

The Best Possible Test

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What Brother Bush has given us in this excellent study is not a history of the Negro policy in the Church, but of the explanations for it. The "attitudes" shift in "a complex evolutionary pattern," as he puts it, while noting in his concluding sentence that from first to last there has been no weakening of "the belief that the policy is justified." That is why this indispensable study seems strangely irrelevant the more one reads it. It is an interesting chapter in the history of thought, showing how the leaders of the Church have from time to time come up with various explanations for limitations placed on the activity of the Negro in the Church. To engage in such mental exercises has been not only their prerogative but their duty. When faced with such a problem, the command is, "you must study it out in your own mind," then, when you have gone as far as you can, you must ask God not to confirm your solution but to let you know whether it is right or not: "Then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore you shall *feel* that it is right." (D.&C.9:7-8.) This is exactly what the Brethren have done; not only Oliver Cowdery (to whom the order was first addressed) but all the great patriarchs and prophets from Adam down have had to exercise their own minds to full capacity in earnest seeking (Abraham 2:12), until God has finally deigned "after many days" to give them an answer. No matter how satisfied they may have been with their own conclusions, they have had to have them checked upstairs, and the answer comes with absolute certainty: ". . . you shall *feel* that it is right." Nothing could be more penetrating and final, but how can you explain your feeling to others? Simply by telling them how to go about getting the same feeling.

This, of course, does not satisfy the world; it has always put the prophets in bad with the rest of mankind, and has repeatedly put the Mormons in an awkward position, individually and collectively. For every individual must solve the "Negro question" for himself. The late President Joseph Fielding Smith in the current Melchizedek Priesthood Manual repeats the words of earlier leaders when he writes, ". . . it is the duty of every male member of the Church to know the truth, for each is entitled to the guidance of the Holy Ghost. . . . Each member of the Church should be so well versed [in the Standard Works] that he, or she, would be able to discern whether any doctrine taught conforms to the revealed word of the Lord. Moreover, the members of the Church are entitled . . . to have the spirit of discernment" (p. 188). This not only guarantees that every worthy member if he puts his mind to it can know the answers

for himself just as surely as the Prophet does, but it throws the floor open to discussion when President Smith adds that members are “under obligation to accept the teachings of the authorities” only “unless they can discover in them some conflict with the revelations and commandments the Lord has given” (p. 191). Hence, though the mind of the Lord is confirmed by an imponderable feeling, one is required, before asking of the Lord and receiving that feeling, to exercise his own wits to the fullest, so that there must be place for the fullest discussion and explanation in the light of the Scriptures or any other relevant information.

More than an explanation for the world, such discussion is really a heart-searching and a test for the Latter-day Saints themselves. Nothing could be easier than to join in the chants of unison that proclaim the perfect equality of all men in all things that are fashionable at the moment; that way we could proclaim our idealism to the world while continuing, like the rest of the world, to treat our fellow man much as we always have. As C. S. Lewis used to point out, the test of the Christian is not to conform with commandments and accept teachings which are perfectly right and sensible to any normal way of thinking; if the Gospel consisted only of such convenient and unobjectionable things, we could be quite sure that we were making it up ourselves. It is the very contrariness and even absurdity of the Christian teachings that provide, for him, the highest proof of their divinity—this is no man’s doing. In the efforts of every President of the Church to explain our position to the world, as presented in Dr. Bush’s study, we see the admission that this thing is not the invention of those men—they are embarrassed by it, and they all pass the acid test for honesty when they refuse to put their own opinions forth as revelation—which in their case would have been an easy thing to do. They are all sure that the policy is right, but none claims to give definitive rational or scriptural justification for it, though they are not backward in putting forth suggestions and speculations.

This puts the Mormons in an embarrassing position, and why not? The Lord has often pushed the Saints into the water to make them swim, and when our own indolence, which is nothing less than disobedience, gets us into a jam, He lets us stew in our own juice until we do something about it. The most impressive lesson of Bush’s paper is how little we know about these things—and how little we have *tried* to know. The Man Adam is expected to seek for *greater* light and knowledge, ever seeking “for the blessings of the fathers . . . desiring also to be one who possessed greater knowledge . . . and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess greater knowledge” (Abraham 1:2). This seeking must go on: “Wherefore murmur ye, because ye shall receive more of my word? . . . my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be unto the end of man” (2 Nephi 29:8-9). On the other hand, nothing displeases God more than to have his people “seek for power, and authority, and riches” (3 Nephi 6:15). It is God who gives us the answers, but only after we have been looking for them for quite a while—and what the Saints have been seeking is not light and knowledge, but those other forbidden things.

In searching for the answers we must consult our feelings as well as our reason, for the heart has its reasons, and it is our noble feelings and impulses that will not let us rest until God has given us the feeling of what is right. Charity does not split hairs or dogmatize, and charity comes first. So I ask my-

self, first of all, is this policy a humane and generous thing? Am I not turning my back on my brother in not sharing the work of the priesthood with him? Not at all! There is a vast amount of work going on in the Church all the time, all directed by the priesthood, but not necessarily carried out by it. To be engaged in any of these jobs is to be engaged in one and the same work; and can the eye say to the hand, I have no need of thee? Thinking I might be slipping into easy rationalization, I consider my own case. I have always been furiously active in the Church, but I have also been a non-conformist and have never held any *office* of rank in anything; I have undertaken many assignments given me by the leaders, and much of the work has been anonymous: no rank, no recognition, no anything. While I have been commended for some things, they were never the things which I considered most important—that was entirely a little understanding between me and my Heavenly Father, which I have thoroughly enjoyed, though no one else knows anything about it.

Interestingly enough, this is the case not only with an occasional odd-ball, but with ALL holders of the priesthood. Men can confer the powers of the priesthood upon others it is true (D&C 121:37), but only God can validate that ordination, which in most cases He does *not* recognize: "Hence, many are called but few are chosen." And he has been kind enough to tell us why: "And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men . . ." (D&C 121:34-35). It so happens "that almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority . . . will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (39), and the exercise of the powers of heaven "in any degree of unrighteousness" invalidate the priesthood—"Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man" (37). What supreme irony! The withholding of the priesthood is supposed to be an unkind act because it deprives a fellow-man of a thing of social value, a measure of status and dignity in the Church. Yet the moment I even *think* of my priesthood as a status symbol or a mark of superiority it becomes a mere hollow pretense. At the slightest hint of gloating or self-congratulation the priesthood holder is instantly and automatically unfrocked. What is the priesthood on this earth? Joseph Smith called it "an onerous burden," a load to be borne, work to be done and nothing more—the glory comes hereafter. One cannot give orders by the priesthood, for it operates "only by persuasion" (121:41); Christ commanded the spirits and they obeyed Him; He commanded the elements and they obeyed Him. But men He would not command, and rebuked the Apostles at Capernaum for suggesting it. "How often would I have gathered you together . . . and ye would not!" Only "if ye love me, keep my commandments." There is nothing here resembling earthly authority.

But whether it is worth anything or not, am I not by the mere act of withholding something guilty of an offensive gesture, a denial of rights, an act of rejection, of implied superiority? Certainly, in the world, if both of us are thinking in worldly terms, but not in the Kingdom. I would rather be a door-keeper in the House of the Lord than mingle with the top brass in the tents of the wicked. If we think in terms of rank and honor we share the folly of those early Councils of the Church which, with all the logic in the world, declared it the height of blasphemy and an insufferable affront to Jesus to place him second to the Father. Seeing all things in the setting of the Empire, as we do of a status-

and success-oriented society, they were completely blinded to reality. Is the Son jealous of the Father's superior rank, or is the Father disturbed by the aspirations of the Son? Nothing sounds more brutal and direct than Brigham Young's, "The negro must serve!" But what is so bad about serving in the light of the Gospel? "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve," meek and lowly, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, despised and rejected . . . need we go on? His true followers will take up the same cross, "In this world ye shall have tribulation," for "if the world has hated me, it will hate you." The greater the tribulation here the greater the glory hereafter, while he who is exalted in this world shall be abased in the next. If we really took the Lord's teachings seriously, we would be envious of the Negroes.

But do we take them seriously? Have we really searched the Scriptures? Consider a few. First the terrible warning: ". . . whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Genesis 4:15). The mark on Cain is for his protection, and as a warning to all the rest of us—hands off! If Cain must be punished, God does not solicit our services for the job: ". . . behold, the judgments of God will overtake the wicked; and it is *by the wicked* that the wicked are punished" (Mormon 5:5). Next, in all the talk about the sin of Cain, we hear no mention of his motivation, which lies at the root of sin. Lamech, too, committed murder, but his sin was not as reprehensible as that of Cain, who "slew his brother Abel, for the sake of getting gain" (Moses 5:50). Cain was carrying out a systematic operation which he learned from Satan, and which he calls "that great secret, that I may murder and get gain" (Moses 5:31), and in this he "gloried . . . saying: I am free; surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands" (Moses 5:33). Cain was "master of that great secret" of converting life into property in which the mighty have prospered ever since his day. Do we ever take this lesson to heart?

Again, our scriptures tell us that all little children are pure and innocent by nature, and as such saved in the Celestial Kingdom of God, and declare the contrary teaching of the world to be particularly devilish (Moroni 8:5-22). Now the vast majority of Negroes who have lived on the earth have died as little children; the Celestial Kingdom will be full of them, while, as we have indicated, there may be very few present-day priesthood-holders among them. Has this been duly noted? It has been maintained that because of the curse of Cain the Negro should never be allowed to vote; but our scriptures tell us that that race is peculiarly fitted for government: "Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh . . . after the manner of the government of Ham . . . Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days. . . . Noah, . . . his father, . . . blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26). Now we have seen that the priesthood does not entail authority to give orders to men, whose absolute free agency it rigorously respects. Where orders must be given, a just and righteous man, blessed with wisdom and earthly knowledge, is just what we need—would we had such leaders today!

The hardest thing in the world for men to learn is "this one lesson—that the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven"

(D&C 121:35f). They are God's alone to give and take away, and no one will dispute His right to do as He pleases with His own. So now the whole issue boils down to asking whether it is really God and not man who has ordered this thing. Members and non-members alike who up until now have laughed at the thought of asking such a question are suddenly exercised by it. And so it gives me great pleasure to be in a position to answer the question with an unequivocal affirmative: it is indeed the Lord's doing. How do I know it? By revelation—which I am in no position to bestow upon others; this goes only for myself. And that makes the "negro question" as unreal as the "Mormon Question" which kept the nation in an uproar for many years. Left to myself, the last thing in the world I would do would be to advocate polygamy or impose any limitations whatever on the Negro—and I have often heard the Brethren express themselves to the same effect. When the Lord told Joseph Smith that he couldn't always tell his friends from his enemies or the wicked from the righteous, what was left for him to do? ". . . therefore I say unto you, hold your peace until I shall see fit to make all things known unto the world concerning the matter" (D.&C. 10:37). Granted that this puts us, as it put the Prophet, in an uncomfortable and even dangerous position, still it provides the best possible test for our faith, our hope, and above all our charity.

