

select the copy, and it will then be yours.' Removing one finished copy of the book, he clutched it to his breast and said with sincerity, 'I love the Book of Mormon. This is *my* book.'²⁶ The casual acceptance and use of the scriptures once plaguing the Church had been changed.

At a reunion twenty-five years later of those who worked on the "prodigious" project, President Monson said, "You have affected the world; you have affected the youth; every missionary who has gone out is [better prepared] because of the work you did."²⁷

Translation of the scriptures into other languages would stretch out for decades. Not until 2009, more than a year into President Monson's tenure as President of the Church, did the Church produce the Latter-day Saint edition of the Holy Bible in Spanish. There were 800,000 copies in the first print run.

The publication of the new editions of the scriptures came just after President Kimball received the revelation on the priesthood. In 1978, at the October general conference, President N. Eldon Tanner read to the gathering of the Saints around the world that revelation. Cited as Official Declaration—2 in the Doctrine and Covenants, it stated "that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple."²⁸ President Tanner called for a sustaining vote to include the revelation in the scriptures; it was unanimously approved.

Elder Monson considers the June 1978 revelation that provided the priesthood to all worthy males, regardless of race, a hallmark of President Kimball's presidency. Prior to that time, neither men nor women of African descent could participate in making temple covenants, though in the early days of the Church a few black men had been ordained to the priesthood. For years the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve had wrestled with the issue. It came with a history of discussions at every level in the Church and constant importuning of the Lord. President Kimball had always taken the position regarding the issue: "We shall stand

and defend as did Peter, 'though the whole world be against us.' . . . When the Lord is ready to relax the restriction it will come whether there is pressure or not."²⁹ In 1974, amidst great controversy, the First Presidency reiterated that male black members could attend elders quorum meetings the same as other prospective elders. But the time had not yet come for change.

President Kimball's announcement in 1975 of a temple in São Paulo, Brazil, and its subsequent construction brought a new pressure. Brazil was such a racially mixed country—who would be eligible to enter the Lord's house?

What followed was the model scriptural pattern for revelation—study, ask, pray, and "you shall feel that it is right."³⁰ President Kimball beseeched the Lord repeatedly in solitary visits to the temple, and he invited each member of the Quorum of the Twelve to express his personal opinion concerning the subject. Elder Monson was one of the few who submitted his feelings in writing, as he has long advocated "that one, when asked, should express his honest opinion, regardless of whether the viewpoint is that which the presiding officers seek or with which they would agree."³¹ He favored petitioning the Lord again with the plea to extend the priesthood to all men counted worthy.

On Thursday, June 1, 1978, President Kimball asked the Apostles to stay in the room in the Salt Lake Temple at the completion of the day's business with all the General Authorities. All had come to the meeting fasting, and he asked that they extend their fast and give prayerful consideration to conferring the priesthood upon the blacks.

Elder Monson recorded: "President Kimball asked each member of the Twelve to make a specific comment on this subject. At the conclusion of the meeting with the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, we had a special prayer at the altar where President Kimball was voice. He implored the Lord for light and knowledge on this issue which has such far-reaching consequences. It was a source of great comfort to the Brethren to hear his humble pleadings as he sought guidance in his lofty calling."³² At the conclusion of the prayer, a great outpouring of the Spirit came over them. The revelation was clear. The prophet of God

had received the Lord's answer, and it was confirmed by those members of the Twelve who, with him, received the same revelation at the same time.

The First Presidency later expressed gratitude that "the spirit of peace and unity which prevailed in the meeting . . . was the finest it had ever been and that it [was] evidence that the Lord was pleased with our discussion."³³ Two of the Apostles were missing from the meeting: Elder Delbert L. Stapley was in the hospital, and Elder Mark E. Petersen was on assignment in South America. Both were consulted and added their wholehearted support to the received revelation.

The temple meeting on the next Thursday, June 8, 1978, was historic. President Kimball announced to the Quorum of the Twelve that the Lord had revealed to him that they should move forward quickly in granting the priesthood blessings to all worthy male members of the Church, regardless of race or color. For Elder Monson and all those in the room, "It was a moment of exultation, for we had heard the Lord's prophet declare the Lord's revelation for this time."³⁴ Again, each of the Apostles present was asked to respond and express an opinion.

President Kimball led the group in prayer to receive the Lord's confirmation. They surrounded the altar in prayer and President Kimball "told the Lord at length that if extending the priesthood was not right, if the Lord did not want this change to come in the Church, he would fight the world's opposition."³⁵ Elder Monson would later note that had the revelation not come, President Kimball "would have defended the previous policy to his dying breath."³⁶

Later that day, Elder Monson met with Bill Smart, editor of the *Deseret News*, and quietly told him, "Reserve space for an important announcement tomorrow."

Smart inquired what was coming.

"I can't say anything now; it is confidential."

"Can you tell me whether to put it on the front page or on B-1 [the front page of the local news section]?"

Elder Monson replied, "You will know when you see it."³⁷

The next morning, June 9, the First Presidency, the Quorum of

the Twelve, and all other General Authorities met again in a special session at 7:00 A.M. "During the meeting, President Kimball reviewed with the Brethren the decision concerning the revelation that all worthy male members might receive the priesthood. Every person in the room expressed himself individually and voluntarily as being in favor and sustaining the presentation by President Kimball as a revelation from the Lord."³⁸

The announcement ran not only on the front page of the *Deseret News* but on the front pages of major newspapers across the country, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines stopped their press runs to insert the story in their upcoming weeklies. Most commentary spoke favorably of what some called "a sudden move" by the LDS Church.

Elder Monson telephoned two of his friends in the Genesis Group, Ruffin Bridgeforth and Monroe Fleming, to congratulate them on the opportunity that was now theirs to receive the priesthood. "Both were elated," he reported.³⁹

On June 21, Elder Monson, as chairman of the Missionary Executive Committee, assigned the first black missionary, Montreal member Jacques Jonassaint, to the Florida Fort Lauderdale Mission, which included Puerto Rico and Haiti, "where he would have the opportunity to preach the gospel to many of his own race."⁴⁰ Two days later, he performed the first sealing for a black family in the temple. In the Salt Lake Temple, Brother Joseph Freeman, Jr., his wife, Toe Isapela Leituala Freeman, and their two children, Zachariah and Alexander, received the ordinance sealing them together for all eternity.

The evening of June 25, Elder and Sister Monson attended the Genesis Group, "where the sacrament was served for the first time at such a gathering, being administered to and passed by black members who now held the priesthood."⁴¹ Five men bore inspiring testimonies of the great blessing given them by God. One young man explained, "When I heard the news, I was on a cloud, but I soon came off my cloud when I realized that now that I would hold the priesthood, I would have the responsibility to do

TO THE RESCUE

The Biography of
THOMAS S.
MONSON

Thomas S. Monson

BY HEIDI S. SWINTON

Heidi S. Swinton



DESERET
BOOK

To Jeffrey

And to our sons: Christian, Cameron,
Daniel, Jonathan, and Ian

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs appear courtesy of the Thomas S. Monson Collection.

© 2010 Heidi S. Swinton

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher, Deseret Book Company, P. O. Box 30178, Salt Lake City, Utah 84130. This work is not an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The views expressed herein are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the Church or of Deseret Book Company.

DESERET BOOK is a registered trademark of Deseret Book Company.

Visit us at DeseretBook.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Swinton, Heidi S.

To the rescue : the biography of Thomas S. Monson / Heidi Swinton.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60641-898-7 (hardbound : alk. paper)

1. Monson, Thomas S., 1927- 2. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Presidents—Biography. 3. Mormons—United States—Biography. I. Title.

BX8695.M56S95 2010

289.3'32092—dc22

[B]

2010027460

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Introduction: To the Rescue	1
1 A Heritage of Faithful Souls	13
2 Between the Railroad Tracks	22
3 "I Want To Be a Cowboy!"	34
4 Like Huck Finn on the River	52
5 Becoming a Gentleman	63
6 School Days	76
7 The Greatest Lessons	86
8 Starting a Family	105
9 "Decisions Determine Destiny"	114
10 Always a Bishop	130
11 "He Went About Doing Good"	149
12 "Have Courage, My Boy"	162
13 "O Canada"	171
14 Called to General Church Committees	195
15 A Special Witness	215
16 Serving in the Twelve	233
17 "He Was Everywhere"	249