

Reviews

Edited by Edward Geary

THE LIMITS OF DIVINE LOVE

Wilford E. Smith

The Church and the Negro. By John Lewis Lund. Paramount Publishers, Glendale, Calif., 1967. 129 pp. \$2.50. Wilford E. Smith is Professor of Sociology at Brigham Young University.

John L. Lund has gone to a great deal of work to compile under the covers of this one small book pertinent excerpts from scriptures and from writings of Church leaders to clarify the Mormon position concerning the Negro. He concludes from his examination of these sources that Negroes are God's beloved children who were born into the world as innocent mortal beings with every right to brotherhood with all men, but they bear a curse which they willingly accepted in the spirit world as a precondition to being born. The curse consists of deprivation of Priesthood, and it is justified as the consequence of some preexistent misdeeds or shortcomings which Negro spirits understood before they agreed to accept mortal bodies. The curse will be lifted from worthy Negroes after all worthy white people have been resurrected and after Abel has been enabled to have offspring and all of them have had an opportunity to be exalted. Black skin is not part of the curse but is a mark put upon the Negro to protect him.

Lund's compilation is very similar to that of John J. Stewart in *Mormonism and the Negro* (2d ed.; Orem, Utah: Bookmark Division of Community Press Publishing Company, 1960), from which Lund draws heavily. He presents more material than Stewart and William E. Berrett do in that text, of which Berrett wrote the historical section titled, "The Church and the Negroid People." Both of these books, and "The Negro Question Resolved" by Yates Heywood (published by Yates Heywood, Box 396, Holbrook, Arizona, 1964), are what critics would call apologist literature — not that they beg forgiveness for their support of what they perceive to be the Church's position, but that they defend it with partisan fervor.

There is nothing new in any of these three compilations, but each is of interest to one concerned with the Negro's place in God's Kingdom. Lund's arguments are particularly bold as he proclaims that Negroes can really be nothing more than second-class citizens in the Kingdom, at least for a long, long time, but that they can still be worthy of much respect and love if they will be good Uncle Toms.¹ He insists that even second-class citizenship in such a great Kingdom is priceless, and in time it will lead to first-class citizenship for them.

Even though Lund's book bears no Church endorsement, it impresses me as being just about what the more "traditionally orthodox" Mormons believe. I rather feel that Lund in a sense is right in describing his views as those of the Church, even though he disavows any intent or right to attempt to speak officially. Most of what he says is right down the traditional line which most of us have learned from childhood.

But some of his arguments scare me. As I read the book, parts of John Greenleaf Whittier's "The Eternal Goodness" kept coming to mind:

I trace your lines of argument;
Your logic linked and strong
I weigh as one who dreads dissent,
And fears a doubt as wrong.

But still my human hands are weak
To hold your iron creeds:
Against the words ye bid me speak
My heart within me pleads.

I walk with bare, hushed feet the ground
Ye tread with boldness shod;
I dare not fix with mete and bound
The love and power of God.

Much of Lund's argument hinges on the condemnation of Cain, and his views on this matter are much too sure for me. Lund asserts that Cain opposed God in the spirit world and was Perdition before he was born (p. 17). For God willfully to send as Adam's son a spirit known to be so wicked that he was called Perdition would not only be so monstrous that it is hard to believe, but it is contrary to the scripture that says only those who did not follow Lucifer were to enter mortality. I read the scripture quoted by Lund to say that Cain was present in the heavenly councils before he was born, not that he was Perdition at that time. My view seems to be nearer to that in Joseph Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection*, often quoted as the best

¹The Uncle Tom label, never used by Lund, is really far from derogatory. Uncle Tom was a truly noble man. If all men could be Christians such as he, this world's social problems would be solved. But many modern Negroes have rejected this role, and any attempt to impose it on them is humiliating and may well lead to bitter feeling. They are tired of self-sacrificing roles. Nothing short of full equality will satisfy them. See Irving Kristol, "A Few Kind Words for Uncle Tom," copyright 1965 by *Harper's Magazine*, reprinted in *Current Perspectives on Social Problems*, Judson R. Landis, ed. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 111-17.

Church writing on this subject.² But if Lund is right and Cain was the kind of willful devil that he is made out to be, still the conclusion that all of this was part of God's plan to give bodies to spirits not worthy to hold the Priesthood demeans God too much for me.

It is true that no other church can do for the Negro as much as ours can. It is true that if they don't believe we have the Priesthood they shouldn't mind not getting it from us, and if they do accept the Church as divine they should gratefully accept all that it can offer them even if it falls short of full equality with any other race of people. But the problem rests in what this does to believers as well as to non-believers psychologically. Believing that Negroes were cursed before they were born makes it psychologically difficult, if not impossible, to accept them as full and equal brothers. It can't help but create a sense of inequality which will deny the scriptural injunction for all men to love each other completely as God loves all men, regardless of race. The Lund explanation may satisfy believers, but will non-believers tolerate beliefs which make them less than other people in a society which proclaims the socio-political equality of all men? How can we tell people debauched and antagonized to the point of riot in Watts, Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and Newark to be good Uncle Toms or they won't be exalted in heaven? How can we tell them they were cursed before they were born so that they can't have all the blessings we have, but they can have many, and that they should love us, their more privileged brothers?

Another crucial question concerns the statement from Paul (Acts 17:26) that the Lord "... hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all of the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." Lund uses this scripture to show that, in His wisdom and goodness, God separated people into different races so that spirits could be sent where they would fit. The rest of Paul's speech seems to give a different meaning, however. He seems to be arguing that men thus separated by nationality are really all of one blood and are all loved of the only true God who wants them all to be united in His kingdom on earth. Why does the Church send missionaries all over the world to stir up people and make them alike in belief and behavior and to unite them in brotherhood, if God intended that they should be separated and protected from such mingling? The scriptures are full of God's love for all men and his promise that all will be judged by their works in accordance with the light they have, and messengers are admonished to take the word to all men and break down the barriers between peoples.

This brings me to Edgar Whittingham, whose testimony Lund prints on page sixty-eight. Whittingham was the first Negro I had taught in eighteen years at Brigham Young University. It was in my class that he told the story printed by Lund. He asked me not to publish the story (which we taped) because he wanted to do more thinking about it (and I wonder if Lund asked

²Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection* (12th ed.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1963), pp. 97-100.

his permission to publish it). I am confident that Brother Whittingham would not want the story used to temper the questions of his fellow Negroes. He told me that he did not like fellow black John Lamb's article in the *Improvement Era*³ because it tended to imply that the Negro was contented with his lot. Edgar hopes for something more, and he believes the President of the Church might have a revelation to give the Priesthood to worthy Negroes much sooner than Lund does. Until he can get the Priesthood, it is not likely that Edgar will be satisfied.

Was Brigham Young necessarily prophesying, as Lund thinks, when he said that Negroes would have to wait until after all of Abel's posterity to get the Priesthood, or was he speaking as a fallible man, as when he stated that the Civil War would not succeed in abolishing slavery. For us to conclude absolutely that the door will not be opened, perhaps even as early as this decade, is too much. Hard and fast decisions based on speculations about pre-earth life, even those by great men, could lead us astray.

One final and crucial note. Lund does not define Negro in his entire book. Are all black-skinned people Negroes? The Fijians, East Indians, Melanesians, and all black Africans? If so, many Negroes now hold the Priesthood. If not, where is the boundary line? Is it logical to suppose that "one drop" of Negro blood makes a white man a Negro while "one drop" of white blood does not make a Negro white (using "blood" figuratively of course)?

This review is much too short to cover all the questions raised by Lund's book. The book frightens me, but it is, nonetheless, full of information that all interested men should know. Others may have different interpretations of the same information, and one who presents opposing points of view need not necessarily be in opposition to Church doctrine or authority.

David O. McKay has the keys, and members of the Church will respect his use of them. The Negro will not hold the Priesthood until the holder of the keys gives it to him. In the meantime, the Negro is among us and must be *related to*, rationally and on a Christian basis. Lund undoubtedly intended his book to do this, and many Mormons will believe that it does; but others who believe the Negro is equal to the white man will reject it as an unconvincing defense of a benevolent racism which they and most contemporary Afro-Americans cannot stomach.

Regardless of how people accept the book, Lund has clearly and boldly presented a point of view. Much of what he says reflects the goodness of true Mormonism, even though his appeal will be predominantly to those who think of themselves as orthodox in the same sense that they are steeped in Latter-day Saint folklore. Mormons who love the Church and who strive to be orthodox in terms of scriptural doctrine will undoubtedly prefer Armand L. Mauss's treatment of the subject in the Winter 1967 issue of *Dialogue*. All Mormons should be aware of how carefully the General Authorities, as a body, have avoided endorsement of any book on this subject.

³John Lamb, "My Responsibility," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (January 1966), pp. 36-37.