

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION:
REFLECTIONS ON THE FORTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE LDS CHURCH'S
LIFTING THE PRIESTHOOD AND
TEMPLE RESTRICTIONS FOR BLACK
MORMONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Robert A. Rees

The Church has no power to do wrong with impunity any more than any individual.

—Brigham Young¹

America's history of racial inequality continues to haunt us. Many of the issues we face today are shadowed by an underlying narrative of racial difference and bias that compromise our progress. Our nation, now more than ever, is in desperate need of an era of truth and justice. We must first tell the truth about our past before we can overcome it.

—Equal Justice Initiative²

1. Brigham Young, "Interview with an Eastern Correspondent," *Salt Lake Herald Republican*, May 12, 1877, p. 3, available at <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6rn4f2p/11686818>. It was also cited in the *Deseret News*, May 23, 1877, p. 2. The subject under discussion was the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

2. Equal Justice Initiative, *Segregation in America*, 2018, <https://eji.org/reports/segregation-in-america/>, emphasis added.

|

Just as the Civil Rights Act of 1968 did not end racism in the United States, so the Church's Official Declaration ending the priesthood ban in 1978³ did not end racism in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor did its official statement "Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God" in 2012⁴ nor its 2013 Gospel Topics essay "Race and Priesthood."⁵ In spite of significant progress made over the decades, in substantial and disturbing ways racism is still a serious international, national, and regional problem. Like the poor, it seems to be always with us. According to a 2022 Gallup poll, the perception of "race relations by both white and Black Americans is at its lowest point in 20 years," with 57 percent of respondents saying such relations are "somewhat" or "very" bad. Furthermore, optimism about prospects for achieving racial harmony has significantly diminished among Black people. "Currently, there is a 20-point gap between Black adults (40%) and White adults (60%) that a solution to racial discord in U.S. society is possible. This is the largest gap recorded in Gallup's three-decade trend."⁶

Racism in Utah, which to some degree mirrors racism in the Church, reflects this trend. According to David Noyce, whose recent article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* encapsulated the history of race in

3. Doctrine and Covenants, Official Declaration 2, available at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2?lang=eng>.

4. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God," Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/race-church>.

5. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

6. Megan Brenan, "Ratings of Black-White Relations at New Low," Gallup, July 21, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/352457/ratings-black-white-relations-new-low.aspx>

Latter-day Saint history, “Today, the Utah-based faith trumpets that ‘all are alike unto God’ and has taken steps publicly in its policies, practices and preachings from the pulpit to call out the sin of racism. But the pains of prejudice persist to this day—in the church and the wider culture.”⁷ Such “pains of prejudice” are part of the long history of racial discrimination in the West, based on the deeply entrenched presumption of white supremacy, which means that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emerged from a culture infected and afflicted by racism.

In large part as a consequence of such inherited Black prejudice that was then amplified under the leadership of Brigham Young, the Latter-day Saints—without revelation from above—conformed their theology to a general belief that Black people were inferior humans.⁸ The Saints developed a folk mythology based on the conviction that certain premortal spirits (those destined to inherit black bodies) were morally flawed because they were less valiant than others.⁹ This noxious fiction became deeply fixed within Mormon/Latter-day Saint consciousness and subconsciousness during the nineteenth century, continued into much of the twentieth century, and even now is still embedded in the hearts and minds of the majority of Latter-day Saints. A recent survey indicates that 61 percent of white and 70 percent of non-white Latter-day Saints believe that both the original policy instituted by Brigham

7. David Noyce, “In wake of volatile volleyball match, these stories shed light on race relations at BYU and in LDS Church,” Sept. 1, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/09/01/these-stories-will-help-you/>. See also, Laura Meckler, “Utah school district allowed ‘serious and widespread racial harassment,’ Justice Dept. finds,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 21, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/10/21/utah-school-racial-discrimination/>.

8. See Matthew L. Harris and Newell B. Bringhurst, “Brigham Young, the Beginning of Black Priesthood Denial, and Legalization of Slavery in Utah, 1844–1877,” chap. 3 in *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

9. Harris and Bringhurst, chap. 3.

Young and its reversal in 1978 were the result of divine revelation to respective prophets.¹⁰

In the nineteenth century, the policy that originated with Brigham Young resulted not only in the withholding of ordinances and blessings from Black Latter-day Saints but also in justifying slavery and keeping Black people in emotional, social, political, and spiritual bondage. The extent of the dehumanization of Black people among Americans in general, including nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints, is seen in Brigham Young's statement, "You see some classes of the human family that are black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally bestowed upon mankind."¹¹ Young's extremely racist views bore poisonous fruit in his theology, as seen in his pronouncement that interracial (i.e., Black–white) marriage was such an egregious affront to God that it could only be atoned for by shedding the offenders' and their children's blood:

And if any man mingles his seed with the seed of Cane [*sic*] the only way he Could get rid of it or have salvation would be to Come forward & have his head Cut off & spill his Blood upon the ground. It would also take the life of his Children.¹²

This shocking statement—reflecting the law of the land, which criminalized miscegenation well into the twentieth century¹³—

10. Jana Riess, "Forty years on, most US Mormons still believe the racist priesthood/temple ban was God's will," *Flunking Sainthood* (blog), <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/11/40-years-later-most-mormons-still-believe-the-racist-priesthood-temple-ban-was-gods-will/>.

11. Brigham Young, Oct. 9, 1859, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:290–91.

12. Brigham Young, Mar. 8, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:110.

13. Anti-miscegenation laws were first introduced in North America from the late seventeenth century onward by several of the thirteen colonies and, subsequently, by many US states and US territories and remained in force in many US states until 1967.

remained the belief of some Church leaders until at least the end of the nineteenth century. According to his journal entry, First Presidency member George Q. Cannon stated in an 1897 meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve:

President [John] Taylor had taught me when I was a boy in Nauvoo concerning this matter; he had received it from the Prophet Joseph, who said that a man bearing the Priesthood who should marry or associate with a negress, or one of that seed, if the penalty of the law were executed upon him, he and her and the offspring would be killed; that it was contrary to the law of God for men bearing the Priesthood to have association with that seed. In this case submitted to us a white man had married a woman with negro blood in her ignorantly; yet if he were to receive the Priesthood and still continue his association with his wife the offspring of the marriage might make a claim or claims that would interfere with the purposes of the Lord and His curse upon the seed of Cain.¹⁴

Such inhumane beliefs were in keeping with Taylor's contention that the Black race was created by God so that the spirits of Black people, who had given allegiance to Lucifer in the premortal world, could be visibly identified: "And after the flood we are told that the curse that had been pronounced upon Cain was continued through Ham's wife, as he had married a wife of that seed. And why did it pass through the flood? Because it was necessary that the Devil should have a representation upon the earth as well as God."¹⁵

The extent of the institutional unawareness of the existence, let alone the offensiveness, of such a sentiment is evidenced by its inclusion a little over a decade ago in a "Church Employee Gift Edition" of Taylor's writings, *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and*

14. The Journal of George Q. Cannon, Dec. 16, 1897, available at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon/1890s/1897/12-1897?lang=eng>.

15. John Taylor, Aug. 28, 1881, *Journal of Discourses*, 22:304.

Discourses of John Taylor.¹⁶ Clearly, no one was checking. This might explain why in 2012, Brigham Young University religion professor Randy Bott did not foresee a rebuke when he told the *Washington Post* that “the denial of the priesthood to blacks on Earth—although not in the afterlife—protected them from the lowest rungs of hell reserved for people who abuse their priesthood powers.”¹⁷

The official response of the Church rejected Bott’s assertions in unambiguous language:

The positions attributed to BYU professor Randy Bott in a recent *Washington Post* article absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. . . . The Church’s position is clear—we believe all people are God’s children and are equal in His eyes and in the Church. We do not tolerate racism in any form.¹⁸

The Church’s unequivocal rejection of Bott’s attempt to justify the priesthood ban as somehow protective and thus a kindness was followed by a clear-cut repudiation of the folk mythology on which Bott’s comments were based, obviating all such justifications:

It is not known precisely why, how, or when this restriction began in the Church but what is clear is that it ended decades ago. Some have

16. G. Homer Durham, comp., *The Gospel Kingdom: Selections from the Writings and Discourses of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City, 1990). An online listing for a used copy of this book is available at <https://picclick.com/The-Gospel-Kingdom-by-John-Taylor-LDS-401300050231.html>.

17. Jason Horowitz, “The Genesis of a Church’s Stand on Race,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 12, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-genesis-of-a-churchs-stand-on-race/2012/02/22/gIQAQZyFR_story.html.

18. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Church Statement Regarding ‘Washington Post’ Article on Race and the Church,” Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

attempted to explain the reason for this restriction, but these attempts should be viewed as speculation and opinion, not doctrine.¹⁹

While Latter-day Saint historians may not know the precise date or the exact circumstance under which the teaching originated, what seems clear is that, reacting to reports of Black men taking white wives, in one instance polygamously, Brigham Young issued a decree that Blacks could not be ordained, even though Joseph Smith had approved such ordinations before his death. There is little question that Young's decision on priesthood ordination, as well as his prohibition against the endowment and temple sealing of Black members, was rooted in the belief that Latter-day Saints and other white people were pure, literal descendants of Abraham and that intermarrying with what was considered a less pure and less favored race would not only corrupt the purity of Abrahamic lineage but also, because many Americans believed that such interracial marriages produced sterile offspring,²⁰ impede the plan of salvation by preventing God's more favored pre-mortal spirits from coming into mortality.²¹ In the face of abundant evidence that the offspring of such interracial marriages did produce children, it is astonishing that such a myth was believed and that it persisted. Equally troubling was the widely held belief, including among Latter-day Saints, that one drop of African blood was enough to pollute a person and assign him or her to a lesser status than whites. A

19. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Church Statement Regarding 'Washington Post' Article on Race and the Church."

20. According to one source, "During the 1880s and '90s, . . . common belief held that mulattoes—the word comes from the Spanish for 'mule'—were genetically weakened hybrids that would sink into sterility and cease to exist within a generation or two; blacks generally would be eliminated before too long in the battle for survival of the fittest." James Kinney, "Miscegenation: The Long, Cruel History of Our Last Taboo," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1986/02/23/miscegenation-the-long-cruel-history-of-our-last-taboo/9e285f6e-6edc-4ddb-ab6d-22cb8ab271a8/>.

21. Harris and Bringham, chap. 3.

number of states, including Utah, passed legislation enshrining this discriminatory distinction.²² Ironically, we now know through modern genetic studies that almost everyone of Middle Eastern and Southern European heritage has at least some trace of African DNA. In fact, a diverse array of Jewish populations can date their sub-Saharan African ancestry back roughly seventy-two generations, on average, accounting for 3 to 5 percent of their genetic makeup today.²³ Furthermore, according to genetic studies, some Black Africans in Zimbabwe are shown to be literal descendants of Jews who left Jerusalem and migrated to Africa two thousand years ago. Of significance to our discussion of the priesthood ban, their DNA reveals the “Cohen modal haplotype,” indicating they are paternal-line descendants of priesthood holders from the time of Aaron and Moses.²⁴

22. See F. James Davis, “Who Is Black?: One Nation’s Definition,” Frontline, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html>. F. James Davis is a retired professor of sociology at Illinois State University. He is the author of numerous books, including *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (1991), from which this PBS excerpt was taken.

23. Harvard Medical School, “Population genetics reveals shared ancestries: DNA links modern Europeans, Middle Easterners to Sub-Saharan Africans,” *ScienceDaily*, May 24, 2011, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110524153536.htm>. While the researchers detected no African genetic signatures in Northern European populations, they found a distinct presence of African ancestry in Southern European, Middle Eastern, and Jewish populations. Modern southern European groups can attribute about 1 to 3 percent of their genetic signature to African ancestry, with the intermingling of populations dating back fifty-five generations, on average—that is, to roughly 1,600 years ago. Middle Eastern groups have inherited about 4 to 15 percent, with the mixing of populations dating back roughly thirty-two generations.

24. In “Y Chromosomes Traveling South: the Cohen Modal Haplotype and the Origins of the Lemba—the ‘Black Jews of Southern Africa,’” Mark Thomas, Tudor Parfitt, et al. distinguish among the three groups of Jewish males: “Today, Jewish males can be divided into three castes: Cohanim (the paternally inherited priesthood), Leviim (non-Cohen members of the paternally defined priestly tribe of Levi), and Israelites (all non-Cohen and non-Levite Jews).” *The American Journal of Genetics* 66, no. 2 (2000):674–86.

As noted above, there is a direct correlation between racism in America and in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As Paul Reeve says in his book *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*, “In telling the Mormon racial story, one ultimately tells the American racial story.”²⁵ Black writer Richard Wright’s mid-century portrait of the white power structure of the American South was in most particulars a portrait of Utah during that period: “We cannot vote and the law is white. There are no black policemen or justices of the peace, black judges, black juries, black jailers, black mayors or black men anywhere in government.”²⁶ The law did not protect or defend Black citizens. According to the website of the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, there were 4,400 lynchings of Black people in the United States between 1877 and 1950,²⁷ including an innocent Black man in Price, Utah, in 1925,²⁸ which drew nearly one thousand spectators. In 1998, a “Day of Reconciliation” ceremony “to dedicate a headstone at the previously unmarked grave” of the Black coal miner was organized by Craddock Matthew Gilmour, one of those spectators. The headstone in the Price cemetery reads: “Robert Marshall, lynched June 28, 1925, a victim of intolerance. May God forgive.”²⁹

25. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

26. Quoted in Jon Meacham, “A Racist World, Described by Those Who Knew It,” *New York Times*, Aug. 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/books/a-racist-world-described-by-those-who-knew-it.html>.

27. Equal Justice Initiative, “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,” third edition, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/report/>.

28. Marcos Ortiz, “The Justice Files: The Last Lynching in the West,” ABC4, Nov. 1, 2020, <https://www.abc4.com/news/justice-files/the-justice-files-the-last-lynching-in-the-west/>.

29. “Utah Town Remembers 1925 Lynching,” *Associated Press*, Apr. 4, 1998, <https://apnews.com/article/4730c24097e5beb3ab7992416c991bd4>.

Although things have improved since 1959 when the US Commission on Civil Rights reported that “the Negro is the minority citizen who experiences the most widespread inequality in Utah,”³⁰ conditions for Black people living in the state are still far from what they should be considering political and policy changes over the past half century. Citing the Church’s official essay “Race and Priesthood,” Black convert Janan Graham-Russell wrote in a 2016 article in *The Atlantic* that while the purpose of the document was to “repudiate the racism and racist folklore that had been used to explain the restriction in the past . . . the attitudes of white members, who make up the majority of the Church in the U.S., have not necessarily changed.”³¹

There is considerable documentary and anecdotal evidence to support such a charge. In fact, President Dallin Oaks acknowledged the persistence of racism among Latter-day Saints following the 1978 policy change. As he said at the fortieth anniversary celebration, “Changes in the hearts and practices of individual members did not come suddenly and universally. Some accepted the effects of the revelation immediately and gracefully. Some accepted them gradually. But some, in their personal lives, continued the attitudes of racism that have been painful to so many throughout the world, including the past 40 years.”³² Reflecting more optimistically on the 1978 change, Oaks also stated,

Institutionally, the Church reacted swiftly to the revelation on the priesthood. Ordinations and temple recommends came immediately.

30. As cited in Janan Graham-Russell, “Choosing to Stay in the Mormon Church Despite Its Racist Legacy,” *The Atlantic*, Aug. 28, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/black-and-mormon/497660/>.

31. Graham-Russell, “Choosing to Stay.”

32. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “‘Be One’ celebration thrills the audience with stories of trailblazing black Mormons and songs of rejoicing and reflection from Gladys Knight, multiracial choirs and others,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2018/06/02/be-one-celebration-thrills-the-audience-with-stories-of-trailblazing-black-mormons-and-songs-of-rejoicing-and-reflection-from-gladys-knight-multiracial-choirs-and-others/>.

The reasons that had been given to try to explain the prior restrictions on members of African ancestry—even those previously voiced by revered Church leaders—were promptly and publicly disavowed.³³

But that was not entirely the case. As Matthew Harris and Newell Bringhurst note in *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History*, “The Mormon hierarchy lifted the ban in 1978, but persistent questions remained about the racist teachings related to the now abandoned practice.” Perhaps because leaders didn’t perceive the need, questions about lineage and premortal behavior “were not initially addressed by the First Presidency, let alone by the revelation itself.” A distressing result of this critical omission was that “Deseret Book—the LDS owned and operated bookstore—continued to print and sell books that contained anti-Black teachings by Joseph Fielding Smith, Bruce McConkie, and other authors.” Clearly, there was no committee assigned to expurgate or retire these texts. Was it hoped or expected that members would mentally do so? This was unlikely given that, as Harris and Bringhurst observe, “the church had failed to officially denounce such anti-Black teachings in church-sponsored venues, specifically General Conference, the *Ensign* magazine, or the *Church News*.”³⁴ It is worth noting that for such a profound change in Church policy there was scarcely a mention of it during the general conferences following the announcement.

Given the persistent racism in Latter-day Saint culture, one of the questions confronting us today is: what is the moral responsibility of the Church and individual Latter-day Saints to address the traumas, injustices, and inequities resulting from our past racism that relegated Black people to a lower intellectual, social, and spiritual status? One could argue that, to whatever extent possible, our religion imposes a

33. Dallin H. Oaks, “President Oaks Remarks at Worldwide Priesthood Celebration,” Newsroom, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-oaks-remarks-worldwide-priesthood-celebration>.

34. Harris and Bringhurst, 118.

moral obligation for us to apologize for, repent of, and (if possible) make reparations for the ocean of pain and suffering we have caused our Black brothers and sisters. Instead, we have tended to diminish the magnitude and seriousness of our false teachings, obscure and distort the historical record, and excuse and justify why we failed to understand the true meaning of scripture. As Jana Riess so cogently put it, “The problem is that Mormons *want* to engage in a collective amnesia because to do otherwise would be to admit the truth: that Brigham Young made a colossal and tragic mistake.”³⁵

The persistence of the Church’s racial mythology is seen in the embarrassing disclosure in 2022 that Young Men general presidency member and BYU religion professor Brad Wilcox had been teaching Church youth that white people also suffered without the priesthood for over 1800 years and that Black people simply had to wait another 150 years beyond that, his intended message being that believers of all races should learn to trust in the Lord’s timing.³⁶ It is astonishing that anyone, let alone a Church leader and BYU professor, could make such an assertion given the contemporary awareness of the history of race relations in the Church, including the fact that Joseph Smith had ordained Black men to the priesthood in the 1830s.

What we seem reluctant to acknowledge is that the 1978, 2012, and 2013 statements by the Church amount to a condemnation of 160 years of false doctrine and practice, not a revelation of new truth. The teachings and practices that evolved after Brigham Young instituted a priesthood ban had no basis in past doctrine or new revelation. Yet the language surrounding the 1978 policy change did not convey this reality. As Lester Bush observed, “The First Presidency statement of 8 June 1978 announcing that ‘all worthy male members of the Church

35. Riess, “Forty years on,” emphasis in the original.

36. Peggy Fletcher Stack and Tamarra Kemsley, “LDS leader Brad Wilcox apologizes for remarks about Black members; BYU ‘deeply concerned,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 8, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2022/02/08/lds-leader-brad-wilcox/>.

may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color' was very carefully worded, without reference to blacks, per se, and without reference to any past doctrine on the subject. . . . [A] revelatory experience was alluded to, the priesthood made available to all 'worthy males,' and the subject quietly but firmly declared dead."³⁷

Had the Church never instituted its prejudicial policy, had it fully and consistently embraced the Book of Mormon ethic—"all are like unto God . . . black and white" (2 Nephi 26:33)—and adopted doctrines and instituted practices that made no distinctions regarding African and non-African heritage, it is by no means inconceivable that the Church would have been at the vanguard of various racial equality movements in the United States and other nations. More significantly, many more Black Church members could have been spared the rejection, humiliation, and pain they suffered because of the policy and instead enjoyed the full blessings of the restored gospel—not only those related to priesthood and temples but to full fellowship.

||

No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

—Nelson Mandela³⁸

Every soul has its South.

—Karl Keller³⁹

37. Lester Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (1999): 270.

38. "Long Walk to Freedom," in *Oxford Essential Quotations*, edited by Susan Ratcliffe (2017), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191843730.001.0001/q-oro-ed5-00007046>.

39. Karl Keller, "Every Soul Has Its South," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 2 (1966): 72–79.

I grew up in a racist home, a racist community, and in a series of racist Latter-day Saint congregations. As a young man, I harbored deeply racist sentiments and attitudes toward Black people (as well as other racial minorities). I can remember clenching my fists on a street in Long Beach, California, when as a teenager I observed a Black man and white woman walking toward me holding hands. The N-word and other racial slurs were used frequently in my home and community. Further, I had been taught that Black people had been unvaliant in the premortal existence and were therefore unworthy to hold the priesthood or receive certain temple blessings. I was also taught that they were cursed with a dark skin to mark their lower status. I believed they were not as intelligent or as industrious as white people. As a student at BYU and as a young missionary in the 1950s, I made racist jokes about Black people that were readily tolerated. In addresses by General Authorities, I was taught that interracial marriage, especially between Black and white couples, was counter to the law of heaven as well as the law of the land. There is no question that such teachings affected my attitudes and behaviors toward Black people.

It wasn't until the late fifties when I went into the army following my mission and spent time in the Deep South that I began to recognize how the teachings of my church were part of a larger, deeper American racial reality. In the South, I witnessed racist language, attitudes, and behaviors that were both more overt and more disturbing than what I had previously encountered. Seeing segregated drinking fountains and other public facilities, witnessing segregated public transportation, and observing firsthand the discriminatory language and behavior of racial tyranny brought about a shock of recognition that initiated a change of both my heart and mind.

The scales of racial prejudice finally fell from my eyes during the civil rights movement when I was in graduate school. When I read about lynchings in the newspaper and saw Black people beaten on television, when I saw an increasing number of white allies becoming

involved in the struggle for Black justice and equality, I realized that this was an issue that concerned me. In literature courses I learned, to whatever extent was possible, about what it meant to be Black in America through reading Langston Hughes's poetry, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and other works by Black writers. It was also about this time that I read Karl Keller's 1966 *Dialogue* article, "Every Soul Has Its South"⁴⁰ and realized that my soul indeed had its South.

However, my full awakening in relation to race and the priesthood took place when, as editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, my coeditors and I published Lester Bush Jr.'s landmark article, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview."⁴¹ Accompanying his article submitted to the journal was a thick document, "Compilation on the Negro in Mormonism," which he later described as a "single-spaced anthology [that] totaled over a thousand items distilled into four hundred pages of historically sequenced source material."⁴² A model of careful, measured, and responsible scholarship, Bush's article laid bare the true history of the Church's teachings on race and priesthood. We now know that Bush's article was the beginning of the unraveling of the mythology that had sustained the Church's erroneous doctrine and practice relating to Black people of African descent for over a century. Bush's own account of what transpired before, during, and after the article's publication, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview' (1973): Context and Reflections," documents its discussion among some top Church leaders and its ultimate influence on President Spencer W. Kimball's 1978 decision

40. Keller, "Every Soul Has Its South."

41. Lester Bush Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8, no. 1 (1973): 11–68.

42. Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" 246.

to lift the ban, although Bush is careful not to make that influence definitive.⁴³

I clearly remember the day I heard the news of the Church's change in policy on the priesthood ordination of Black men and temple endowment and marriage for Black men and women. It was something my family and I prayed and worked for but were uncertain would ever happen in our lifetimes. The news came in a call from our friends David and Susan Egli, who had moved several years previously from our ward in West Los Angeles to Salt Lake City. My wife, Ruth, and I were at first incredulous and then jubilant. The long-awaited day had finally come and with it a profound sense of relief, especially knowing that not only our Black brothers and sisters but also non-Black members, including our own children, would no longer have to live with that particular shadow over their lives. What we didn't realize at the time was that that day need not have been either long *or* awaited, since Black people had always been entitled to the full blessings and privileges available to all God's children, as acknowledged by the Church decades later.⁴⁴

As welcome as it was, then, President Kimball's 1978 announcement of a policy change was not entirely satisfying because the justification for the practice was still firmly entrenched in Latter-day Saint folk doctrine and culture. Although relieved that the burden of denying ordination and full temple blessings had finally been lifted—literally

43. See Bush, "Writing 'Mormonism's Negro Doctrine,'" especially sections III and IV. See also, Edward L. Kimball, *Lengthen Your Stride: The Presidency of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 219–20. See chapters 20–24 for a detailed exposition of President Kimball's years-long search for enlightenment.

44. David O. McKay, who was troubled by the Church's practice, which he considered an inspired policy rather than a doctrine, "wrestled with the subject for years and years, making it a matter of intense prayer on many occasions." Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 103. I have wondered why there is no recorded response to his petitions.

from our faithful Black brothers and sisters and emotionally from those of us who had suffered with them—we were still troubled knowing that many Saints harbored the conviction that the origin of the practice under Brigham Young had been as inspired as its cessation. It was not until the Church’s official statement in 2012 (some thirty-four years later) and its official acknowledgement that the practice had been wrong all along in the “Race and the Priesthood” essay in 2013 that we could finally begin putting the sad history of this unfortunate—and in many ways tragic—practice behind us.

In 2018, as we approached the fortieth anniversary celebration of the lifting of the priesthood ban, many Latter-day Saints hoped Church leaders would use the occasion to reiterate the candor of the 2012 and especially the 2013 documents and make a full and frank acknowledgement of and apology for the errors of its past teachings and the suffering they had caused. Instead, the celebration took place without mention of the dark racist history of the origin of the “doctrine” that preceded the change and, to a significant degree, followed it. Rather than acknowledging that the restrictions had no basis in Latter-day Saint scripture or revelation, leaders advised that members of the Church should emphasize the positive and look forward rather than backward, even though many considered that doing so would hinder progress because it omitted the important gospel principles of apologizing and asking forgiveness—actions the Church itself advises its members to take, beginning in their youth.⁴⁵

By not making a clear and decisive break from the past, those who spoke at the celebration gave the impression that such a past did not exist. For example, in speaking of his own wrestling with the doctrine in the 1960s, President Oaks admitted, “I studied the reasons then being given and could not feel confirmation of the truth of any of them.” By

45. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Learn to Apologize and Forgive,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/youth/activities/new/goal/learn-to-apologize-and-forgive?lang=eng>.

doing so, he echoed the sense so many of us had during that time that this practice was not of God. But then he added, “As part of my prayerful study, I learned that, in general, the Lord rarely gives reasons for the commandments and directions He gives to His servants.”⁴⁶ This comment seems to imply that Brigham Young’s teachings about race and the priesthood could be considered “commandments and directions” from the Lord. Thus, President Oaks gave the impression, intentionally or not, that somehow the Lord had either inspired, affirmed, or allowed what we now know to be not only erroneous but harmful and hurtful to his Black children—and to the Church as a whole.

Make no mistake: the First Presidency’s “Be One” celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the revelation on the priesthood was impressive and inspiring, and I was pleased to be there, especially to see Black Latter-day Saints express their joy and jubilation over the lifting of the ban—as well as their grief and sorrow at being denied blessings—in song, story, dance, and the spoken word. Nevertheless, I am proposing that more be done to reverse misconceptions that sustain ongoing racist attitudes. Since we know that temple and priesthood blessings were not taken away by God, wouldn’t it be more healing to state that truth, to acknowledge that in 1978 President Kimball was inspired to correct a man-made error that had stood for over a hundred years? In his address at the celebration, President Oaks declared, “Most in the church, including its senior leadership, have concentrated on the opportunities of the future rather than the disappointments of the past.”⁴⁷ As stated above, while focusing on the future is understandable, a successful future depends on coming to terms with the past as a Church and a people.

46. Church News Staff, “President Oaks’ Full Remarks from the LDS Church’s ‘Be One’ Celebration,” *Church News*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/2018/6/2/23221509/president-oaks-full-remarks-from-the-lds-churchs-be-one-celebration>.

47. Church News Staff, “President Oaks’ Full Remarks.”

III

The practice of peace and reconciliation is one of the most vital and artistic of human actions.

—Thích Nhất Hạnh⁴⁸

We are Christians, disciples of Christ, yet when we allow the attitudes of the world to infiltrate our minds to the point of blindness about their existence, we limit our progress toward that which our Father expects us to become, and we enter into a sin that often has lasting consequences.

—Darius Gray⁴⁹

In his book *All Abraham's Children*, LDS sociologist and scholar Armand Mauss reports that at the turn of the twenty-first century, the Church considered but then backed away from making a formal institutional repudiation of past racist teachings and practices.⁵⁰ That repudiation has now been made in the “Race and the Priesthood” essay, but it will not be in full force until the body of the Church knows about it. Instead, “Race and the Priesthood” was tucked away among the Gospel Topic Essays published on the Church’s website in December 2013. It attempts to explain the context in which the original doctrine emerged, what led to the 1978 change, and what transpired following that change. It also seeks to draw a clear demarcation between the historical “realities” of previous centuries and the present “modern reality” of policies relating to non-discrimination and racial integration. The fact that many Latter-day Saints have not read the document and in fact do not know of its existence, much less its contents, seems related to the low-profile nature of its publication. As Tamu Smith, coauthor of *Diary of Two*

48. Arnold Kotler, ed., *Peace in Every Step: Mindfulness in Everyday Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

49. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Healing the Wounds of Racism,” *Gospel Living*, Apr. 5, 2018, <https://www.lds.org/blog/healing-the-wounds-of-racism?lang=eng>.

50. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 248–50.

Mad Black Mormons,⁵¹ observed, “It was neither signed nor penned by the governing First Presidency, nor has it been mentioned, alluded to, or footnoted in speeches by LDS authorities at the faith’s semiannual General Conferences.”⁵² Indeed, this does seem strange for such a remarkably significant document, but it’s also lamentable—a missed opportunity to right a terrible wrong.

I believe the essay needs to be brought to center stage with an acknowledgement of the emotional as well as spiritual wounds suffered by Black Latter-day Saints, in addition to the harm done to those Saints who suffered institutional disapproval, censure, and punishment for challenging the Church and championing the cause of their Black brothers and sisters. Although not claiming revelation for the Church itself, these Latter-day Saints through rigorous study and earnest prayer had received answers that left them with the unsettling conclusion that their leaders were wrong. I also believe that making the essay more visible and emphasizing its message might help diminish racism in the contemporary Church, the persistence of which is not only sinful but surely has a deleterious impact on the Church’s mission—not only in the United States and Europe, but also, perhaps especially, in Africa, where, according to a 2018 article in the *Wall Street Journal*, the Church is likely to see significant growth.⁵³

While it seems possible that the Church considered its various attempts to address its racial policy and practice sufficient, the fact that historical mythology persists and racism continues in the Church and

51. Tamu Smith and Zandra Vranes, *Diary of Two Mad Black Mormons: Finding the Lord’s Lessons in Everyday Life* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2014).

52. Quoted in Peggy Fletcher Stack, “This Mormon Sunday school teacher was dismissed for using church’s own race essay in lesson,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 10 2015, <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=2475803&itype=CMSID>.

53. John G. Turner, “Mormonism’s Global Future,” *Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 20, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/mormonisms-global-future-1524177760>.

in Mormon culture suggests that the persistence of racism presents an ongoing challenge for the Church.

So, if official statements in the news and essays on the Church's official website are proving ineffective, what more can we do? I suggest that nothing short of an official truth and reconciliation initiative by the Church, patterned perhaps to some extent after the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, is likely to significantly diminish racism in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Mormon culture, especially given its endurance in American society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established by the South African government to resolve issues related to racial conflict in that country produced remarkable results, especially in healing the wounds caused by apartheid in all its official and unofficial manifestations. In many ways, what happened in South Africa has had a transforming influence on that country and has spread its healing influence to other parts of the world where ethnic, racial, and religious conflict have destroyed communities and divided nations.

In his *No Future without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, speaks of the courage and love that were necessary for the commission to do its work: "There is a movement, not easily discernible, at the heart of things to reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility and disharmony."⁵⁴ That movement, Tutu argues, requires both the seeking of forgiveness from those responsible for the wrong and the willingness of those who have been wronged to forgive. This movement worked in South Africa because, as Tutu writes, "Our leaders were ready . . . to say they were willing to walk the path of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation with all the hazards that lay along the way. . . . It is crucial, when a relationship has been damaged or when a potential relationship has been made impossible, that the

54. Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 265.

perpetrator should acknowledge the truth and be ready and willing to apologize.”⁵⁵

In reflecting on the nineteenth-century world during which the Church was organized, “Race and the Priesthood” speaks of a time when slavery was practiced and “racial distinctions and prejudice were not just common but customary among white Americans.” Failing to acknowledge that they were also common among Latter-day Saints and claiming that such “realities” are “unfamiliar and disturbing today” are simply the products of wishful thinking; as we all know, racial distinctions and prejudice remain an undeniable part of American and Latter-day Saint culture (as well as many other cultures). One thing seems clear: in relation to race, there is enormous resistance to progress on many levels and in many regions of the nation, including in the Mormon heartland.

Obviously, a truth and reconciliation initiative is more complicated when those needing to ask for forgiveness may not have been guilty of the transgressions themselves but may be the present-day representatives of those persons, policies, and institutions responsible for the wrongs. Nevertheless, it seems that they must take the risk of responsibility if true healing is ever to take place. As Archbishop Tutu has said, “True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking, but in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can only bring spurious healing.”⁵⁶

There is considerable evidence that the Spirit of Christ is moving strongly today among both the leaders and the general membership of the Church regarding race, prompting a desire to extend love equally to all God’s family—past, present, and future. This growing

55. Tutu, *Forgiveness*, 269.

56. Tutu, *Forgiveness*, 271–72.

desire to heal and reconcile where we and our predecessors have done harm should inspire the official Church to give voice to this spirit of true reconciliation. There is no way to calculate the humiliation, the degradation, or the emotional, physical, and spiritual violence suffered by Black individuals within the Latter-day Saint community. It is important for the Church to acknowledge that no matter what it does, the evil perpetrated in the name of revelation and divine sanction cannot be erased nor can the festering harm of justifications invented to explain it. But it can be diminished and forgiven if the Church publicly takes full responsibility and sincerely and humbly asks for forgiveness.

I make such statements as someone who believes in continuing revelation and who has sustained ten prophets/presidents of the Church and hundreds of apostles in my lifetime, including all our current leaders. I raise this issue in part because the Church asks me to look inward and acknowledge if there are any unresolved matters in my own life that would prevent me from worthily entering the temple. And I do so because the New Testament teaches that I need to repent of past errors, seek forgiveness of any I have offended, and take responsibility for my actions. Can the Church ask less of itself?

The answer must clearly be no. As Brent Staples observes of racism in the United States, “The notion that the country might somehow move past this deeply complex, historically layered issue by assuming an attitude of ‘color blindness’ is naïve. The only real hope of doing that is to openly confront and talk about *the powerful, but submerged, forms of discrimination that have long since supplanted the undisguised version.*”⁵⁷ Eradicating what Staples correctly identifies as “powerful but submerged forms of discrimination” is precisely the challenge that faces Latter-day Saint leaders and members today.

57. Brent Staples, “The Racist Trope That Won’t Die,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/opinion/roseanne-racism-blacks-apes.html>, emphasis added.

It is significant that the Church has acknowledged the error of past pseudo-doctrines, policies, and practices in relation to Black members, and relevant that it places the genesis of such false teachings within the larger dominant culture. It is heartening to have the Church publicly denounce white supremacist attitudes, as was done following the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia: “White supremacist attitudes are morally wrong and sinful, and we condemn them. Church members who promote or pursue a ‘white culture’ or white supremacy agenda are not in harmony with the teachings of the Church.”⁵⁸ It is also helpful that the Church emphasizes such things as not having racially segregated congregations and its present nondiscriminatory posture toward minorities.

But there is one thing missing from such declarations and explanations: the answer to the question that we as a people have generally been disinclined to ask, namely, why, when Latter-day Saints believe in modern prophets and claim revelation on a variety of issues—both momentous and minor—there was apparently no revelation to Latter-day Saint prophets and apostles from 1852 to 2013 (a period of 161 years) countering and correcting teachings of which the Lord must have disapproved and that the Church now admits were erroneous? Although the racial priesthood and temple ban ended in 1978, the admission that its primary justifications were wrong didn’t come until 2013. It might seem unpolite and impolitic to ask this question, but it is imperative that we do so for the spiritual health of the Church and the wellbeing of its members.

One answer is that God, who is surely not a racist, *was* trying to tell us—leaders and followers alike—but we were not interested in

58. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Church Releases Statement Condemning White Supremacist Attitudes,” <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/church-releases-statement-condemning-white-supremacist-attitudes?lang=eng>.

or perhaps even capable of hearing the still small voice that prompts but does not coerce. But the next question quickly arises: Is a prophet capable of making mistakes in his prophetic calling? Could he believe he is inspired but actually be following his own inclinations? Is that not what we are saying Brigham Young did by establishing the priesthood and temple policy and subsequent prophets did in enforcing it? I admit that these are uncomfortable questions, but they are also essential to address if we are to move forward. In the Church we have a strong desire to revere leaders and reverence prophets, but we are not asked to surrender our responsibility to seek personal confirmation and inspiration. In fact, it was Brigham Young himself who said the Latter-day Saints should not take all he said as truth—only that which the Holy Ghost confirmed to their hearts and minds:

Some may say, “Brethren, you who lead the Church, we have all confidence in you, we are not in the least afraid but what everything will go right under your superintendence; all the business matters will be transacted right; and if brother Brigham is satisfied with it, I am.” I do not wish any Latter-day Saint in this world, nor in heaven, to be satisfied with anything I do, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the spirit of revelation, makes them satisfied. I wish them to know for themselves and understand for themselves, for this would strengthen the faith that is within them. Suppose that the people were heedless, that they manifested no concern with regard to the things of the kingdom of God but threw the whole burden upon the leaders of the people, saying, “If the brethren who take charge of matters are satisfied, we are,” this is not pleasing in the sight of the Lord. Every man and woman in this kingdom ought to be satisfied with what we do, but they never should be satisfied without asking the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, whether what we do is right.⁵⁹

We revere and sustain our leaders because they humbly seek the Spirit to reveal the truth to them on our behalf as a church—not

59. Brigham Young, Oct. 6, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:45.

because we believe they act infallibly. Presuming that this truth of prophetic fallibility might undermine members' confidence in divinely inspired leadership sells faithful members short. We worship no one but Christ through the Spirit of truth and love. Painfully aware of our own fallibility, we will continue to sustain, support, and love our leaders and offer them the same forgiveness we seek from the Lord and his church.

This seems to be what President Kimball had in mind when he addressed the Church just a year after his inspired 1978 change in the Church's teaching about race and priesthood:

Now, my brothers and sisters, it seems clear to me, indeed, this impression weighs upon me—that the Church is at a point in its growth and maturity when we are at last ready to move forward in a major way. Some decisions have been made and others pending, which will clear the way, organizationally. But the basic decisions needed for us to move forward, as a people, must be made by the individual members of the Church. The major strides which must be made by the Church will follow upon the major strides to be made by us as individuals. We have paused on some plateaus long enough. Let us resume our journey forward and upward.⁶⁰

IV

“Without truth there is no reconciliation.”

—Bryan Stevenson⁶¹

It might seem a bold and risky thing for the Church to be apologetic as well as clear and scrupulously honest regarding its history restricting

60. Spencer W. Kimball, “Let Us Move Forward and Upward,” Apr. 1979, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1979/04/let-us-move-forward-and-upward?lang=eng>.

61. New York Encounter, “‘Without truth, there is no reconciliation’ | Bryan Stevenson | New York Encounter 2022,” YouTube video, 1:01:43, Feb. 23, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ9sZIKOcI4>.

Black members from receiving priesthood and temple blessings, but I don't see how, morally, it can do otherwise. Indeed, the members crave transparency and will welcome—even celebrate—leaders finally resolving this thorny historical, cultural, religious, and spiritual issue, one that has been a burden to bear for both the Church and its members. Were the Church to seek for truth and reconciliation with its Black members and with Black investigators who found the ban an impediment to their joining the Church, it would take a major step toward healing what is not yet fully healed in the hearts of all members—and won't be healed until it is faced. Prophets often must do things that reverse historical error, that expose false beliefs and go against the grain of society, to set their people on a more correct course. This, in turn, will free us as followers of Christ from those things in our past (and still manifest in our present) that inhibit the complete unfolding of the kingdom of God.

Let me defer here to Black convert and ward Relief Society president Bryndis Roberts:

Before joining the Church in January 2008, I struggled mightily with the fact that, before 1978, there was a ban on men of African descent having the priesthood and a ban on all persons of African descent participating in temple ordinances. In practical terms, this ban meant that all of the people who looked like me were relegated to a second-class form of Church membership. From the first time I learned of the priesthood/temple ban, I knew without a doubt that no part of the policy was from God. That knowledge made it possible for me to join the Church despite the ban's previous existence and the many hurtful statements Church leaders and members had made to justify it. Consequently, when the Church issued the *Race and the Priesthood* essay on December 13, 2013, as part of its series on Gospel Topics, that essay simply confirmed what I already knew—that racism was the only reason for the ban. Almost every religion has some history of racism. However, the history and sanctioned Church-wide practice of racism in the LDS Church lasted way too long. Moreover, the effort put into

justifying that history and practice left investigators and members of African descent feeling doubly wounded.⁶²

Roberts then itemizes five steps toward the goal of truth and reconciliation:

I commend the Church for issuing the Race and the Priesthood essay, but I do not believe it has done nearly enough to rid itself of the stain of exclusionary practices of the past. Here is what I wish the Church would do:

- Issue the Race and the Priesthood essay as a letter from the First Presidency, an Official Declaration, or a proclamation.
- Have that official document translated into all the languages that the Church uses to communicate with its worldwide membership.
- Read it at General Conference and make it clear that neither the ban nor the justifications for the ban came from God.
- Direct that it be read from the pulpit in every ward, branch, “cluster,” and mission in the world.
- Incorporate it into all levels of the Church’s curriculum and teachings.

By doing these things, I believe the Church will begin to make amends for the racism that permeated Mormon life in the past and the racist remnants that continue to haunt us in the present. Preaching the truth about racism out loud, from the pulpit—repeatedly if necessary—will hasten the day when there are no distinctions in the Church because of race.⁶³

62. Jana Riess, “African American Mormon convert: LDS Church needs to ‘make amends’ for past racism,” *Religion News*, Mar. 19, 2015, <https://religionnews.com/2015/03/19/african-american-mormon-convert-lds-church-needs-make-amends-past-racism/>. According to Riess, Roberts “calls on the Church to stop hiding its Gospel Topics statement under a bushel, and use it to take a bolder stand to rectify the racist sins of the past.”

63. Riess, “African American Mormon convert: LDS Church needs to ‘make amends’ for past racism.”

Jesus' entire life was devoted to truth and reconciliation. His entire mission was devoted to teaching the truth and calling us to follow him—as radical and uncomfortable as it might be for us to do so at times—in order that the entire human family might be reconciled to God. As his followers, we should be no less committed to a process that acknowledges the truth of our behavior—both as individuals and as members of a collective—and to do all we can to make amends for any harm we have done to others. Christ died on the cross to reconcile us to God; we should do all in our power to seek reconciliation with others whose lives have been damaged or diminished by our failure to fully live his gospel. Let us hope that in the next few years we can establish those conditions in our personal lives, in our congregations, in our Church, in our communities, in our nation, and in our world in which all are alike not only unto God but unto one another as well.

ROBERT A. REES {bobrees2@gmail.com} is former director of Latter-day Saint/Mormon studies at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. He is the cofounder and president of FastForward for the Future of the Planet, a nonprofit that seeks to unite the world's faiths in addressing climate issues, and cofounder of the Bountiful Children's Foundation, a nonprofit that addresses malnutrition among Latter-day Saint and other children in the developing world. His most recent publications are *A New Witness to the World: Reading and Re-reading the Book of Mormon* (2020) and volume two of *Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Latter-day Saints* (2021).