

How I heard the news of the new revelation that opened the priesthood to all races, and some reactions to it. (99)

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I heard the news of the new revelation on Friday, June 9, while I was vacationing with my family in southern California. In the early afternoon, after spending the morning in Tijuana, Mexico, we were driving northward toward Nevada. The announcement came over a local radio station. To say the least, I was thrilled. This was something I had been hoping for for a long time, and it made me feel warm and comforted all over. One reason that it was especially gratifying to me was that I have been studying and thinking so much lately about the process of change in the Church. I have even written an article on it that may or may not be published in the Ensign, and I find that some people are strangely reluctant to discuss the reality of dramatic changes. But this is one of the most important changes ever to come in Church policy, and it was therefore especially meaningful to me. One of my first thoughts was that I had just finished participating in some Education Week programs in South Carolina and in the Washington, D.C. area, and one of my main talks was on the process of change in the Church. I called it "Constancy Amid Change," and emphasized the concept of continuing revelation as the key to change. I got the feeling that, perhaps, some of the things I had said may have helped someone accept this change when it came. At any rate, here is a beautiful example of the dynamics of change in the Church--many contemporary situations that cause the issue to arise more and more frequently, long and earnest prayer by the prophet, and then a revelation in which the prophet said that it had been "confirmed" to him that it was the time for all races to have the priesthood. I suppose I was almost as pleased with the evidence of continuing revelation that could bring about such a change as I was with the change itself. But whatever the case, I was warmed and thrilled--and felt great joy for

the blacks in the Church who had been waiting for so long.

I thought of a number of blacks--but in particular I thought of Abner Howell, who is now dead. I had the pleasure of participating in an interview with him in California many years ago, and he said some things about the history of the blacks in the Church that were very interesting. But mainly I was impressed with his devotion to the Church--I hope his temple work is done soon. And I am sure my thoughts are much like the thoughts of most people in the Church who have known some faithful negros.

My family ~~reacted~~ reacted very positively. We talked about it for a while--everyone commented on how good it was--and we wondered what was going on back home. I was disappointed that of all days to be away from the office in Salt Lake, this should be the day. (But I found out later that many of the staff were away from the office that day--so I was not so different.)

My daughter and son-in-law (Kristine and Scott Card) were so excited that they tried to reach us by phone to tell us the news. They left word twice at the motel we expected to stay at in Las Vegas that night, but when we checked in the motel did not give us a message.

We got home Saturday night, and everyone was, of course, talking about it. The reactions of various people were interesting to me.

I went to BYU 6th Stake High Council meeting at 7 a.m. on Sunday morning, and President Gill read us the letter. Everyone talked about it in warm, glowing terms, and I was especially interested in the comments of Arthur Henry King. When someone brought up the doctrinal issue, he was very adamant on the idea that this had never been a doctrine--only a policy--and that the scriptures were simply not clear on the idea that the blacks were descended from Cain. I could not have agreed more.

As the discussion went on, President Gill instructed the High Council to discuss the new revelation next Sunday when we make our monthly high visits to the wards. But, he told us, he did not want us to use the words

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"black" or "negro." Rather, we should use the tone of the letter, and refer to all races. Also, and equally important, we were to talk about the concept of continuing revelation in the Church.

I attended a BYU ward Sunday School class. The young instructor spent a short time on the new revelation, but ~~she~~ opened the discussion with an effort to try to define the doctrine as it had been--going to the Pearl of Great Price to try to show that the blacks were descendants of Cain., etc. I spoke up and pointed out that such an interpretation had never been officially pronounced as Church doctrine, and that we should be careful not to raise more questions by perpetuating the idea. The general feeling of the BYU students on this was affirmative, and one of gratitude that this had happened. In fact, everyone I talked to at BYU that day expressed nothing but great support, and often great relief. I sensed this as a general attitude, and this was ~~confirmed~~ confirmed Monday night when my daughter came home from a BYU religion class and told about how positive the discussion ~~was~~ had been there.

I also went to a Sunday School class in the Orem 31st ward. Here the Sunday School teacher, Boyd Call, opened the whole period to a discussion of the issue, and taped the comments. There were many things said--none negative, but all representing different experiences and different understanding of the issue. To me, the most interesting comment came from a man who said, in effect, that during the past two days he had done a lot of reexamining of his own attitudes, and that now he had fully repented of some old attitudes toward the blacks that were wrong. You could tell that he had gone through quite a traumatic experience, but that it had been a positive one for him and that now he was absolutely sincere in his acceptance of the revelation, and of the equality of the blacks in the Church.

So far as the reaction of the BYU faculty is concerned, the only conversations I had on Monday were with the history faculty. Ted Warner was greatly

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pleased, partly because of his broad, liberal attitude anyway. But, he wondered, how would he, a liberal, feel if now we also got a revelation that the Church must vote Republican? Michael Seibt was delighted with it, but added the news that on Friday evening one of the TV stations ran a long discussion of it that included a quotation from The Story of the Latter-day Saints. The commentator had referred to a recent book on Church history, showed the cover of the book, then turned to page 620 and quoted the first couple of lines of the last paragraph, which were shown on TV as he read them. My son, Michael, called Monday from Billings, Montana, and said he had seen the same newscast up there.

The whole week-end has therefore been a rather uplifting, memorable time, so far as this development is concerned. From talking to BYU students, faculty, and Orem townspeople, I get the feeling that at least in this area there will be no serious problems implementing the new policy.

I was delighted when I arrived at the office in Salt Lake City this morning and found that yesterday the History Division staff had held a meeting and given their reactions. I was invited ^{by Leonard Arrington} to write my reaction to add to theirs, which had already been recorded to go into the journal history.

At the same time, I was wondering how Southerners might react. Ted Warner told me Monday that he was concerned about his father-in-law's possible reaction, for he was a typical southern white who had some long-standing pro-segregation attitudes. But today I was visited by some friends from South Carolina, Ted and Beverly Gorka, whom I had met while on the Education Week circuit. Beverly commented on the fact that there was a black in their ward, but that he was already well accepted. She believed there would be no problem of accepting him fully into the priesthood and ~~her~~ her personal attitude, at least, was one of very positive acceptance. Her husband is not a Church member, but he was highly pleased with the move.

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LJA DIARY - 13 JUNE 1978 - TUESDAY

I heard this morning a report that one of the immediately precipitating factors of the new revelation was the projected opening of the temple in Brazil and the many questions ~~which~~ ^{that} were raised about it which were taken to President Kimball and which he felt he had to take to the Lord. There is a large number of members of the Church in Brazil which appear to have some black African ancestors. In the process of shifting the responsibility for genealogical work to individual families--in the process of requiring that people in each temple district be required to furnish names--the people in Brazil were extremely hesitant. They were not anxious to do their genealogical work and provide names which would be used in temple work there.

According to this report President Kimball discussed these matters with the Quorum of the Twelve and First Presidency and then decided to go to the Lord, and he decided to keep praying until he received a definite answer one way or the other. ~~According to this report President Kimball remained in the upper room of the temple for three days and nights in a period of constant prayer and fasting to receive an answer from the Lord.~~ ^{not true} The answer which he finally received was presented to the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency in their meeting of the temple the morning of June 1. This was then presented to a general meeting of all the General Authorities including First Presidency, Quorum of Twelve, First Quorum of Seventy, the Presiding Bishopric, and Presiding Patriarch, the morning of June 8.

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LJA DIARY, SUNDAY 18 JUNE 1978

This morning in priesthood meeting, and again in our Sunday School class, Gil Janner was invited to share an experience during the week. He and Nedra had ridden a bus to St. George to attend a meeting of the board of some corporation. Along on the trip also, for the same purpose, were Boyd Packer and his wife. For a part of the trip, Gil was able to sit next to Brother Packer. Gil asked him if he could share some of the experiences which led up to the announcement of the revelation on the priesthood for blacks. Brother Packer ~~was~~ said he could share part of the experience part of it he could not share.

Brother Packer said President Kimball had felt it necessary to petition the Lord on this matter. And so, for the past two months he has gone daily to ~~the~~ an upper room in the temple to pray specifically for that purpose. On the morning of Thursday, June 1, he decided to share some of his impressions with the Twelve. He asked them, in advance, to fast for the purpose. He and they then spent sometime discussing the problem in its various aspects. At a certain point in the discussion, President Kimball then asked if he might give a prayer on behalf of the group. So he went to the altar and prayed earnestly to the Lord. At a certain point in the prayer, Elder Packer stated, all present became aware of what the decision must be. He did not say what happened; this is no doubt the part which he was forbidden to tell. But there was some kind of manifestation, presumably which was plain to all those present. As Brother Packer referred to ~~this~~ he sobbed--something which he does not commonly do. Obviously, it was a tender experience. *

President Kimball finished the prayer. Then Elder Benson said: "We all are aware of what has happened. Now what should we do about it? President Romney spoke up and said, "Let's take a week to formulate a statement to announce it to the other general authorities and to the Church." So in the subsequent week the statement which appeared in the papers was drawn up. Presumably it was read to the Twelve in their June 8 meeting. It was then read to all the

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general authorities. The authorities were then asked to comment on it, one by one. When every single one of them indicated their approval, it was then announced to the media, and to the Church as a whole.

In the Priesthood meeting, when Brother Warner had finished telling this, Bill Pulsipher said that on the ~~Monday~~ morning of June 9 he was meeting in a board of directors meeting with Elder Paul Dunn. Elder Dunn was late for the meeting, and as he came in, it was obvious that he had been crying. He then took a few moments to tell the group what had taken place. He emphasized that all at the meeting had the general authorities were certain that this was a revelation from the Lord.

~~There~~ In our Sunday School class, when Brother Warner had finished relating his experience, Sister Mamie Silver raised her hand and stood to give her own experience. As the new revelation was announced, a certain person telephoned her to say that they were leaving the church on account of the announcement. Sister Silver said, "Let me phone my brother, [LeGrande Richards] and ask him about it. So she telephoned Elder Richards, who more or less told the same thing that Elder Packer had told Gil Warner, and emphasized that all of the Twelve were certain it was a revelation from the Lord, and if the telephoning party believed in the Lord, and had a testimony of the truth of the Church and of the prophethood of Spencer W. Kimball, they must accept the revelation as from God. Mamie said she herself believed it and was convinced it was something we must accept.