Mormonism's Worldwide Aspirations and its Changing Conceptions of Race and Lineage

Armand L. Mauss

> *Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. . .And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* –Apostle Paul to the Galatians 3:7, 29.

MORMON HISTORY CONTAINS ITS FAIR SHARE of ironies and unintended consequences. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began with a mission to restore the ancient church, but not for everyone at the same time. In its earliest days, the church was preoccupied with its mission to seek out the descendants of Abraham through Jacob or Israel; these Israelites, in turn, would prepare the world for the millennial reign of the Messiah. The first to be so identified were the Lamanites, known to other Americans as the aboriginal Indians, but believed by the Latter-day Saints to be descendants of the ancient Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel). Next came the Anglo-Israelites, otherwise called "Mormons," who were thought to be descendants of Joseph through his son Ephraim. The church thus appeared at first as an exclusive, particularistic sect, not only claiming to be the sole authentically Christian church, but also seeking its converts primarily from certain lineages. This is the story of how such a provincial–even tribal–movement was gradually transformed into a universal religion in which lineage of all kinds became essentially irrelevant.[1]

---

[1]This account is given with much greater detail and documentation in my forthcoming book tentatively entitled, *All Abraham's Children: Changing LDS Conceptions of Lineage and Race* (unpublished manuscript under editorial review by publishers).

This change was an outcome, somewhat ironically, of a massive missionary commitment which began as a quest for locating and converting the lost and scattered Israelites. Having discovered, through early missionary success in certain places, that the "blood of Israel" might be found in some rather unlikely populations, the church came increasingly to look beyond its earlier concerns with specific lineages to the world as a whole. The earlier theological and mythological constructions of lineage identity were gradually transformed into operational definitions based upon cost-benefit assessments of church growth. In other words, Israelite lineage would manifest itself wherever large numbers of converts were found and retained. The designation "Israelite" thus became more a symbolic and figurative identity than a literal one. This process, of course, brought the Latter-day Saints ultimately to the same understanding taught by the Apostle Paul to the Galatians (an understanding which many early Mormons already had before the church digressed into a preoccupation with lineage). This same ideological transformation has helped the church purge itself internally of controversial racist notions which had inevitably become attached to the lineage preoccupation.

Continuity and Change in Religious Doctrine

It is well known that religions which spread beyond their original homelands must cope with the issue of syncretism in the locales where they are imported. For Mormonism, as for most expanding religions, the ultimate pragmatic test is the conversion and retention of new members. At any given period of time and in any given locale (including the religion's homeland), some doctrines and ideologies will find greater acceptance and appeal than will others. One of the factors in the success of new religious movements is an engaging mixture of the familiar and the novel in its message and its practices.[2] As these new movements interact with their cultural environments, their growth largely depends on their ability to make local adaptations of doctrine, policy, and cultural traditions. This process can involve not only the intermixing of elements usually implied by the term "syncretism," but also the dropping or de-emphasizing of some elements and the accretions of others. Of course, as with all forms of syncretism, doctrinal and ecclesiastical integrity will place some limits on what kinds of elements can be taken on or phased out.

Certain explanations will usually be required when such changes are recognized, and these explanations might take the form of useful organizational myths. In Mormonism, one of those myths might be

[2]Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 12 (1996): 133-57.

called the "myth of continuity," wherein past doctrines and policies are rarely repudiated explicitly. Instead, either the older doctrines are seen as temporarily in abeyance (as with the imminence of the Millennium or the nineteenth-century practice of polygamy), or the changes are seen as logical developments deriving from prophecies or harbingers of the past (as with the change in race policy in 1978).[3] Furthermore, given its claims, from the very beginning, of continuous revelation through living prophets, Mormonism has always been in a sound doctrinal position to attribute any changes ultimately to deity.

Contrary to the obdurate, monolithic image often projected on Mormonism, from both the inside and the outside, this religion has shown an enormous capacity for flexibility and change. Its doctrine of deity was still evolving until the early twentieth century, when a formal pronouncement was constructed and issued by the First Presidency.[4] Even now one sees a continuing evolution toward a greater Christocentric focus. What is especially interesting for purposes of this paper is the apparent correlation across time between changes in doctrine (at least conventional, if not canon doctrine), and changes in the outcomes of the proselyting and public relations efforts of the church. That is to say, the waxing of some points of doctrine and the waning of others bears some apparent relationship to the results of church programs for proselyting and retention in various parts of the world. A direct causal connection cannot be assumed, but the correlation is suggestive.

The Construction of Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage

Traditional LDS conceptions of race and lineage were constructed within the social and intellectual environments of the nineteenth century, both in Europe and in America. To be sure, Mormonism added a few unique elements of its own, but the general racialist framework of that century is readily apparent. This framework enjoyed an affinity with a common Protestant interest of the time in identifying and locating the descendants of the various ancient Israelite tribes, whose gathering was believed to be either imminent or actually in progress as a harbinger of the millennium. Accordingly, the return of the Jews to

[3] In "Official Declaration No. 2" (bound with the Doctrine and Covenants since 1981), which announced the change in its race policy on the priesthood, the First Presidency of the church expressed its awareness "of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the church who have preceded us that at some time, in God's eternal plan," the priesthood would be extended to all from whom it "has been withheld."

[4] Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (July/August 1980): 24-33 (reprinted 10, no. 5 [1985]: 8-18).

Palestine, which was already underway by mid-century, was widely seen as a major sign of the end times. But what about the other Israelites, the so-called "Lost Ten Tribes"?

Various theories were advanced about who and where these other Israelites might be, and how they would be gathered from the North, as per scriptural prophecy. Other races were also explained as descendants of one or another of the sons of Noah, although their destinies were not necessarily connected to the gathering in preparation for the millennial reign of Christ. For example, black Africans were widely understood as descendants of both Ham and Cain, and Asians of various kinds as descendants of Japheth. Of course, these were biblically derived religious conceptions, but secular scholars and intellectuals of the time had their own explanations for the origins and natures of the various races.[5]

The Appropriation of Israelite Identity for the Mormons

Although not given much attention in contemporary Mormonism, a conception of Mormons as literal Israelites developed soon after the organization of the church and endured as a central idea in official discourse for about a century after the settlement of Utah.[6] This doctrine, which had only a tenuous basis in Mormon scripture, was the product primarily of a powerful intellectual movement within church leadership, starting particularly with Brigham Young and his contemporaries. As this movement gained greater currency in official discourse, Mormons came to understand themselves as literal descendants of the tribe of Ephraim, although occasionally other Israelite ancestry was recognized as well. The special role and primacy of Ephraimite descent, based on certain Old Testament passages, apparently had its origin in the royal leadership Ephraim assumed over the Ten Tribes at the division of Solomon's kingdom.

For the early Mormons this meant that Ephraim would also be the vanguard tribe in the gathering process—that is, the descendants of Ephraim would be the first of the lost tribes to be gathered and would establish a new gathering place for those tribes in America, while the tribe of Judah, or the Jews, would gather to their prophesied gathering place in Palestine. Consistent with that understanding, most nineteenth-century converts to Mormonism were, by definition, literal descendants of Ephraim. Of course, many Protestants, especially of the Calvinist variety, had taken on a symbolic or figurative identity as Israelites, or at least as "Abraham's seed," in line with the Apostle Paul's redefinition of the

[5]These ideas from early American and European literature are described and documented in the first part of Armand L. Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim: Traditional Mormon Conceptions of Lineage and Race," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no.1 (Spring 1999): 131-73.

[6]See ibid., 143-58, where considerable documentation is offered for this generalization.

Abrahamic covenant in terms of conversion to Christ. Mormons often did the same, from the beginning. However, I refer here to an additional step, the translation of that symbolic identity into a literal one.[7]

This understanding derived in part from a passage in the Book of Mormon which seemed to identify the Prophet Joseph Smith as a literal descendant of the ancient biblical Joseph, and a section in the Doctrine and Covenants, which identified the church with Ephraim.[8] Further confirmation of such an identity came from patriarchal blessings given by men with special callings to discern the divine will and destiny for individual members and to identify their respective lineages. At first, fewer than half these blessings mentioned lineage, but as time went on, and especially in the Utah period, these blessings increasingly attributed Israelite lineage generally, and/or Ephraimite lineage specifically, to the members who received them.[9]

During the second half of the century, the LDS appropriation of Ephraimite lineage came to be enriched and expanded by the accretion of doctrines and ideologies from the outside. One of these was British Israelism, the claim that the peoples of the British Isles, and indeed the monarchy itself, had originated in the immigration of descendants of various biblical figures, but especially descendants of the Lost Tribes. This idea had its origins at least in the eighteenth century, and by the middle of the nineteenth it was a significant (if minority) strain in popular religious thinking.[10] While never a dominant theme in the discourse of established religions, the doctrine was purveyed by a few prominent Anglican clergy, and it acquired several sectarian exponents from outside the establishment. The best known of these in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were Joanna Southcott, founder of the Christian Israelites in Aston, and Richard Brothers, a some time associate of this sect but known more for his independent writings on the subject. Best known in both Europe and America was John Wilson, who was in some demand on the lecture circuit in the 1830s, and whose 1840 book on the subject went through many printings on both sides of the Atlantic. In recent times, a rather pernicious version of this doctrine has been

---

[7]Symbolic and spiritualized connections of the Christian faith to God's covenant with Abraham have been common at least since Puritan times. See, e. g., Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), on what it means to be "spiritual Semites."

[8]2 Nephi 3: 6-15; D&C 133: 7, 12, 21, 26, 30-34.

[9]See Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 145-46; and Irene M. Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings and the Routinization of Charisma," *Dialogue* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 1-29. During Joseph Smith's lifetime, patriarchal blessings seemed to specify lineage only about half the time.

[10]Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 134-43; see also early chapters in Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

adapted by the Christian Identity movement, an overtly racist, right-wing, quasi-religious movement in the U.S.[11]

A second, and more secular, intellectual current of the early nineteenth century was an explicitly racialist doctrine which might be called "Anglo-Saxon triumphalism." This idea derived from a scholarly preoccupation in various disciplines with trying to trace the origins of European peoples and languages. Apparently taking a cue from the work of Roman historian Tacitus on ancient Germans, scientists and intellectuals of all kinds began to trace the origins of the various Germanic peoples, including those who settled England and Scandinavia, back to the ancient Aryans of central Asia. As time went on, according to this theory, these ancients, and particularly their Anglo-Saxon descendants in the British Isles, came to be seen as the carriers not only of the Germanic languages but also of certain superior cultural and physical traits. This line of historical explanation was not limited to a few sectarian enthusiasts but was pervasive in the science, philosophy, history, and literature of the nineteenth century.[12] Of course, it provided powerful support for the British Imperialism and the American Manifest Destiny which were emerging on the world scene contemporaneously with this Anglo-Saxon triumphalism. Unfortunately, much of it was still available in the twentieth century to be integrated into the official ideology of the Third Reich in Germany; but it was by no means invented in Hitler's time.

It is difficult to establish just how and when early British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism were discovered by influential Mormon thinkers; but those movements were not merely contemporaneous with the rise of Mormonism—they were clearly approaching the apex of their influence just as the first Mormon missionaries arrived in England. Borrowings from these movements in official Mormon discourse can be seen at least as early as the 1850s when the terminology, and even some of the authors in these movements, began to be cited in general church conferences. In the 1870s, if not earlier, the British Mormon publication Millennial Star began to carry references to the same, and in 1878 the pages of that publication carried a monthly series of articles by George Reynolds, citing by name several exponents of British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon

---

[11]On Wilson's synthesis and framing of this ideological legacy, see John F. Wilson, *Our Israelitish Origin: Lectures on Ancient Israel and the Israelitish Origins of the Modern Nations of Europe* (Liverpool and London: Nisbet Co., 1840 and many subsequent editions). On recent American adaptations of this legacy, see Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*; and James A. Aho, *The Politics of Righteousness: Idaho Christian Patriotism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

[12]The evidence is reviewed in Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 139-43 and notes. Even such prominent American history scholars as Francis Parkman and George Bancroft were proponents of these ideas.

triumphalism in support of claims about both Israelite and Anglo-Saxon origins for most Mormons.[13]

Simultaneously with these outside imports being synthesized into Mormon discourse, the middle of the century also witnessed an important theological development within Mormonism, namely an expanded understanding of the doctrine of premortal existence. During the 1830s, Mormonism shared with Protestantism the understanding that biblical and doctrinal references to predestination or foreordination referred to plans and decisions in the mind of God, not to events actually experienced by individual souls before birth. However, after Joseph Smith's work on the Book of Abraham, he came to believe that all children of God had enjoyed a conscious existence as individual spirits in God's presence before mortality. Furthermore, during that premortal period certain decisions were made and key roles assigned to certain individuals, who would become prophets and major players in the religious history of the earth. This new understanding of premortal life did not achieve general circulation in Mormonism until 1842, when the Book of Abraham was first published, and that book did not enjoy canon status as Mormon scripture until 1880.[14]

Meanwhile, after the Saints' arrival in Utah, the doctrine of premortal existence underwent a certain amount of extra-canonical expansion at both the official and the grassroots levels. One important new element was the idea that not merely individuals were foreordained by God for key roles in mortality, but even entire categories of premortal spirits were identified and set apart to be born into certain mortal lineages. Both these lineages, and the specific times and places of individual mortal births, were decided partly on the basis of divine strategy and partly on the differential premortal merit achieved by individuals. Once this expansion had occurred in the doctrine of pre-existence, then it was available for combining with the imported racialist ideas mentioned above.

Beginning in the 1850s, and for nearly a century thereafter, a certain cosmic scenario recurred in Mormon discourse (official and unofficial), namely, that the most righteous and meritorious spirit children of God in the pre-existence were designated to come forth in the last days through the lineage of Israel, especially the tribe of Ephraim, as the vanguard of the gathering. In mortality, these souls have shown an inborn propensity, in their very blood, to recognize the teachings of Christ as delivered by

[13]Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 149-58. Reynolds's contribution in particular is reviewed in 156-58.

[14]Charles R. Harrell, "The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830-1844," *BYU Studies* 28, no. 2 (1988): 75-96; Blake Ostler, "The Idea of Preexistence in the Development of Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 59-78; Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (1973): 473-88; and Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 153-56.

LDS missionaries, and to join the church in large numbers. By divine plan, these Israelites were clustered together especially in the countries of northwestern Europe, where they have been known in human history as Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, and other Germanic peoples. As such, they are an especially favored lineage, indeed a royal one, as amply demonstrated by their superiority over other peoples politically, militarily, scientifically, and culturally.[15]

Elsewhere I have explained that this racialist construction of Mormon ethnic identity functioned in large part as a defensive ideology to counter the pervasive nineteenth-century image of Mormons as a pariah people.[16] This ideology also developed in tandem with the massive numbers of conversions enjoyed by the church in England, Scandinavia, and Germany during the 1830s through the1870s. Given both the theological framework of Mormonism, and the increasingly popular racialist explanations circulating in Europe and America about the supposed superiority of the Germanic peoples, the Mormon synthesis provided a plausible explanation for missionary success, as well as a reassuring defense of Mormon ethnic claims against a hostile world.[17] Furthermore, this defensive function helps account for the persistence of Mormon racialist ideology well into the twentieth century; for by the turn of that century, conversions in Europe had largely dried up, and the church was starting to look elsewhere for the descendants of Ephraim and Israel. Even in the late 1960s, however, when I collected survey data from representative samples of Mormons in Salt Lake City and San Francisco, I found that most Mormons still believed themselves to be literal descendants of Ephraim or other Israelite tribes, and thus "God's chosen people."[18]

American Indians as Israelites

Joseph Smith was not the only religious thinker of his time with a theory about the Israelite origins of the American aborigines, but he was the

---

[15]This general line of thinking was exhibited by many prominent LDS spokesmen all the way through the first half of the twentieth century (see Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 159-64), but it was most fully and articulately codified by Joseph Fielding Smith in *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society, 1931), chs. 7 and 8, esp. pp. 42-51 and 129-30.

[16]Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 150-53. For supportive discussions on "identity construction" in social psychology, see Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Tavistock, 1985); Eugeen E. Roosens, *Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989); Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): and Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[17]Thomas F. O'Dea is well known for having described the Mormons at mid-twentieth century as a virtual ethnic group. See his *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), and his "Mormonism and the Avoidance of Sectarian Stagnation: A Study of Church, Sect, and Incipient Nationality," *American Journal of Sociology* 60 (1955): 285-93.

only one to claim possession of their Israelite history. I will not recount here the general plot of the Book of Mormon story, since it is well known to most of my readers that the book identifies these aborigines, or American Indians, as "Lamanites." While the Lamanites are portrayed as a fallen and degraded people, having rejected their ancient American prophets of God, they are nevertheless literal descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim, sons of the ancient Biblical Joseph. As such, they are peoples of divine destiny, waiting to be gathered by the Lord's modern emissaries in these last days. Indeed, the Book of Mormon, as well as the earliest Mormon discourse, portrayed white Mormons as "Gentiles," commissioned by God to bring the Book of Mormon and the gospel of Christ to the Lamanites. The converted Lamanites would subsequently assume their divine commission to build the city and temple of Zion in America as the gathering place for the ten tribes. In this endeavor, according to the earliest understanding, the white Mormon Gentiles would have an auxiliary and supportive role; but later, as I have indicated, the Mormons came to understand themselves as literal Israelites and began to take the main responsibility for building Zion (with little objection, one might add, from the reluctant Lamanites).[19]

The earliest missionary expedition of the church was to Indian tribes in the Mississippi River region, nor have the Mormons since forsaken their divine commission to convert the Lamanites. Nevertheless, the nineteenth century ended with little to show for decades of missionary effort among the Indians: At several different junctures in early Utah history,

---

[18]For example, in 1967-68, 78 percent of Salt Lake City Mormons and 62 percent of San Francisco Mormons agreed that it was "definitely true" or "probably true" that "most Latter-day Saints are literal descendants of one or more of the ancient Israelite tribes." To the question, "Who do you think are God's chosen people today?" 39 percent of Salt Lake City Mormons and 25 percent of San Francisco Mormons answered "the Latter-day Saints"exclusively. Another 32 percent in Utah and 25 percent in California were willing to include as "chosen" a few other categories such as Jews, Christians, and Americans, *along with* Mormons. Only about 20 percent in Utah and 40 percent in California responded with "none," "other," or "don't know" who are today's "chosen people." The nature and quantity of the survey data on which these figures are based have been described at some length in Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), ch. 3 and the appendix.

[19]In the common Mormon and Christian view of the time, the gentile dispensation of the gospel ("the times of the Gentiles"), obtaining since the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah, would soon be fulfilled by a new dispensation in which the gospel would go again to the House of Israel. For Mormons, this meant Lamanites as well as Jews and other Israelites. In that context, Mormons had originally understood themselves to be the Gentiles mentioned in the Book of Mormon as "nursing fathers and mothers" to the Lamanites. See the Book of Mormon title page, as well as 1 Nephi 21:22-23 and various subsequent cognate passages. As late as 1855, Orson Pratt (*Journal of Discourses* 9:178-79) envisioned this gentile role as one of assisting the Lamanites in building the New Jerusalem. Somewhat ambiguously, this idea of Anglo-Mormons as mainly Gentiles who had been merely adopted into the Israelite lineage, continued to exist in authoritative Mormon discourse alongside the claim to literal Ephraimite lineage.

the church leaders declared new resolutions, and made renewed missionary assignments to the various Indian peoples of the mountain west and southwest, but few proselytes endured. Much of the explanation for the limited success lies with the opposition experienced by the church from U.S. government Indian agents and from the missionary enterprises of other denominations. Yet it must be conceded that with rare and brief exceptions, it was the Indians themselves who showed but little interest in becoming either Lamanites or Mormons.[20]

After about 1870, most of the Indian peoples were confined by the government to reservations, and Mormons, like other Americans, saw less and less of them. Then with the assimilation of Mormons into the American mainstream after the turn of the century, succeeding generations of Mormons acquired essentially the same distorted and condescending view of the aboriginal peoples which all Americans saw in the cowboy "westerns" during most of the twentieth century. It was as though the Lamanites had returned to the pages of the Book of Mormon, and only the degraded and savage Indians remained in the Mormon consciousness. Even in the traditional "Indian Country" of the mountain states and plains states, Mormon missionaries began proselyting mainly in white communities, and no new Lamanite missions were initiated until the Navaho-Zuni (later Southwest Indian) Mission was established in 1943.

If the North American Indians had proved reluctant to see themselves as Lamanites, Mormons had long realized there were other potential Lamanites farther south. As missionary work bogged down among the tribes in the U.S., the church began making forays into Mexico, and the first enduring mission was established there in 1901. It took another twenty-five years to establish missions beyond Mexico in South America, and even then the missionaries began working primarily with the German and Italian immigrants of Brazil and Argentina.[21] Yet increasingly since the middle of the twentieth century, the growth of the church has been strong and consistent throughout Latin America, especially since World War II; and now more than a third of all Mormons are to be found in that part of the world. As that growth began to occur, church discourse began to refer less often to the Lamanite identity of the American Indian

[20]This generalization seems justified from Charles S. Peterson's *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonizing along the Little Colorado, 1870-1900* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1973), and from Lawrence G. Coates's, "A History of Indian Education by the Mormons, 1830-1900" (Ed. D. diss., Ball State University, 1969). Chapter 3 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children* describes and documents in great detail the process and generally disappointing results of nineteenth-century Mormon missionary work among American Indians.

[21]See the chronological outline of various LDS mission openings, closings, and rearrangements in (e.g.) the *Deseret News 1991-1992 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1990), pages 225-42; see also Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 23-34.

tribes, or indeed to refer to American Indians at all. Instead, the Lamanite identity was increasingly emphasized and broadened in reference to other peoples in the world where missionary success was more apparent, namely in Mexico, Latin America, and Polynesia.[22]

With scattered and periodic exceptions, one sees a long hiatus in the relationship between the LDS church and the American Indians until the middle of the twentieth century. Then, beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, a renewal of formal church programs for the Indians began, which was to be sustained for at least three decades.[23] However, this renewal does not seem to have resulted from deliberate organizational policy review and change so much as the response of the leadership to the initiatives of local and individual Mormons. What followed was a particularly interesting and felicitous convergence of biographical and organizational developments. Especially important was the career of Spencer W. Kimball, a devout and conscientious local leader in Arizona, long a sympathetic and humanitarian promoter of Indian causes in his region.[24] Elder Kimball became an apostle in 1943 and president of the church thirty years later. Very early in his apostleship, he was placed in charge of a new church agency called by various names, including the Lamanite Committee and the Indian Committee. From then on, the growth and fate of the LDS posture toward the American Indians was tied intimately to his career.[25]

While Elder Kimball was a key individual in a powerful position, he was by no means the only one responsible for the renewal of church commitment to the Indians. One of the most noteworthy programs was started at mid-century through the initiative of a local Arizona family, which heeded the pleadings of a Navaho girl for their help and sponsorship in

---

[22]See Gordon and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 241, for calculations of changing frequency and saliency of references to Indians in church discourse across time, especially the dearth until 1950.

[23]Chapter 4 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children* provides a lengthy overview, with extensive documentation, of the renewed LDS commitment and special programs for Indians during the second half of the twentieth century

[24]President Kimball grew up with a father devoted to the well being of Indians. Andrew Kimball spent a dozen years, between the mid-1880s and the mid-1890s, as President of the Indian Territory Mission. See brief reference in Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Publishing Co., 1941), 360-61.

[25]See David J. Whittaker, "Mormons and Native Americans: A Historical and Bibliographic Introduction," *Dialogue* 18, no. 4 (1985): 38-40, for an overview of sources on new LDS initiatives toward Indians starting in the mid-twentieth century. The official church magazine *Ensign* devoted its entire December 1975 issue to a description of these various programs at what, in retrospect, must be considered the apex of the church commitment. On Elder Kimball's career to this point, see the biography by his sons, Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball, Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball: Twelfth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977).

seeking a modern education. The eventual result was the massive Placement Program, in which Indian children—some as young as eight—with the (sometimes reluctant) permission of their parents, were placed with white LDS foster families during each school year. At its height in about 1970, the program placed 5,000 Indian children a year, many of whom returned each fall to the same family until graduation from high school. The white foster families were personally and financially responsible for all aspects of the lives of these Indian children. As one might imagine, this project in cross-cultural relationships produced situations ranging from the sublime to the comical to the tragic.[26]

There were other programs for the Indians in which the church invested enormous resources during this same period. One was the Indian Seminary Program. In Mormon parlance, "seminary" does not refer to professional theological education, since the church has no professional clergy. Rather, the term refers to a system of daily religious instruction for school children at the high school level. The U.S. government had set up a number of off-reservation boarding schools for Indian children, some of them in the Mountain West. The church was permitted to establish seminary programs in or near these boarding schools for Indian youngsters who were members of the church, although many non-member children participated as well. The object was to ensure that students received formal instruction in LDS doctrines, scriptures, and normative standards.[27]

Probably the most conspicuous and expensive church programs for Indians, however, were based at Brigham Young University. These were basically of two kinds: First, full scholarships were given to several hundred Indian students each year, combined with a variety of academic, social, and cultural support services to help the students adapt to the norms and expectations of the university while still retaining pride and identity in their own respective cultures. The second kind of BYU program was more in the nature of an off-campus extension program, like the international A.I.D. programs or the U.S. Peace Corps, in which experts were

---

[26]On the Indian Placement Program, see the following general descriptions, which combine factual and experiential data: James B. Allen, "The Rise and Decline of the LDS Indian Placement Program, 1947-1996," in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998) ch. 4; J. Neil Birch, "Helen John: The Beginnings of Indian Placement," *Dialogue* 18, no. 4 (1985): 119-29; T. J. Hangen, "A Place to Call Home: Studying the Indian Placement Program," *Dialogue* 30, no. 1 (1997): 53-69; and George P. Lee, *Silent Courage: An Indian Story* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987), esp. ch. 10. A professional evaluation of the program was published by Bruce A. Chadwick, Stan L. Albrecht, and Howard M. Bahr, "Evaluation of an Indian Student Placement Program," *Social Casework* 67 (November 1986), 515-24.

[27]Overviews of the seminary program for Indian children, while it lasted, will be found in Chris L. Jones, "Seminary for Six-Year Olds," *Ensign* (December 1975): 21-22; and less conveniently in Boyd K. Packer, "Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Administration of Indian Seminaries . . . ," Ed. D. diss., BYU, 1962.

sent under university auspices to Indian reservations and settlements in order to provide technical guidance and training in agriculture, range management, construction, and even social services for families or individuals troubled with alcohol abuse, conflict, or neglected children.[28]

During the heyday of these programs in the 1960s and 1970s, they fit well with the social and political environment of the period, not only in the church, where Elder Kimball's career was reaching its apex, but also in the American nation, which was undergoing a powerful civil rights movement aimed at lifting various disadvantaged minorities out of their social and economic deprivation. What the LDS church undertook in its own backyard for the Indian peoples might be understood as a uniquely Mormon parallel to the various programs and initiatives undertaken during that same period for black Americans by other denominations in major U.S. urban areas. There were also parallels in the various ways in which the intended beneficiary peoples responded to the proferred programs. Some Indians, like some blacks, held assimilationist aspirations, welcoming and appreciating the assistance and support of both church and government as indeed overdue. They were often objects of scorn, however, from the more militant and separatist movements within their own populations, who saw both the churches and government bureaucrats as undermining their cultural heritage and co-opting their political momentum.[29] For this reason, and others which I

---

[28]A comprehensive study of the extensive and enduring commitment of BYU to the academic and technical education of Indians has yet to be published. An initial overview will be found in Ernest L. Wilkinson and Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976), ch. 40. Also important, and much more candid, is V. Con Osborne, "An Appraisal of the Education Program for Native Americans at Brigham Young University, 1966-1974" (Ph. D. diss., University of Utah, 1975), which was later updated by an unpublished report by Osborne, "Indian Education at Brigham Young University, 1965-1985," prepared for BYU's Dean of Student Life, 1993, and located in the BYU archives. See also various brief articles in the December 1975 *Ensign* cited earlier

[29]The nation as a whole experienced a rise in Indian militancy during the early and middle 1970s, especially around the time of the siege and bloodshed at Wounded Knee. See Vine Deloria, *God is Red* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1973). Mormon programs, including the Placement Program, came in for their share of criticism as vehicles for destroying Indian culture, (e.g., Martin D. Topper, "Mormon Placement: The Effects of Missionary Foster Families on Navajo Adolescents," *Ethos* 7, no. 2 [1979]: 142-60), and Temple Square was sometimes picketed during LDS general conferences by the American Indian Movement or other Indian militants. See coverage of one such incident in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 9, 1973, A-3. For examples of church response, see the press release of Sunday, 8 April 1973, from Wendell J. Ashton (head of LDS Public Affairs) emphasizing the church resources which had been allocated to Indian causes in recent years. Publicity of a more general kind about the church's benign intentions and efforts where the "Lamanites" were concerned are exemplified in other articles of the same period in the *Ensign* for January, November, and December 1975, and in the *Church News* for February 16, throughout early April, and on November 16, 1974; March 1 and July 19, 1975; January 31, February 28, March 6, March 20, May 1, May 22, and May 29, 1976.

shall mention shortly, the mid-century renewal of a special LDS focus on American Indians did not survive the demise of Elder Kimball.

As for white Mormons in general, they seem to have retained a considerable ambivalence in their attitudes toward native Indians, if we judge from the survey data I collected from LDS populations in Logan, Utah, and Cardston, Alberta. This ambivalence no doubt reflects the cross-cutting influences of the Book of Mormon and of western U.S. history. That is, white Mormons who tended to think of the native peoples primarily as "Lamanites" also tended to hold more sympathetic attitudes toward them than did those regarding them primarily as "Indians."[30]

Africans, African-Americans, and the Cursed Lineage

The traditional LDS outlook on people of black African lineage is much more widely recognized and remarked upon, and other scholars, as well as I, have written extensively on the subject.[31] Accordingly, I will give it short shrift here. It is generally conceded by scholars that the Mormon prohibition against bestowing the lay priesthood on blacks did not originate with the founding prophet, Joseph Smith. A probable trend toward this prohibition can be discerned during the first few years after Smith's assassination, but the policy itself did not become official and public until it was announced by Brigham Young in Utah in 1852.[32]

[30]This ambivalence is discussed more extensively near the beginning of chapter 5 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children*, where I present data from crude but suggestive surveys of white Mormons in Logan, Utah, and in Cardston, Alberta. During a serious political dispute between the Blood Indians and the Canadian government in 1980, the white Mormon citizens of Cardston were generally put off by the Indian militancy, but those who regarded the Bloods as "Lamanites," rather than merely as "Indians," expressed somewhat more sympathy for their claims and tactics.

[31]The most thorough treatments are those by Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981); Lester E. Bush, Jr., "A Commentary on Stephen G. Taggart's *Mormonism's Negro Policy*," *Dialogue* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 86-103; Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 11-68, reprinted vol. 34, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 225-293; and Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine, An Historical Overview,' (1973): Context and Reflections, 1998," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 229-71. See also Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism and Secular Attitudes toward Negroes," *Pacific Sociological Review* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1966): 91-99; Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro: Faith, Folklore, and Civil Rights," *Dialogue* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1967): 19-39; and Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharoah's Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 10-45. The Bush and Mauss essays from *Dialogue* were volumized (along with a special introduction and conclusion) in Lester E. Bush and Armand L. Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), now out of print.

[32]The ambiguities in Mormon ecclesiastical policy toward blacks seem to have hardened gradually after1844 into the formal prohibition declared by Brigham Young in 1852, a process described in the concluding essay in Bush and Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black*, 200-08. See also Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks*, 64-73.

According to the detailed historical account of Lester Bush, a tendency to deny the priesthood to people of black ancestry finally hardened into an actual church policy only after 1880, when Joseph Smith's Book of Moses and Book of Abraham had been canonized and thus became available for scriptural support of the policy, particularly with the inference of lineage assignment in pre-mortal life.[33] This was also the period which saw the fullest and most rapid embrace of British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism in the construction of LDS lineage, as explained earlier. Racialist explanations for differential human conditions, increasingly common in both Europe and America, must have seemed all the more plausible in Utah with its northern European homogeneity, which lasted until at least the First World War. Even as late as the 1960s, my surveys of Mormons in Salt Lake City and San Francisco revealed a widespread popular acceptance of the traditional folklore about biblical marks and curses on descendants of Cain or Ham.[34]

If the United States itself, including all its institutions of government, maintained discriminatory policies toward its black citizens until after the second World War, it is not surprising that the priesthood policy of the Utah-based church, relatively isolated from the racial ferment in the rest of the country, did not change for another whole generation. I will briefly recount the process of this change later.[35]

The Lineage of Judah as a Special Case

Both before Joseph Smith's time and since, the gathering and return of the scattered Jews to Palestine has been considered an important preliminary and harbinger to the second coming of Jesus Christ, at least in Protestant Christianity. In Mormonism, as in other nineteenth-century denominations, there was some difference of opinion, and thus ambiguity, as to whether or not the return of the Jews would entail their conversion

---

[33]See Bush and Mauss, eds., *Neither White nor Black*, 208-09, and Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 153-56.

[34]For example, in the late 1960s, 52 percent of Salt Lake City Mormons and 33 percent of San Francisco Mormons accepted as "definitely" or "probably" true that "because of the wickedness of Cain and other forefathers of the Negroes, these people carry the mark of a black skin and the curse of perpetual inferiority." Large majorities of Mormons in both cities also believed "it is the will of God at present that the priesthood be withheld from Negroes" (which was, of course, official church policy at the time). These surveys are described in chapter 3 and in the appendix to Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*.

[35]In matters of secular, civil policies on race, Mormons in surveys expressed attitudes toward black rights which were actually no more discriminatory than those of most other Americans of the time. However, after the church changed its policy on the priesthood in 1978, average Mormon attitudes toward "racial justice" moved clearly to the liberal side of the spectrum. For early comparisons, see the introduction to Bush and Mauss, *Neither White nor Black*; Mauss, "Mormonism and Secular Attitudes toward Negroes" (1966); Mauss, "Mormonism and the Negro" (1967); and Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 51-54. For later comparisons, see the latter book, 152-54.

to Christianity—and, if so, whether that conversion would come before, during, or after the return. These questions were not resolved within Mormon teaching or discourse during Joseph Smith's time, although one sees in Mormon discourse from the beginning a strong philo-Semitic strain and a general rejection of anti-Semitism.

As Steven Epperson and Arnold Green have explained, the successors to Joseph Smith in LDS leadership have tended to divide into two camps on the Jewish question. One camp, following Brigham Young's ideas, expected the conversion of the Jews to be delayed until after their gathering in Palestine, but it was not an enthusiastic expectation. (One senses in Young's comments, at least, a pessimism about Jewish receptivity to the gospel message, if not outright anti-Semitism). However, the other camp, following Parley and Orson Pratt, embraced a more optimistic and universalistic position, holding, with the Apostle Paul, that the ancient covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in the Christian gospel, to which the truly devout Jews must now turn, along with all of humankind.[36]

Since Young was the president of the church until his death in 1877, his views tended to obtain in church proselyting policy. Accordingly, although a handful of Jews as individuals joined the church during the nineteenth century, no missions among the Jews were attempted until the twentieth century, and then only to American Jews and only spasmodically. Apostle Orson Hyde had been sent by Joseph Smith in 1841 to dedicate Palestine for the gathering and return of the Jews; but Hyde's dedicatory prayers (and those of subsequent LDS emissaries to the Holy Land) did not refer to the proselyting or conversion of the Jews, as have dedicatory prayers in other locations.[37] Furthermore, according to

---

[36]The most thorough explorations of the differences among early Mormon leaders on what should be done (if anything) about the conversion of the Jews will be found in Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), and in two long essays by Arnold H. Green, "Jews in LDS Thought," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 137-64, and "Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 195-228. Epperson and Green both identify two distinct strains in Mormon thought and describe them similarly but not identically. Of necessity, I have greatly simplified the matter here, but I have evaluated the conceptualizations of Epperson and Green more thoroughly in chapter 6 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children*.

[37]On the significance of the dedicatory visits of Hyde and subsequent LDS leaders to Palestine, see Epperson, *Jews and Mormons*, 209; Green, "Jews in LDS Thought," 144; and David B. Galbraith, "Orson Hyde's 1841 Mission to the Holy Land," *Ensign* (October1991): 16-20. Mormons have never had a proselyting mission for Jews in the Middle East. However, intermittently between 1889 and 1950, there was a mission in the area focused mainly on other peoples, especially Christian Armenians. This mission was called by various names (e.g., Turkish and Near East), but produced very few durable converts. See accounts in Rao H. Lindsay, "The Dream of a Mormon Colony in the Near East," *Dialogue* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1966): 49-67; and Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), ch. 8.

Epperson, some of the early Mormon leaders seem to have hypothesized that the Jews had, as it were, a "side-deal" with God obviating the need for their formal conversion to Christianity before the end-times.[38]
After World War I, the pogroms of eastern Europe, and the Balfour Declaration, the prophesied return of the Jews to Palestine en masse seemed once again imminent to both Mormons and other Christians. Along with others, Mormons deplored the traditional treatment of the Jews, even while seeing their displacement as fulfillment of prophecy. As early as 1920, the president of the church issued warnings in general conference against anti-Semitism, and hopes ran high that the latest Jewish gathering would be accompanied by a new receptivity to the Christian (specifically LDS) gospel.[39] When church authority B. H. Roberts was appointed mission president over the eastern states in 1922, he recognized early that millions of Jews lived in New York and elsewhere in his jurisdiction. He gave special attention to his Jewish prospects and established collaborative relationships with a Jewish Christian group. He also wrote a book and a number of proselyting tracts packaging the Mormon message especially for Jews. This effort persisted until 1932 without producing any Jewish converts.[40]

A similar renewal of enthusiasm for potential Jewish conversions occurred after the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. This time the main champion of Jewish conversion was Apostle LeGrand Richards, who was given permission in the early 1950s to establish a number of "experimental" Jewish missions in several U.S. cities, especially Los Angeles. His book, *Israel, Do You Know?*, was a clarion call for Judah to join with Mormon Ephraim in preparing for the return of the Messiah, and a number of special proselyting plans for Jews were designed by LDS mission leaders in various cities. Once again, the effort lasted a decade or

---

[38]Epperson was severely criticized for taking this position in a review essay by Grant Underwood, "The Jews and their Future in Early LDS Doctrine," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 110-24. All things considered, I find myself somewhat in sympathy with Epperson's view, but I agree that he exaggerated the extent of Jewish exceptionalism in the thinking of early Mormon leaders. A more recent and cursory review of LDS thinking on this matter also comes to the conclusion that Mormons generally have been inclined to leave in God's hands the schedule and arrangements for the ultimate conversion of the Jews to Christ (Keith E. Norman, "The Use and Abuse of Anti-Semitism in the Scriptures," *Dialogue* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 167-79.

[39]Discussion of this renewed optimism about Jewish gathering and conversion are discussed, for example, in Green, "Gathering and Election," 214-19. In a well known 1921 general conference address, President Heber J. Grant deplored the anti-Semitic propaganda then circulating in the world and reminded his listeners that they must not take part in any anti-Semitic causes; for "in no part of the world is there as good a feeling in the hearts of mankind toward the Jewish people as among the Latter-day Saints" (*Conference Report*, April 1921, 124).

[40]Arnold H. Green, "A Survey of LDS Proselyting Efforts to the Jewish People," *BYU Studies* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1968): 427-43.

less with a very poor cost/benefit ratio. By 1960 the First Presidency abolished the special missions and directed that henceforth Jews were not to be given any special attention in proselyting. Since then, with the exception of a local mission president here or there, the LDS church has deliberately refrained from proselyting among Jews as a people.[41] Yet popular LDS conceptions about Jews, as revealed in my surveys in the 1960s, have always been remarkably free of anti-Semitism, despite a belief that Jews will eventually have to be converted.[42]

The Ascendancy of Mormon Universalism and the Erosion of Ethnic Consciousness

The final decades of the twentieth century brought a virtual end to the LDS focus on lineage and ethnicity in interpreting the spiritual histories and destinies of the various peoples of the earth. This focus has been displaced increasingly by the Pauline universalism that was also present in Mormonism from the beginning, and, of course, in New Testament Christianity all along. In symbolic terms, one might say that the blood of Christ has finally replaced the blood of Israel as the more important theological idea for Mormons and for others. This trend has paralleled the

[41]Ibid. Elder Richards had been an enthusiastic advocate for Jewish proselyting even before entering the ranks of the general authorities. His views and basic approach to this enterprise were set forth in his *Israel, Do You Know?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954). Also, on the Richards campaign in particular, see the oral history interviews conducted by William G. Hartley with Rose Marie Reid during July and August 1973, especially the fourth one (Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives). With Elder Richards's encouragement and sponsorship, Ms. Reid (a prominent California swimsuit designer with extensive Jewish contacts) designed a process and series of lessons to be used by LDS missionaries in teaching Jews. The program was used extensively in southern California during the 1950s, as well as in Utah and elsewhere for awhile.

[42]During the 1960s, in surveys comparing San Francisco Bay Area Mormons with Catholics and Protestants in the same area, Mormons consistently had relatively low figures on rates of anti-Semitic attitudes and beliefs, based on measures created by Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark in their *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper, 1966). See also Armand L. Mauss, "Mormon Semitism and Anti-Semitism," *Sociological Analysis* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 11-27. A more elaborate presentation of such data from Salt Lake City Mormons and San Francisco Mormons will be found in chapter 7 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children*. See also the lengthy historical overview of Mormon-Jewish relationships by Rudolf Glanz, *Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relations and Religious Outlooks* (New York: Waldon Press, 1963). Jews who have written of associations with Mormons also report little evidence of anti-Semitism in their personal experiences. See, e. g., Seymour Cain, "Mormons and Jews," *Midstream* 39 (October 1993): 31; Jack Goodman, "Jews in Zion," in *The Peoples of Utah*, ed. Helen Z. Papanikolas (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1976) ch. 5; Steve Siporin, "A Jew among the Mormons," *Dialogue* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 113-22; and Louis C. Zucker, "A Jew in Zion: Memories of Half a Century in Utah," *Sunstone* 6, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1981): 35-44. For a less glowing view of life among the Mormons, see Hanna Bandes, "Gentile and Gentile: Mormon and Jew," *Midstream* 27 (February 1981): 7-12.

effort to eliminate racial discrimination in the U.S., the home base of Mormonism. Yet it would be a gross oversimplification to see this trend as merely a Mormon effort to achieve political correctness on the American political scene. At least as important as politics have been the practical experience and differential success of the church in its own proselyting programs.

Relationships with Jews

If we look, for example, at recent Mormon relationships with Jews, they have taken the form not of proselyting but of searching for common ground and common interests. Mormons have always favored Zionism in Palestine, although in recent years with a more balanced appreciation for Palestinian rights and aspirations. In the earliest years after the establishment of the new state of Israel in 1948, comments by Mormon leaders, whether in public or in private, revealed a strong pro-Israel sentiment, based primarily on their inherited religious eschatology about the significance of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. Also, in common with other Americans, most Mormons tended to approve of the new state as an entitlement for Jews in the wake of the holocaust experience, and to see the resistance by Palestinians and certain Arab states as illegitimate in the face of both divine and U.N. mandates. Later in the century, however, as the power and prosperity of the state of Israel made it seem much less the underdog in the region, Mormons seemed increasingly to have separated opinions about the state of Israel from their favorable feelings toward Jews more generally. By the end of the century, Mormon leaders and members had adopted a more balanced perspective on Israeli conflicts with the Palestinians.[43]

---

[43] Evidence for a Mormon outreach toward the Arab world, and Palestine in particular, can be seen at both the scholarly and the political levels. See, for example, the collection in Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1983); and Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided* (cited above). Important articles with more official church status would include Camille Fronk and Ray L. Huntington, "The Palestine Refugee Family Study," *Newsletter of the BYU Religious Studies Center* 12, no. 3 (May 1998): 1-4; Howard W. Hunter, "All Are Alike unto God," *Ensign* (June 1979): 72-74; James B. Mayfield, "Ishmael, Our Brother," *Ensign* (June 1979): 24-32; Herbert F. Murray, "Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Ensign* (January 1971): 21-23; and D. Kelly Ogden and David B. Galbraith, response in the "I Have a Question" section of the *Ensign* (September 1993): 52-53, to the query, "What are the reasons behind the long-standing conflicts in the Holy Land, and how should Latter-day Saints view such conflicts?" In all these articles, readers are admonished not to take sides in the Arab-Israeli conflicts, since both sides have legitimate aspirations and grievances. The same theme was emphasized in a 1986 lecture series by David B. Galbraith, then about to become director of the LDS Jerusalem Center (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Saturday, August 23, 1986, 2B). Indeed, some Jewish commentators have found the modern Mormon posture toward Israel a little *too* balanced. See Moshe Dann, "The Mormon Church, Israel, and the Arabs," *Midstream* 33 (May 1987): 10-11.

In their relationships with Israelis and with Jews throughout the world, Mormons seem to have come to the realization, however reluctantly, that prospects for the conversion of Jews in any appreciable numbers are extremely remote for the foreseeable future. Of course, theologically and theoretically, Mormon leaders still expect that sooner or later "every knee must bow and every tongue confess" that Jesus is the Christ, and that includes the Jews. However, it is doubtful that any Mormon leader today would expect such a spiritual consummation of the world's history to be imminent. Meanwhile, perhaps in preparation for that wondrous day, church leaders obviously consider it important for Mormons and Jews to build amicable relationships of the kind which (for example) have made possible the establishment of the Hyde Memorial Garden and the BYU Center in Jerusalem (on condition, incidentally, of no Mormon proselyting).[44] The same strategy can be seen at the scholarly level in the sympathetic commemoration at BYU of the Holocaust experience and in the collaboration between BYU and Israeli academics in preserving and promoting study of the Dead Sea Scrolls.[45]

However, perhaps no incident so well typifies the new Mormon sensitivity to the Jewish religious heritage as the rapid response of LDS leaders in 1995 to Jewish complaints about the vicarious temple baptisms

---

[44]On the establishment and purposes of the Hyde Memorial Garden (dedicated in October 1979) and the more controversial BYU Jerusalem Center (opened in 1987), see Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided*, 343-53; "BYU President Defends School's Jerusalem Center," *Ensign* (October 1985): 73-74 (news item, no author); Dan Fisher, "Mormon Issue Splits Israelis into Two Camps," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 1986, p.1; Thomas A. Indianopulos, "Mormon-Jewish Turmoil in Zion," *Christian Century* 102 (December 1985): 1123-26; and Teddy Kollek, "Reflections on Howard W. Hunter in Jerusalem," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 6-15. The most knowledgeable figure on relations between Mormons and Israelis during the 1970s and 1980s is probably David B. Galbraith, who lived in Israel beginning in 1969 and, from 1979 on, served as district president over the three small LDS branches in that country. He was obviously a key participant in the negotiations which eventually permitted the church to establish the Garden and the Center in Jerusalem. A 1984 interview with Galbraith in Jerusalem by a visiting student from California will be found as part of the Moyle Oral History collection in the LDS Church Archives.

[45]For example, a fiftieth commemorative "Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches" was held at BYU in early March 1995, and featured as keynote speaker, Mr. Tom Lantos (D-California), a non-Mormon Hungarian Jew and Holocaust survivor, as well as a number of others being honored at the conference for their work in Holocaust research, museums, films, and other aspects. One of the organizers of the conference was Douglas F. Tobler, a BYU German Language professor and former LDS mission president in Germany. See Tobler's "The Jews, the Mormons, and the Holocaust," *Journal of Mormon History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 59-92. The collaborative work on ancient documents, with scholars in Israel and Palestine, has taken place largely under the auspices of BYU's Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), which in 1997 established a special Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. FARMS and this center have produced a number of publications and videos on their work with the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient documents. See any recent FARMS catalogue for more information.

of deceased Holocaust victims. In a gesture rich with both symbolic and political significance, the church halted all such Jewish baptisms, even though they would have had no spiritual or theological efficacy except to Mormons themselves. In light of this incident, one might be tempted to conclude that the Mormons have given up (at least temporarily) on efforts to convert even those Jews who have departed to the next world. [46]

The Changing Church Posture toward Blacks

The policy change toward Africans and African Americans in 1978 is at least as interesting a story as how the original policy was instituted in the first place. I have recounted these events in detail elsewhere, while others have also offered parts of the explanation.[47] Outside observers have tended to seek the explanation for change in external political pressure or in church sensitivity to public image; such influences cannot be discounted but should not be exaggerated. Again, the explanation for change is best understood in light of the church's own imperatives, particularly its growth-oriented pragmatism.[48] Two episodes, in particular, were influential in driving home to LDS leaders the potential of their traditional ideas about race and lineage to undermine their aspirations for a worldwide Mormon presence. The first of these episodes occurred in the early 1960s: A very promising opportunity for Mormon expansion into West Africa had to be aborted when the Nigerian government refused entry to Mormon missionaries because of the church's policies and teachings about people of black African ancestry. The church leadership came close to a consensus on policy change shortly thereafter, and again just six years later, but in both cases the consensus broke down at the last minute.[49]

It was the second episode which finally precipitated the change. This was the decision, again largely on the initiative of President Spencer W. Kimball, to build a Mormon temple in Brazil, a country with

---

[46]However, by agreement with the several Jewish organizations involved, LDS members are still permitted to do vicarious temple ordinances for Jews who happen to be their own direct ancestors. See the press coverage of this development in late April and early May 1995, e.g., Kristen Moulton (Associated Press), "Mormons to Stop Baptizing Dead Holocaust Victims," *Ogden (Utah) Standard-Examiner*, April 29, 1995, 1B-2B, and (same title, longer article) in the *Moscow (Idaho) Daily News*, Weekend, April 29-30, 1995, 5A.

[47]See Mauss, "Fading of the Pharoah's Curse" (1981) and Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine.'"

[48]In this I have disagreed with others who tend to see such changes in church policy primarily as responses to external pressure from politics or the mass media. See O. Kendall White and Daryl White, "Abandoning an Unpopular Policy: An Analysis of the Decision Granting the Mormon Priesthood to Blacks," *Sociological Analysis* 41 (Fall 1980): 231-45, and our subsequent exchange in the pages of the same journal, 42 (Fall 1981): 277-83 and 283-88.

[49]Mauss, "Fading of the Pharoah's Curse," 14-19; Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 233-44.

an especially large contingent of African ancestry. Despite a discriminatory policy toward people of that ancestry, the growth of the church in Brazil had been so rapid by 1974 that a temple was overdue by usual church criteria. The problem, of course, was that priesthood access is a condition for participation in Mormon temple rituals. Thus, on the one hand, Brazil was ready for a temple; on the other hand, however, the church faced the prospect of having to deny temple entry to a large proportion of its Brazilian converts, many of whom, indeed, would have contributed their time, energy, and treasure to its construction. Just weeks before the temple was completed in 1978, President Kimball, in an inspiring combination of spiritual and political astuteness, brought his colleagues in the leadership to an acceptance of his own understanding of God's will in the matter. The important contribution of the missionary effort in Brazil, and of the converts there, in bringing about the policy change is the subject of a paper by Mark Grover.[50]

Although the policy of priesthood restriction was changed a quarter century ago, there remains a strong residue, at least among North American Mormons, of the theological folklore traditionally used to justify that policy, and which I found especially strong in my surveys of the 1960s.[51] This racist folklore continues to appear in the latest editions of widely purchased books written by earlier Mormon leaders, and in the grassroots "explanations" sometimes offered by lifelong Mormons when they are asked about the erstwhile church policy toward blacks.[52] As long as that folklore lingers in the popular Mormon grapevine, it will continue to offend converts and potential converts of African ancestry. While the current president of the church has publicly indicated that he sees no necessity for formally repudiating doctrines which are obviously obsolete,

---

[50]Ibid., pp. 24-27 (Mauss) and pp. 265-70 (Bush). See also Bush's concluding essay in *Neither White nor Black*, 208-14; and Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy."

[51]The surveys in question, and the racial folklore they revealed, are described in an earlier note. In addition, see comparisons of Mormons with others in tendencies to accept various racial myths of a more social kind (e.g. "Negro intelligence"), esp. 51-53 in my *Angel and Beehive*. See also the concluding chapters of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children* for changes across time in survey results comparing Mormons with others on race attitudes and policies.

[52]Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966) is a widely consulted "classic" in Mormon homes, despite never having received official endorsement. Even after a slightly revised 1979 paperback version, it continues to contain various references tying divine approval to ostensibly racial characteristics. See, for example, the entries on Negroes, Cain, Ham, Pre-existence, Priesthood, and Races of Men. Most of the material on these subjects comes from the earlier teachings of McConkie's father-in-law and late church president, Joseph Fielding Smith in *The Way to Perfection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1931), especially chapters 7, 15, and 16, also still in print and easily available to church members. The problems created for the church by the perpetuation of such literature are discussed at some length by Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling in *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), ch. 6.

some of his younger colleagues in the leadership share the view that whether or not it is obsolete, racist folklore from the past can continue to undermine the prospects for church growth until it is formally and publicly repudiated.[53] Such folklore, of course, has always been primarily a European and Euro-American preoccupation, so it does not seem to have restrained Mormon growth among black populations in Africa, in the Caribbean, or in Latin America. However, Mormon growth among black Americans has been very slow, and retention has been relatively poor, a predicament likely attributable, at least in part, to the persistence of racist folklore at the Mormon grassroots in the U.S.[54]

The New Lamanites

An important line of argument in this paper has been that traditional Mormon teachings about lineage-as-destiny have proved operationally flexible in light of church experience with conversion and retention in various parts of the world. In the case of African lineage, the divine curse was removed as missionary prospects became increasingly important in Africa and in Latin America. In the case of the Jews, who have proved consistently impervious to Mormon (and other Christian) conversion efforts, the church has retained its belief in the divine destiny of the lineage of Judah but has left their conversion to God's own timetable and special arrangements, sensing the wisdom of maintaining good relationships between Judah and Ephraim. As for the Israelite lineage of the natives of the western hemisphere, we can see a gradual shift in the operational definition of that lineage from north to south as church growth has bogged down among the Indians of North America and (by contrast) mushroomed in Latin America.

By the time of President Kimball's death in 1985, the special LDS missions for North American Indians were already being reorganized and assimilated into the regular missions of the church for all citizens of the various states and provinces.[55] The same was true of the special

---

[53]One attempt in 1998 by a prominent general authority to get official, public repudiation of the LDS legacy of such racial folklore is recounted by Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 103-05.

[54]Ibid., 105-06. See also Jessie L. Embry, *Black Saints in a White Church: Contemporary African-American Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), and "Separate but Equal? Black Branches, Genesis Groups, or Integrated Wards?" *Dialogue* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 11-37; also Cardell K. Jacobson, "Black Mormons in the 1980s: Pioneers in a White Church," *Review of Religious Research* 33 (December 1991): 146-52; and O. Kendall White and Daryl White, "Integrating Religious and Racial Identities: An Analysis of LDS African-American Explanations of the Priesthood Ban," *Review of Religious Research* 36 (March 1995): 295-311.

[55]For example, in July, 1984, the Navajo-Zuni Mission was transferred to the Arizona Phoenix Mission; this was also the general pattern for the few other missions established mainly for Indians in the twentieth century.

seminaries for the religious instruction of Indian youth and the placement program for reservation school children with white families during each school year.[56] Perhaps most conspicuously, the special programs at BYU for Indian scholarships, Indian instructional support, and other forms of special focus on the needs of Lamanites were closed down or transferred to private agencies.[57] While a variety of reasons for this decline in Lamanite emphasis might be offered, it seems clear that the main explanation is to be found, once again, in a cost/benefit analysis of such a use of church resources.

While not obvious at the time, the death knell of these special programs was probably sounded by Elder Boyd K. Packer during a 1979 speech to an assembly of BYU Indian students. While couched in diplomatic language, Elder Packer's remarks were unmistakable in their purport. In effect, he made a number of comparisons between the Lamanites of North America and those of South America, chastising the former (represented in the assembly before him) for a general failure to live up to the hopes and expectations which the church had placed in them during an entire generation of special programs. He charged, in effect, that they had not used their special educational advantages to serve the church as missionaries and leaders among other Lamanites, and had not even remained very faithful to the LDS way of life. Some of what he criticized them for (including their seeming reluctance to accept organizational leadership and to conduct meetings) could be understood as tribal cultural traits, indicating simply an incomplete assimilation to white ways. In any case, as Elder Packer said, "If it sounds like I'm scolding you. . .it will be because I am."[58]

Probably more than anyone realized, Elder Packer's remarks on that occasion also signaled a redefinition of Lamanite lineage, operationally if not ideologically, such that the main stronghold of that lineage was to be found now in Latin America and in Polynesia, not on the Indian reservations of the U.S. or Canada. There is no question that Joseph Smith and the entire founding generation of Mormons believed that the Indians of North America were the Lamanites of the Book of Mormon. They certainly recognized that the aboriginal peoples of Latin America might also

---

[56]Beginning in 1980, seminary classes for Indian youngsters were integrated into the general high school seminary program of the church. The foster Placement Program was closed down more gradually, but it had died a natural death for all practical purposes before the end of the century (James Allen, "Rise and Decline," 107-10).

[57]See Osborne, "Indian Education at BYU,"and its appendices; and chapter 4 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children*.

[58]Elder Boyd K. Packer, "Indian Week Speaker, February, 1979" (unpublished draft in BYU Archives and copy in my files). The speech was published in the next issue of the Indian student newspaper, *Eagle's Eye*.

be Lamanites, and they saw an intimation from a brief passage in the Book of Mormon that at least some Polynesians might also be included (Alma 63:5-8). Yet nineteenth-century Mormons searched almost exclusively in North America for the Lamanites who, in prophecy, were to join with them in building a new Zion in America.[59]

Despite very hard going for more than a century, the LDS church periodically launched one special initiative or program after another to fulfill its God-given responsibility to these "benighted peoples of destiny." In terms of the sheer number of conversions on record, these efforts were certainly not negligible: By 1980, there were more than 60,000 American Indians on church membership records, constituting five percent of the total North American Indian population (more than twice the percentage for white Americans). Yet, among these thousands, relatively few have married within the faith and established Mormon families or embraced normative Mormonism in the conduct of their lives. Accordingly, relatively few can be brought into organizational leadership, where they can be bishops or stake presidents and thus promote the growth of the church from within their own cultures.[60]

The contrast with Mormon converts in Latin America is dramatic. More than a third of the entire population of the LDS church now lives in that part of the hemisphere. The local and regional leadership and much of the missionary work are in the hands of the native members, including many of aboriginal or mixed ancestry. The same has been true in most of Polynesia, where in some cases the LDS percentage of the

---

[59]LDS aspirations and missionary work among the Lamanites were focused mostly on North American Indians throughout the nineteenth century. The main exceptions were a brief missionary presence across the Arizona border into Mexico late in the century, a brief and abortive foray into Chile by Parley P. Pratt in 1852, and a durable mission in Hawaii after about 1860.

[60]Estimates of the LDS Indian population, and of the number and strength of Indian branches at their height, can vary greatly depending on how much of North America is included, and on whether the count includes branches in stakes, as well as in missions. Figures provided me in 1975 by Stewart Durrant, coordinator of Minority Affairs (as the "Lamanite Committee" head was then called) estimated the LDS Lamanite population in the U. S. and Canada at 61,000 (not counting Latin America or Polynesia), or about 4.5 percent of the total American Indian population. One 1981 estimate put the figure at 40,000 among the Navajos alone, or about 20 percent of that tribal population (Steve Pavlik, "Of Saints and Lamanites: An Analysis of Navajo Mormonism," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8, no. 1 [Spring 1992]: 21). Enormous cultural differences underlie the frustrations which white Mormon leaders and missionaries have always felt in trying to get Indian members to participate actively and permanently in LDS church life. Certainly this frustration is apparent in the "scolding" of Elder Packer (mentioned above) as well as in various accounts of experienced white Mormon leaders in the field. See, e. g., Michael Fillerup, "Hozhoogoo Nanina Doo," *Dialogue* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 153-82, and the final pages of chapter 4 in my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children*.

population approaches half.[61] Accordingly, some in the church have begun in recent years to wonder if it is in these countries where the real Lamanites may be found. However, this issue has not been addressed in any formal way by the church leadership itself, whose concerns are far more pragmatic—namely the conversion and retention of members, in whatever manner their lineage might be constructed in spiritual or theological terms. Precisely locating the true Israelites (or Lamanites) of the Americas has always been of more interest to Mormon academics and intellectual apologists than to the ecclesiastical leaders.[62]

At the turn of the twentieth century, the first expedition in search of the ancient cities of the Book of Mormon was led to Mexico by Benjamin C. Cluff, president of BYU. The expedition was an expensive and embarrassing debacle, and no similar enterprise was undertaken for half a century.[63] Then, in the 1950s, a group of BYU-based Mormon archaeologists, some amateurs and some professionals, formed the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAF), backed in large part by church funds, and began again to search in Latin America for archaeological evidence which might authenticate the Book of Mormon scientifically. This effort, which lasted a decade or so, was more sophisticated than the earlier one but scarcely more successful. It was unlikely, in any case, that the scientific world outside of Mormonism would have placed much credence in the discoveries of Mormon apologists, however careful and successful their work might have seemed to insiders.[64]

---

[61]By the end of the twentieth century, LDS church membership had reached one million in Mexico alone, and four million in Latin America altogether. See *Deseret News 1997-1998 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1996), 355. The first durable missionary presence of Mormons in Polynesia dates from the 1860s in Hawaii (then called "Sandwich Islands"). Earlier missionary forays had been tried and abandoned after a few years in both the Sandwich Islands and in the Society Islands (Tahiti). Since about 1890, Mormon missionary success throughout Polynesia has been remarkable, with Mormons now comprising large percentages of the total populations of Hawaii, Tahiti, Tonga, Samoa, Maori New Zealand, and other Polynesian islands. By the end of the twentieth century, Mormon membership in Polynesia and Oceania exceeded 100,000 (See *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1992] especially "Oceania," 1022-26, and "Polynesians," 1110-12).

[62]LDS history scholar Kenneth W. Godfrey, as part of an article on quite a different topic, points out (with several examples) that church leaders, past and present, have had various ideas on where the Book of Mormon story took place, but they have not "discourage[d] students and scholars in their studies regarding Book of Mormon geography." See Godfrey's "What is the Significance of Zelph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 70-79.

[63]For a lively account of the Cluff expedition, see Samuel W. Taylor's *Rocky Mountain Empire: The Latter-day Saints Today* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1978), ch. 11, and more briefly Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 10-12.

[64]The decline, and then resurgence, of church interest in the study of the Book of Mormon is documented and explained by Noel B. Reynolds in "The Coming Forth of the Book

The most recent academic approach under church auspices to the study of the Book of Mormon and its ostensible Israelite protagonists can be found in the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), organized two decades ago as a private foundation but recently brought under BYU administration. FARMS sponsors and promotes all kinds of research on ancient scriptures and documents, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, but its main focus is on the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient book of scripture. Its approach is much more cautious and realistic than the earlier efforts. For one thing, while FARMS reprints (with permission) relevant archaeological literature on pre-Columbian migrations to America as published by non-Mormon experts, it does not do any archaeological research of its own. Rather, its research on the Book of Mormon is primarily of a literary and philological kind, which is far less subject to debunking than was the earlier archaelogical research.[65]

For our purposes, the most important feature of the FARMS publications is their apparent consensus regarding the proposition that the Book of Mormon story all took place within a radius of about 500 miles in the Yucatan area of Mexico and Guatemala.[66] Therefore, if there are any survivors of that ancient Israelite or Lamanite people, they are probably located in that area rather than on the Indian reservations of

---

of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 7-47. On pp. 17-18, Reynolds identifies the most important mid-century scholars in Book of Mormon studies, including Sidney Sperry, Hugh Nibley, Francis Kirkham, Wells Jakeman, Ross Christensen, and John Sorenson. In the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (172), H. Donl Peterson adds the names Milton R. Hunter and Thomas S. Ferguson. Hunter, like B. H. Roberts earlier, represents a rare case of direct involvement in such scholarly enterprises by a general authority of the church. The NWAF continued to function to some extent throughout the rest of the century. See W. K. Howell, D. Ranae, and E. Copeland, *Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation* (Provo, Utah: NWAF, BYU, 1959-95). Ferguson's own career and eventual disillusionment with the work of the NWAF (and with Book of Mormon claims more generally) is recounted in Stan Larson, *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1996).

[65]This is a very limited description of the work of FARMS, but for more information see Reynolds, "Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," 37-40, and his "Shedding New Light on Ancient Origins: Scholars Illuminate Book of Mormon Authorship," *Brigham Young University Magazine* (alumni publication), Spring 1998, 38-45. The various projects and publications of FARMS are listed in an annual catalogue and in its monthly newsletter *Insights*. In chapter 5 of my forthcoming *All Abraham's Children* I consider the work and significance of FARMS at much greater length as part of my discussion of the ongoing redefinition of "Lamanite" identity.

[66]This is the underlying thesis of an important book by BYU anthropologist John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient Setting for the Book of Mormon Story* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., and Provo: FARMS, 1985). The thesis is implicitly embraced in the quasi-official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (208) in an article by Stephen D. Ricks, "Book of Mormon Studies." Like most of the authors commissioned to write on the Book of Mormon for the *Encyclopedia*, Ricks has been closely associated with FARMS.

North America. The success of Mormon missionary work in that area during the past generation has lent credence to that supposition. It is important to emphasize again that there has been no new determination or pronouncement from church leadership as to where today's Lamanites might or might not be located. Yet it seems reasonable to see FARMS, with its BYU auspices, as the source of a new quasi-official definition of Lamanite lineage, which definition would make more understandable both the rapid recent growth of Mormonism in Meso-America and the relative stagnation of such growth in North America.[67]

It is unlikely that church leadership will ever make any official statements on this matter, for one of the interesting side-stories in this process concerns the tendency of various native converts to become invested in their own definition as the true Israelites, in contradistinction to the merely "grafted" Israelites of Anglo-Mormonism. This tendency contributed to the recent falling out between church leadership and Elder George P. Lee, the only Native American Indian ever to serve in the ranks of the general authorities before his excommunication a decade ago.[68] The same tendency contributed to a major schism among Mexican Mormons in the 1930s, while even today there are leading Mormons in Mexico whose public discourse reveals a devout belief in their Israelite and Lamanite heritage. Thomas W. Murphy has discovered this same construction of Israelite identity among Mormons in Guatemala.[69] In any case, we see here again an interesting relationship (going both ways) between the identification of Israelite lineage and prospects for church growth.[70]

---

[67]FARMS and Sorenson have especially favored Mayan sites, lore, and surviving artifacts in their work on likely candidates for ancient Book of Mormon locations, as will be apparent from a perusal of back-issues of *Insights* and of the FARMS catalogue.

[68]Lee's fall from grace and eventual excommunication were described in many Utah newspapers during September 1989, and his grievances were laid out in an article and two long letters published in *Sunstone* 13 (August 1989), "The Lee Letters,"47-55. His autobiography, *Silent Courage: An Indian Story* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987), published only two years earlier, heavily muted the frustrations he was already feeling.

[69]On the Third Convention, and the role therein particularly of Elder Margarito Bautista, see F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987), chs. 5 and 6. On the uses of Lamanite/Israelite identity by Mexican and other Mormons in recent years, see Thomas W. Murphy, "From Racist Stereotype to Ethnic Identity: Instrumental Uses of Mormon Racial Doctrine," *Ethnohistory* 46, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 451-80; and "Other Mormon Histories: Lamanite Subjectivity in Mexico," *Journal of Mormon History* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 179-214.

[70]Other examples could also be adduced. The integration of imported Mormonism with Maori lore has contributed to the strengthening of both kinds of identity in New Zealand. See Grant Underwood, "Mormonism, the Maori, and Cultural Authenticity," *Journal of Pacific History* 35, no. 2 (September 2000): 133-46.

The Universalization of Israelite Lineage

I return, finally, to the nineteenth-century Mormon "search for Ephraim" discussed earlier in this paper. I have argued that across time Mormons have attached changing differential spiritual significance to the African, Jewish, and AmerIndian lineages, depending largely on the missionary imperative and its prospects. What about the Anglo-Saxon and northern European Mormons, with their constructions of their own lineage as Israelite (and specifically Ephraimite)? Here again, we can see a definite tendency during the twentieth century in the discourse of church leaders to drop the earlier glorification of their own European lineage in favor of a universal appeal to the world's peoples. This process seems to have proceeded in stages.

The first stage was the decline in church growth and missionary prospects in northern Europe, which had been regarded as the homeland of the superior Germanic and Israelite breeds led there anciently by providence or destiny or both. Part of this decline was attributable, of course, to large-scale migration of Mormon converts from that part of the world to Utah. Yet, after about 1870, conversion rates in the northern European countries no longer replaced the departing converts, and some church leaders remarked publicly that perhaps the harvest of Israelite descendants had been completed there, with only gleaning left to do.[71]

Meanwhile, as the second stage in the process of universalization, the blood of Israel began to be discovered in various other parts of the world. I have already commented on the successes in Polynesia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Besides there and in Latin America, missions were opened in eastern Europe, white South Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. To all these regions, church leaders and mission presidents made visits and tours, returning to Utah to proclaim that the blood of Israel was to be found in all such climes.[72] Even after the Japan Mission closed in 1924 for lack of results, the mission president returned to testify in general conference that the blood of Israel had reached that country from ancient migrations out of the Middle East.[73] In effect, these traveling church leaders became advocates

[71]When missionary success tapered off in northwestern Europe, lineage theory again provided an explanation: The blood of Israel had already been successfully gathered there. (See, e. g., Franklin D. Richards, *Conference Report*, October 1898, 33.) On the downturn in Mormon missionary harvests in the British Isles after 1870, see Frederick S. Buchanan, "The Ebb and Flow of Mormonism in Scotland, 1840-1900," *BYU Studies* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 27-52; and Bruce A. Van Orden, "The Decline in Convert Baptisms and Member Emigration from the British Mission after 1870," same journal issue, 97-105.

[72]See Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 166-67, for discussions in official LDS discourse about the "blood of Israel" in various parts of the world, especially in the period after the ebbing of baptismal rates in northwestern Europe.

[73]Lloyd O. Ivie, *Conference Report*, April 1926, 96.

for the presence of Israelite lineages in the countries in which they visited and labored.

As a third stage in this process, one might see a gradual evolution in the understanding of lineage assignment during patriarchal blessings. In this rather unique LDS institution, church members may apply for blessings at the hands of specially designated patriarchs in each stake. These blessings are understood by Mormons as divinely inspired statements of guidance and admonition to each individual, outlining his or her potential for spiritual and other growth and accomplishment, contingent upon faithfulness to the gospel. A regular feature of the patriarchal blessing since the 1840s, at least, has been the declaration of lineage, in which the patriarch designates the individual's genealogical descent, usually from one of the ancient tribes of Israel, and almost universally from the tribe of Ephraim. Until recent decades, this lineage assignment was understood in literal terms—that is, the patriarch, by divine insight, was revealing the individual's actual genealogy.[74]

However, in more recent years different patriarchs have come to different understandings of lineage assignment, not always literal. I have held informal conversations about this issue with dozens of stake patriarchs in recent years and have found many who take the reference to lineage literally in their blessings but many others who offer a more symbolic or even administrative understanding of the matter. The 1992 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* explains that it does not matter whether the lineage mentioned is literal, for it is essentially the "line and legacy through which one's blessings are transmitted."[75] Obviously, the recent ambiguity in the significance of this lineage declaration, intended or not, has had the effect of de-emphasizing the importance of literal lineage, thereby supporting the more general trend toward universalizing access to the Abrahamic covenant irrespective of literal lineage.

The final stage in this universalization process has been the disappearance from the discourse of church leaders of virtually all references to the significance of lineage, whether cursed or favored. With sixty thousand Mormon missionaries now in most countries of the earth, the opposite message is now declared from LDS pulpits, as it was by Paul of old. The emphasis is now upon the common blood and origin of all people as children of the same God. The late President Howard W. Hunter declared, for example, that "race makes no difference; color makes no difference; nationality makes no difference;. . .we are all of one blood and

[74]See the note above, early in this essay, on lineage indications in the patriarchal blessings of the 1830s and 1840s.

[75]See the discussion in Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim,"168-69, of the changing understandings about lineage assignment in patriarchal blessings. See also entries in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* on "Patriarchal Blessings" by William J. Mortimer (3:1066-67) and on "Stake Patriarch" by Ariel S. Ballif (3:1064-65).

the literal spirit offspring of our Heavenly Father"; and that the gospel stands "squarely against all stifling traditions based on race, language, and. . .cultural background."[76] More recently, James E. Faust, of the First Presidency, observed that in his experience "no race or class seems superior to any other in spirituality and faithfulness."[77]

Concluding Observation

Religious communities, like societies more generally, sometimes rise above the historic realities of a given time and place to promulgate ideals sublime in conception but which can be fulfilled only gradually. So it has been, for example, with the Anglo-American heritage of political liberty and human rights, which, we trust and hope, is closer to a description of real life today than it was at the time of either the English or the American Revolutions. Similarly, the Christian heritage, having begun on the philosophical premise of universal brotherhood, was somehow translated across European history into theological justifications for various forms of bigotry and barbarism, but now struggles in most places to return to its roots in the life and mission of the humble and loving Jesus of Nazareth. In a much shorter time frame, Mormonism also experienced a century or more of racialist attitudes and policies, partly as a participant in the general culture of its homeland, but seems in recent decades to be returning to its roots in the Christian gospel of Jesus and Paul.

In some ways, it is an inspiring irony that Mormons, like many others, have been brought to embrace this universalism directly as a concomitant of their proselyting program. That is, as they have gone forth to convert peoples in increasingly exotic locales to the particularistic LDS gospel, Latter-day Saints have come to recognize the general capacity in all peoples to respond to spiritual influences and to missionary service when it is sensitively rendered. As it continues in this mode, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is poised to become a world religion in the twenty-first century.

---

[76]Howard W. Hunter, "All are Alike unto God," *Ensign* (June 1979): 72-74, and "The Gospel—A Global Faith," November 1991, 18-19.

[77]James E. Faust, "Heirs to the Kingdom of God," *Ensign* (May 1995): 61-63. For numerous other universalistic interpretations of the significance of the lineage of Abraham and Israel, as found in recent official Mormon discourse, see examples in Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," 165-67.