

A BLACK MORMON PERSPECTIVE

Lowell Bennion

It's You and Me, Lord! (My Experience as a Black Mormon). By Alan Gerald Cherry. Provo: Trilogy Arts Press, 1970. 64 pp. \$2.95. Lowell Bennion is Associate Dean of Students at the University of Utah.

This is a brief autobiography of Alan Cherry, a young black man who grew up in New York City, entered the Air Force in Texas after a year and a half of college, was court martialed and discharged. In the meantime he had come across a tract, "The Joseph Smith Story," and the Book of Mormon, and joined the Church in a small branch in Texas. After spending a year in New York City, he entered B.Y.U. and found a career as a comedian in student productions. His story is told in simple but concrete language, and is honest, candid, and vivid. It contains a good deal of substance in its brief 64 pages.

More interesting to me than the events and experiences Alan Cherry narrates is the inner development of his spiritual life which accompanies them; he discovers himself as he pursues the truth.

"It all started," he says, "because I was fat." The conquest of his obesity — he went from 235 to 135 pounds — gave him an experience in self-conquest which placed the center of life within himself, where it belongs for all of us. With increasing confidence he accepted himself and began to evaluate his conduct in terms of basic conviction. Integrity increased in him as he abandoned shallow and erroneous actions.

In a whole, child-like kind of way he became very responsive to nature, to other people, to God, and to himself. This led him to the point where, in his words, he wished to "seek the truth, seek it at my optimum vibrance, until I become part of it, until I become full of truth." He sought to know the truth in the full meaning of the word — that he might be free.

The question to which most readers of this book would be curious to know the answer is Alan's reaction to the denial of the priesthood to him. He tells us that he accepted the policy of the Church for perhaps two reasons. He had had a spiritual witness of the truthfulness of the Joseph Smith story before he learned of the priesthood issue. He feels he cannot deny the reality of this conviction. To question the priesthood policy, for him, would be to question the Church and its priesthood leadership. Then, too, for him the priesthood is not the end but a channel through which the truth comes to man. He has learned from personal experience that a man can find truth, serve others, and bear certain kinds of responsibility without holding the priesthood. In fact he concludes his little book by saying, "I guess when it all comes out in the end, the important thing in God's Kingdom will not be who leads us there, but simply who gets there."

I believe the reason he can accept the policy of the Church in this regard is that it does not diminish his self-image. He has already found great inner strength through faith. He has experienced the Kingdom of God