

16.

LJA DIARY, FRIDAY AFTERNOON, 9 JUNE 1978

Although I had no premonition of the announcement of this day revealing that the Lord will now permit blacks to hold the Priesthood and go to the temple, I will record here some things that I have known.

First, approximately six months ago Elder Neal Maxwell telephoned me on a confidential basis to ask if I could find for him the quote of Joseph Fielding Smith that "darkies are wonderful people." He said he understood Joseph Fielding had said something more ~~xxx~~ in that interview about blacks ultimately being given the Priesthood. My memory was that this was in an article in Time about 1966, or 1967. I hunted through Time and through other publications and could not find it. I gave up. Then about a month ago, quite by accident, I learned that it was in an article in Look in 1968. I hunted that article up, xeroxed the article and sent it on to Elder Maxwell. He expressed his appreciation and asked for a xerox of the Deseret News interview on which it was based. I sent that as well. He expressed appreciation for that as well. This suggests that ~~Somebody~~ Elder Maxwell, as chief planning officer, was actively working on a memorandum to President Kimball about the issue and wanted all the evidence he could find.

Second, Chase Peterson, during the flight from Boston to SLC on May 14, showed me a letter he was in the process of writing to President Kimball about the issue. It was a wonderful letter, so well written and so sincere, and approached so well. He talked as though he was going to send it to President Kimball during the following week. I made two or three suggestions for improving the letter and those were incorporated at the time. I assume he sent the letter. He did not want to send the letter without assurance that President Kimball would see it. He contacted Bill Smart of Deseret News, who had the opportunity of asking President Kimball about it, and President Kimball said he would welcome the letter and would read it with much interest. I assume that Chase did, in fact, send the letter and that it reached receptive ears.

Third, Elder Durham was in my office yesterday asking if I had evidence

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to show that Joseph Smith had been responsible for fastening the Priesthood denial to blacks upon the Church. He said that he was very concerned that this not be attributed to Brigham Young exclusively as had been done in Lester Bush's article. I told him that Newell Bringhurst was in my office just a day earlier to tell me that he had found sufficient evidence to suggest that Priesthood denial to blacks was fairly generally understood and accepted in the Church in 1843 in Nauvoo. I told Elder Durham I might be able to get this from Newell if he particularly wanted it. Elder Durham said no, he had talked with Dr. Bringhurst himself a day earlier, and wanted to know if I had any additional evidence. What a coincidence if Elder Durham did not himself know yesterday about the forthcoming announcement!

I have of course no idea as to whether the First Presidency and General Authorities made use of Elder Adam S. Bennion's report of about 1957 in which he indicated the denial of the Priesthood to blacks had no sound scriptural basis. I have not seen that report, but Elder Bennion summarized it in his talk to our Mormon Seminar in SLC about 1957 at a session at which I was present, and of which I kept notes. (I presume those notes are in my folder on Negroes and the Priesthood.)

In my talks to Mormon groups, and a question period comes, I am almost never asked a question about the "Negro policy." In talks to public groups, almost inevitably the question is asked, "Why . . . ?" My reply in such public discussions has been pretty much as follows: For the believing Mormon it is sufficient to know that the Lord's servants--those empowered to interpret His will--have said the Lord has not sanctioned giving the Priesthood to blacks. As to why, we don't know, nor do the Lord's servants know. We accept it as one of the inexplicables like why the Lord permits suffering, or permits sinners to prosper. Looking at it from a purely naturalistic standpoint, I would make the following points: (1) Mormons have always believed that Negroes would eventually be given the Priesthood; (2) Mormons have thought that the

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Lord's refusal to approve granting the Priesthood to blacks may have as much to do with the unwillingness of the whites to accept blacks as true brothers as with the unworthiness of blacks; ~~(2)~~ and so we have prayed that we might be more worthy; (3) historically, the ~~early~~ Saints did preach the gospel to blacks, and there were a number of black members in the early church. Then Missouri. Then the strong statement that we do not encourage blacks to join, and do not grant them leadership positions. We did not want to alienate the Missourians unnecessarily. We were fighting for our lives! (4) Finally, there have not been many blacks in Utah and "Mormon Country" to make it an important problem. (5) We do try to keep down prejudice and discrimination; we lean over backwards to show our love for blacks. (6) We do think the Gospel has much to offer to blacks by way of helping to stabilize the family and training in leadership, and we are praying to the Lord to permit us to give them the Priesthood.

Friday Evening

James called about dinner time to talk about the ANNOUNCEMENT. Said it was received joyously among students at BYU. He heard not a single adverse comment. His favorite comment was that of one student who said: "Now we can have the best basketball team in the nation." Another ~~commented~~ joked: "It was a black day for the Mormon Church." James was delighted, of course.

My brother Don, in Kimberley, telephoned and wanted my comment about it. Ron Esplin called to say Duane Cardall had wanted a television interview with someone. How about me? I told him to suggest Elder Durham. I watched tonight's broadcast and they had Dean May. Dean handled it very well. This evening Ray Boren of Deseret News telephoned for a telephone interview. I told him to call Elder Durham.

Grace and I went to the reception at Bitton's house for the marriage of their daughter. Davis said they heard the announcement at 10:30 am in the temple from Elder Hanks, who came in to perform the ceremony. Elder Hanks said

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he had just come from a meeting of General Authorities in the Temple and that this group would be the very first to get the news. He said they had been meeting for several hours in the temple. Many wept for joy at the announcement of the revelation. And each was asked for his own personal statement.

I listened to each of the national TV channels report the news at ~~4~~:30, 5:00, and 5:30. It was done tastefully, with no comments or statements damaging to the Church and its image. Then at 6:00 I listed to KSL Channel 5, which carried comments from a number of people, nearly all of which were favorable to the announcement. I liked the comment of the Jewish rabbi, Abner Bergman; the Presbyterian minister, Sweitzer; and of the president of the Genesis branch, Rustin Bridgeforth, all of which were good. Dean May's interview was thoughtful and good.