

Statement by the
First Presidency of the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
on the
Negro Question
August 17, 1951

The attitude of the Church with reference to negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that negroes may become members of the church but that they are not entitled to the priesthood at the present time. The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said: "Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their fathers rejecting the power of the holy priesthood, and the law of God. They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the holy priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will then come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to."

President Wilford Woodruff made the following statement: "The day will come when all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have."

The position of the Church regarding the negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the pre-mortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality, and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the principle itself indicates that the coming to this earth and taking on mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintained their

first estate; and that the worth of the privilege is so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood, is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in this deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the negroes.

Why the Negro was denied the Priesthood from the days of Adam to our day is not known. The few known facts about our pre-earth life and our entrance into mortality must be taken into account in any attempt at an explanation.

1. Not all intelligences reached the same degree of attainment in the pre-earth life.

And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.

The Lord thy God sent his angel to deliver thee from the hands of the priest of Elkenah.

I dwell in the midst of them all; I now, therefore, have come down unto thee to deliver unto thee the works which my hands have made, wherein my wisdom excelleth them all, for I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, in all wisdom and prudence, over all the intelligences thine eyes have seen from the beginning; I came down in the beginning in the midst of all the intelligences thou hast seen.

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make

my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. . . .

And we will prove them herewith to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them;

And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.²⁶

2. Man will be punished for his own sins and not for Adam's transgression. (2nd Article of Faith.) If this is carried further, it would imply that the Negro is punished or allotted to a certain position on this earth, not because of Cain's transgression, but came to earth through the loins of Cain because of his failure to achieve other stature in the spirit world.

3. All spirits are born innocent into this world.

Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.²⁷

4. The negro was a follower of Jehovah in the pre-earth life. (There were no neutrals.)

One of the best explanations is that given by President David O. McKay:

November 3, 1947

Dear Brother:

In your letter to me of October 28, 1947, you say that you and some of your fellow students "have been perturbed about the question of why the negroid race cannot hold the priesthood."

In reply I send you the following thoughts that I expressed to a friend upon the same subject:

Stated briefly your problem is simply this:

Since, as Paul states, the Lord "hath made of one blood