

Old Testament Aaronic priesthood, with its animal sacrifices and offerings, its need for an earthly physical temple where the sacrifice took place, had been rendered obsolete in the cross of Jesus (Heb. 7–8; 1 Pet. 2:9). This was one of the points where Jerald was beginning to see the Book of Mormon coming into conflict not only with later Mormon scripture and practice, but with the Bible as well. In the same year that Jerald published his tract on the Book of Mormon and racism, he had also privately expressed doubt about this point in a letter to Pauline Hancock: “If High Priests don’t continue after Christ; why then do priest[s] continue in the Book of Mormon. I cannot find any reference to priest in the bible after Christ.”¹⁷ But in the letter, which expresses a number of other doubts about the Book of Mormon, the race issue hadn’t come up.

Had Jerald missed the problem? Was this another case of what LaMar Petersen had been talking about when he told Jerald, “You’ve got to see Mormonism as a whole; not as two kinds of things.”¹⁸ It was the very same Book of Mormon teaching that white skin meant righteousness and black skin wickedness that Joseph would carry over into the Book of Moses by asserting that the Mark of Cain (compare Gen. 4:15 to Moses 7:22) and the curse of Canaan (Gen 9:25 to Moses 7:8) were being made black.¹⁹ In doing this Joseph provided seeming scriptural validation for the baseless and “often refuted” Southern interpretation of Genesis passages used to support Black slavery.²⁰ Which explained as well why Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders had explicitly endorsed the erroneous Southern readings.

Smith does not specifically mention priesthood or Blacks in his two scriptural accounts of the war in heaven in the pre-existence

17. Jerald Tanner to Pauline Hancock, ca. Dec. 1959, Tanner and Tanner, Papers.

18. Petersen, “Memoirs of Lamar Petersen,” 2:42.

19. See, 1 Ne. 12:23, 2 Ne. 5:21, 2 Ne. 30:6, 3 Ne. 2:15–16. The 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon replaced “white” with “pure.” See Skousen, *Book of Mormon*, 148 and 754, and Campbell, “White” and “Pure.”

20. The words in quotation marks come from Noll, *Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 56. The interpretation was not widely endorsed by historic Protestantism, because there is no indication in the Bible that Cain, Ham, or Canaan were Black. Popular Protestant commentaries, including Adam Clarke’s, often contained extensive notes summarizing possible interpretations of what the Mark of Cain might have been, but seldom reflected awareness of anyone suggesting it had anything to do with being Black.

(Moses 4:1–4, Abr. 3:24–27). But he does connect the curse of Ham and Canaan to priesthood in Abraham 1:21–27, the passage LDS Apostle David O. McKay would refer to in 1947, when he said, “I know of no scriptural basis for denying the Priesthood to Negroes other than the one verse in the Book of Abraham.”²¹

The Tanners insisted that the LDS Church, which avoided proselytizing in nations with large numbers of Black citizens, could not be the true church of Jesus Christ because it did not obey Jesus’s final “Great Commission” at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: “Go ye therefore, and teach *all* nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19–20).²² The “proof text” often adduced for the church’s exclusionary practice was Moses 7:12, where Enoch calls all the people to repent “save it were the people of Canaan,” because of the curse that fell upon them a few verses earlier (v. 8).²³

At some point early on the Tanners’ circle learned of the ordination during Joseph Smith’s time of African American Elijah Abel.²⁴ In 1960 Sandra’s step-grandfather, Nicholas Philagios, wrote a letter asking Joseph Fielding Smith whether “Negro[e]s were ordained Elders in the early church.” Smith wrote a terse response in red on the same letter: “Negroes were *not* ordained in the early church.”²⁵ Bob Phillips, a friend of James Wardle and the Tanners, discovered that Abel’s son Enoch and grandson Elijah had all been ordained elders.²⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith soon adopted a new explanation after Abel’s ordination became more publicly known: The only reason Abel was ordained, Smith now claimed, was because it happened “before the

21. David O. McKay, Letter of Nov 3, 1947, rpt. in Lund, *Church and the Negro*, 91.

22. Tanner and Tanner, *Solving the Racial Problem in Utah*, 7 (emphasis mine). Jerald points, for example, to statements by Bruce R. McConkie, that “the message of salvation is not carried affirmatively to them” (“Negroes,” *Mormon Doctrine*, 477), and William E. Berrett, that “no direct efforts have been made to proselytize among them,” in “Church and the Negroid People,” 65.

23. McConkie, “Negroes,” *Mormon Doctrine*, 477; Petersen, “Race Problems,” 14; Smith, *Way to Perfection*, 107.

24. Abel (sometimes spelled Able, Abels, and Ables) was ordained an elder on March 3, 1836, and a seventy on April 4, 1841. For more on his life, see Andrew Jenson, “Abel, Elijah,” *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3, 577, and Stevenson, *Black Mormon*.

25. Nicholas Philagios to Joseph Fielding Smith, June 8, 1960, Tanner and Tanner, Papers.

26. Tanner and Tanner, *Negro in Mormon Theology*, 14–17, and *Curse of Cain?*, 38–41.

Mark E. Petersen, a longtime opponent of lifting the ban, was out of town on church business.⁸⁰

In the meantime, Jerald and Sandra's attention turned in a new direction. The last book they wrote on the topic for the time being was *Mormons and Negroes* (1970), but they continued to report and revisit the issue in the *Salt Lake City Messenger*. In 2004, the Tanners' *Curse of Cain? Racism in the Mormon Church* summed up their earlier work with new discussion of more recent developments.

Kimball's revelation had come fifteen years after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led the March on Washington, and twenty-two years after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. What had taken so long? Jerald and Sandra gave credit to the LDS Church for the change, noting it would "undoubtedly help blacks obtain equality in Utah."⁸¹ But they also wrote that the 1978 announcement was an example of the church's bowing to social pressure. The decision also made them feel personally vindicated for their own part in applying that pressure:

Since we have probably printed more material critical of the Mormon anti-black doctrine than any other publisher, the new revelation comes as a great victory and a vindication of our work. We printed our first criticism of this doctrine in 1959. This was certainly not a popular cause to espouse in those days. (In fact, at one time a Mormon threatened to punch Sandra in the nose over the issue).⁸²

80. Kimball, "Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," 55.

81. "Blacks Receive LDS Priesthood: Pressure Forces Mormon President to Issue New 'Revelation,'" *Salt Lake City Messenger* 39, July 1978, 2.

82. Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, 293-A.

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DOCUMENTS AND FORGERIES

In the July 1982 issue of the *Messenger* the Tanners offered a new publication entitled *Clayton's Secret Writings Uncovered*, which contained the extracts from the diaries of Joseph Smith's secretary W. Clayton. The entries extended from January 22, 1843, to July 28, 1846, and detailed the events surrounding the emergence of the polygamy revelation that became Doctrine and Covenants 132. It also discussed the difficulties that arose between Joseph and Emma regarding it, Joseph's death, and the events that followed in the aftermath.

By the time the Tanners went to press with the excerpted diaries of the extracts had been circulating for at least ten months. A sort of black market for suppressed documents commonly called the Mormon Underground. The Tanners got their copy of the diaries from Kent Walgren, an administrative law judge and owner of a bookstore in Salt Lake City, who in turn got his copy from Mormon historian Richard Van Wagoner.¹ Where Van Wagoner got his copy is unknown. By the time the Tanners got it, there were probably hundreds of copies in circulation.²

The story of the original leak of the document to the press is well known. It broke in the January 18, 1982, issue of the *Seventh East Press*, an alternative independent newspaper for BYU students. The article opened with the line: "A BYU graduate student has admitted to being a member of a bishopric of stealing copies of materials which the student obtained from the vault of the First Presidency."³ The graduate student in question was Andrew F. Ehat, and the material he reportedly obtained from the First Presidency vault was the Clayton diaries.

1. Tanner and Tanner, *Tanners on Trial*, 99.

2. Celia Warner, "The Tanners on Trial," *Sunstone Review*, Apr. 1984, 7.

3. "Restricted Church Document Stolen: Bishopric Member Circulates Restricted Documents," *Seventh East Press*, Jan. 18, 1982, 1.



Jerald and Sandra Tanner

LIGHTHOUSE

JERALD & SANDRA TANNER

DESPISED AND BELOVED CRITICS OF MORMONISM

RONALD V. HUGGINS