propositions to the Lord for confirmation, and these propositions are the products of a great deal of prayerful deliberation, both individually and collectively.

Q: *So this is what finally happened in 1978?*

A: Yes. President Spencer W. Kimball had anguished for some time over the restrictions on black people, and he took a great deal of initiative in persuading his colleagues to make it a matter of the most earnest prayer and deliberation.²⁰ In response to their collective efforts, he reported on 8 June that "the Lord [had] *confirmed*" (my italics) that the priesthood should be extended to all worthy male members (Official Declaration —2).

Q: *Was President Kimball the first prophet to focus so intensely on the issue?*

A: Not necessarily. Most of his predecessors said little or nothing about the matter, except for President David O. McKay (president from 1951–70). He was clearly concerned about it even in the 1950s when he visited several parts of the world that had black populations and even black Church members. One of his counselors, Hugh B. Brown, was also publicly anxious to see a change in Church policy. However, they were apparently never able to galvanize the consensus among the other apostles that might have changed the policy ten or fifteen years earlier.²¹

Q: *Too bad. It would have looked a lot better for the Church if the change had come sooner.*

A: Maybe, but not necessarily. During the 1960s, the Church was under a great deal of pressure from various national organizations and leaders over its racial restrictions. Indeed, I recall that period as a public relations nightmare for the Church. Yet if the Church had made the policy change then, the public relations outcome might have been anticlimactic, since the Church would have appeared to be caving in to political expediency, instead of maintaining its own prophetic and procedural integrity, even in the face of public criticism.²²

Q: *Well, anyway, now that the Church has dropped its earlier racist ideas and policies, is it attracting many black members?*

A: Conversion numbers in Africa are quite startling, but of course racial conflict in the U.S. has never been especially salient to Africans. The growth of the Church among African Americans, however, has been much slower, largely because of the lingering racist heritage of the past and the reluctance of

the Church to deal with this heritage candidly.²³ Those black members and investigators who find it hard to look past all that have also found it hard to remain active in the Church. We have a lot yet to do.

THAT'S THE END of my hypothetical apologia. I recommend something like this approach in our future efforts to confront our racist past and to place that past in an understandable historical context. It unshackles us from the accumulated racist folklore of the nineteenth century, on which we have so far depended to "explain" the traditional discriminatory policies in the Church. It is candid and faithful to the historical record as we have it so far. It acknowledges the human element in Church leadership, but it ultimately vindicates the process of divine revelation. It is an explanation likely to be understood by many black Americans of good will, who have been put off by so much that they have heard before from and about Mormons. Whatever we do, though, we must abandon the old explanations based on nineteenth-century interpretations of scripture; these only make it harder for us to reach black Americans.

I am aware that the official "explanation" offered these days for denying the priesthood to blacks is that "we don't know." That response to questions about the past is perhaps technically accurate, since very few members or even leaders know much about the history of our black members or of their part in our larger history. It is true also that we can't be sure of all that lay behind Brigham Young's 1852 declaration that "descendants of Cain" could not have the priesthood. In the absence of all such knowledge, certainly the safest thing for a Church member or leader to say today is that "we don't know." It is also a good public relations tactic, since it has the effect of changing the subject before it gets complicated! Yet it is also somewhat disingenuous to say that we don't know, and it is certainly an unsatisfactory response to any of our converts, investigators, or youth who are conscientiously troubled by this chapter in our history, especially if they

**The fact
is that we
do have
a lot more
relevant
historical
knowledge
than the
we-don't-
know
response
would
indicate.**

are black. The fact is that we do have a lot more relevant historical knowledge than the we-don't-know response would indicate. This knowledge, furthermore, is based on authoritative historical research by responsible scholars, to which I have alluded in the hypothetical conversation just summarized.

Although this historical literature cannot tell us anything about the mind of God, or about revelatory encounters of our leaders with Deity, it can tell us a great deal about the evolving historical contexts within which racial conceptions developed across time, both in the nation and in the Church. Understanding these contexts, in turn, will help us to understand the ideas and policies of Church leaders, especially where influences upon them from those contexts can be demonstrated or at least reasonably inferred. Obviously divine guidance does not depend upon historical context, but it seems clear from history that some revelations have been received by prophets in response to inquiries motivated by the surrounding social and political environment.

What I have presented here draws upon historical context, but for obvious reasons I have not broadened that context beyond what seemed necessary for a discussion of the ideas and policies of the Latter-day Saints regarding black people. There is, however, a still larger context, and that is the origin and development of LDS conceptions about race and lineage more generally. My recent book, *All Abraham's Children*, undertakes to explain our changing views about blacks within the still larger context of changing views about Jews, about Lamanites, and indeed about American Mormons as Anglo-Ephraimites. Our understandings about all such lineages, and others, too, have evolved in response to our experiences with the world's peoples encountered in our global missionary enterprise. Through that process, we have come to understand the ultimate irrelevance of all mortal lineages, whether African or Israelite, in the divine plan of salvation. As Paul taught the Galatians, all who accept the gospel of Christ become the children of Abraham.²⁴

NOTES

This essay was published originally under the title, "The LDS Church and the Race Issue: A Study in Misplaced Apologetics," in the FAIR Journal, September 2003, Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, www.fairlds.org.

1. Bruce R. McConkie, "New Revelation on Priesthood," in *Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 126–37, esp. 126–27.

2. See *ibid.* 128, where McConkie reaffirms the notion that blacks descended from Cain and Ham. Even recent editions of his 1966 *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft) retain racist ideas under headings such as "Caste System" and "Pre-existence." See also his *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81, 4 vols.), 1:23; *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 182–83 (plus all of chapter 16); and *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 510–12 (plus chapter 4), in all of which he ties the unequal conditions of various mortal lineages to decisions made in the pre-existence. For the continuing influence of such writings on grassroots Mormon thinking, see my *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 261–64; also Darron Smith, "The Persistence of Racialized Discourse in Mormonism," *SUNSTONE*, March 2003, 31–33; and "Speak the Truth and Shame the Devil: A Roundtable Discussion on Race, Experience, and Testimony," *SUNSTONE*, May 2003, 28–39. A selected list of in-print books by LDS publishers that contain these ideas can be found in *SUNSTONE*, March 2003, 34–35.

3. See, for example, my "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1967): 19–39.

4. Hugh Nibley, in his *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), eventually offered the explanation that the denial of the priesthood to the pharaonic line had nothing to do with racial lineage but with the claim of the priesthood through the matriarchal rather than the patriarchal line (see esp. page 134). This explanation might have been more helpful if offered a decade earlier, before the lineage issue became moot.

5. See, for example, H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), especially 129–36; and Forrest G. Wood, *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in American from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), 84–111. The survival of such racist biblical folklore even in modern Protestant churches is demonstrated in the brief study by Cain Hope Felder, *Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

6. See Mauss, *All Abraham's Children*, 252–55, and Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), chapter 6, esp. 195–200.

7. The 1852 declaration was recorded in Wilford Woodruff's journal for January 16, 1852: ". . . any man having one drop of the seed [of Cain] . . . in him cannot hold the priesthood, and if no other Prophet ever spake it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ. . ." (Matthias Cowley, *Wilford Woodruff*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909, 351). Questions had arisen about the ordination of black members in some of the eastern branches of the Church in the late 1840s, so it is possible that a *de facto* restriction on the priesthood had already begun unofficially before 1852. See Newell G. Bringham, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 84–108.

8. Slavery in early Utah never involved as many as even a hundred blacks, and it was never an important economic institution there. The process by which the permissive "Act in Relation to Servitude" was adopted by the Utah Territorial government is a complicated story, which is summarized very nicely by Newell G. Bringham in his *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, chapter 4, especially 61–73. As I read Bringham, the reluctant acceptance of slavery in the Utah Territory was the product of (1) a series of national political compromises expressed in the Compromise of 1850, which attempted to limit the spread of slavery while still allowing room for "popular sovereignty" (local option) in the western territories, and (2) a concession to the few Southern Mormon slaveholders who had immigrated to Utah. As Bringham also points out, however, the legal restrictions placed by the territorial legislature upon the practice of slavery, and upon the treatment of slaves, made the institution more like the indentured servitude that had occurred at other times and places in American history than like Southern slavery *per se*. In the intensifying sectional strife of the 1850s, Brigham Young was trying to avoid ruling slavery either in or out, in principle, hoping to keep the Territory separate from this political strife. In all discussions of potential statehood during this period, however, neither Young nor other LDS leaders contemplated admission of Utah to the Union as a slave state. See also the extended discussion of the slavery issue in Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11–68, especially 22–31.

9. Brigham Young's personal distaste for slavery is apparent from several of his comments quoted by Bringham in *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 69, 110–11, among others.

10. Lincoln partisans among contemporary historians have tended to gloss over his views on the race issue before and during the Civil War. From his debates with Stephen A. Douglas all the way through to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862–63, Lincoln's public statements do not reflect the principled opposition to slavery that appears in his Gettysburg Address and afterward. Near the beginning of the Civil War, when journalist Horace Greeley asked Lincoln if his main objective in the war was freeing the slaves, Lincoln famously responded that his main objective was saving the Union, and that if he could achieve that goal without freeing any slaves, he would do so. Even the Emancipation Proclamation freed only those slaves living in the states still in rebellion at that time. See the somewhat jaded treatment of Lincoln by Lerone Bennett, Jr. (editor of *Ebony* magazine) in his *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 2000), which has the opposite of the conventional bias but is nevertheless a useful corrective to the naive popular assumption of today that white racism was mainly a feature of the South (or of Utah!) from the 1860s to the 1960s.

11. The Prophet Joseph Smith himself is quoted in the so-called

"Documentary History of the Church" as admonishing us that prophets are mortal men with mortal frailties, so that "a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such" (B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Period I*, 6 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1902–12], 5:26). The complications in identifying which directives from Church leaders are to be understood as binding on the Saints are extensively addressed by President J. Reuben Clark in a lengthy *Church News* article of 31 July 1954. See the reprint of that article, "When are the Writings or Sermons of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?" in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 68–81. Applying all of this to Brigham Young's 1852 declaration in a political forum (the Utah Legislature), despite his citing of prophetic authority, leaves us with an interesting quandary, considering that today's Church leaders (at least since 1969) have clearly retreated from Young's ideas on race, priesthood, and many other things.

12. See, for example, Acts 15; Galatians 2; and 2 Peter 3.

13. See the well-documented account of Elijah Abel's 1836 ordinations to the offices of elder and seventy, and his full fellowship in the Kirtland days of the Church generally, in Newell G. Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Place of Blacks within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 2 (Summer 1979): 26–36.

14. A sampling of Joseph Smith's views on blacks during the 1840s can be found, among other places, in the above-mentioned "Documentary History" (B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church*, 2nd edition), 4:445–46, 501; 5:217–18. In his 1844 presidential platform, Smith favored a program of "recolonization" of blacks to Africa, as Lincoln also did.

15. The crystallization of the Church's race policy after Brigham Young, through inertia and the loss of institutional memory, is recounted by Lester Bush in his "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine," 331–39.

16. The final three chapters of Wood's *Arrogance of Faith* are devoted to the historical impact of slavery and racism on the various religious denominations of America. It is clear from this account that even after the denominational schisms around the period of the Civil War, and all the way down to the present, all the major denominations, North and South, have continued with racial segregation and other forms of discrimination. Even as late as 1985, black bishops in the Roman Catholic Church, constituting only 3 percent of the total American bishops, complained about racial bias in the church, according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, 14 November 1985, I-5.

17. For evidence on national and Mormon attitudes toward blacks and civil rights, see, for example, Angus Campbell, *White Attitudes toward Black People* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1971), especially chapter 7. For a comparison of the attitudes of Mormons with those of other religious denominations during the 1960s, see my "Mormonism and Secular Attitudes toward Negroes," *Pacific Sociological Review* 9 no. 2 (Fall 1966): 91–99; also my *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), chapter 4, especially 52–54; and my *All Abraham's Children*, 219–26.

18. See my account of the long and anguished history leading up to the policy change on priesthood in the LDS Church: "The Fading of the Pharaoh's Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 10–45, summarized in *All Abraham's Children*, 231–41. See also Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 229–71; and Gregory A. Prince, "David O. McKay and Blacks: Building a Foundation for the 1978 Revelation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 145–53.

19. Mauss, "Fading of the Pharaoh's Curse," 11–17; Prince, "David O. McKay and Blacks," and D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 13–17.

20. See the account by Elder Bruce R. McConkie in his "The New Revelation on Priesthood," esp. 128; also various other accounts cited by Quinn in *Mormon Hierarchy*, 16–17.

21. Prince, "David O. McKay and Blacks," and Mauss, "Fading of the Pharaoh's Curse," 11–17.

22. Mauss, "Fading," 26–31, 43, and notes 111–12.

23. See the extended discussion of this point in my *All Abraham's Children*, 241–64. See also Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (eds.), *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), a mixture of analytical and anecdotal essays that offer the reader plenty of candor.

24. In this same connection, see also my earlier essay, "In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 131–73.



HOUSE AND BARN

Remember how the house stood firm
but the barn swayed slowly
at the slightest hint of a nor'easter.

So strong the foundations,
the rooms around us
seemed to grow like my bones,
put on flesh,
while the rotting rust-red shadow
of this bed-rock structure
shed shingles like skin,
creaked in every rotting rafter,
burst its nails with each new stress.

Remember how the family split,
the house was sold,
proceeds divided up,
the wretched barn
an unwilling partner to the deal,
cash taken off the top
for razing and replacing.

Know how, in my heart,
the house caught fire,
the next family or the one after that
too careless with the boiler,
too rough and ready with
the kindling of our history,
and insurance money paid for some new place
none of us have ever lived in.

But the barn stood, if not firm,
steady in its weakness,
always in the state of one good breeze
cheating the wrecking ball.
But there never is
that one good breeze,
not now, in this silent room,
where I sketch at faces
but nothing comes,
where the sigh for outlived years
mimics the endless heave of wood.

—JOHN GREY