

OFFICE OF
THE FIRST PRESIDENCY
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

DAVID O. MCKAY

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Dear Brother:

In your letter to me of October 28, 1947, you say that you and some of your fellow students "have been perturbed about the question of why the negroid race cannot hold the priesthood."

In reply I send you the following thoughts that I expressed to a friend upon the same subject:

Stated briefly your problem is simply this -

Since, as Paul states, the Lord "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth," why is there shown in the Church of Christ discrimination against the colored race?

This is a perplexing question, particularly in the light of the present trend of civilization to grant equality to all men irrespective of race, creed, or color. The answer, as I have sought it, cannot be found in abstract reasoning, for, in this case, Reason to the soul is "dim as the borrowed rays of moon and stars to lonely, weary, wandering travelers."

I know of no scriptural basis for denying the Priesthood to Negroes other than one verse in the Book of Abraham (1:26); however, I believe, as you suggest, that the real reason dates back to our Pre-existent life.

This means that the true answer to your question (and it is the only one that has ever given me satisfaction) has its foundation in faith — (1) Faith in a God of Justice, (2) Faith in the existence of an eternal plan of salvation for all God's children.

Faith in a God of Justice Essential

I say faith in a God of Justice, because if we hold the Lord responsible for the conditions of the Negro in his relationship to the Church, we must acknowledge justice as an attribute of the Eternal, or conceive Him as a discriminator and therefore unworthy of our worship. In seeking our answer, then, to the problem wherein discrimination seems apparent, we must accept the Lord as being upright, and that "Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne." (Psalm 89:14), and we must believe that He will "render to every man according to his work," and that He "shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Eccl. 12:14) Accepting the truth that God is just and righteous, we may then set our minds at rest in the assurance that "whatsoever good thing any man doeth the same shall be received of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." (Eph. 6:8)

I emphasize Justice as an attribute of Deity, because it is the Lord who, though He "made of one blood all nations", also "determined the bounds of their habitation." In other words, the seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is not something which originated with man, but goes back into the Beginning with God.

It was the Lord who said that Pharaoh, the first Governor of Egypt, though "a righteous man", "blessed with the blessings of the earth, with the blessings of wisdom" * * * * "could not have the right of Priesthood."

Now if we have faith in the justice of God, we are forced to the conclusion that this denial was not a deprivation of merited right. It may have been entirely in keeping with the eternal plan of salvation for all of the children of God.

The peopling of the Earth is in accordance with Great Plan

Revelation assures us that this plan antedates man's mortal existence, extending back to man's pre-existent state. In that pre-mortal state were "intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones;

"And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good."

Manifestly, from this revelation, we may infer two things: first that there were among those spirits different degrees of intelligence, varying grades of achievement, retarded and advanced spiritual attainment; (2) that there were no national distinctions among those spirits such as Americans, Europeans, Asiatics, Australians, etc. Such "bounds of habitation" would have to be "determined" when the spirits entered upon their earthly existence or second estate.

In the "Blue Bird" Materlinck pictures unborn children summoned to earthlife. As one group approaches the earth, the voices of the children earthward-tending are heard in the distance to cry: "The earth! the earth! I can see it; how beautiful it is! How bright it is!" Then following these cries of ecstasy there issued from out the depth of the abyss a sweet song of gentleness and expectancy, in reference to which the author says: "It is the song of the mothers coming out to meet them."

Materlinck's fairy play is not all fantasy or imagination, neither is Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" wherein he says:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home;"

for, as we have already quoted, it is given as a fact in revelation that Abraham was chosen before he was born. Songs of expectant parents come from all parts of

the earth, and each little spirit is attracted to the spiritual and moral parentage for which the spirit had prepared itself.

Now if none of these spirits was permitted to enter mortality until they all were good and great and had become leaders, then the diversity of conditions among the children of men as we see them to-day would certainly seem to indicate discrimination and injustice. But if in their eagerness to take upon themselves bodies, the spirits were willing to come through any lineage for which they were worthy, or to which they were attracted, then they were given the full reward of merit, and were satisfied, yes, and even blessed.

Accepting this theory of life, we have a reasonable explanation of existent conditions in the habitations of man. How the law of spiritual attraction works between the spirit and the expectant parents, has not been revealed, neither can finite mind fully understand. By analogy, however, we can perhaps get a glimpse of what might take place in that spirit world. In physics we refer to the law of attraction wherein some force acting mutually between particles of matter tends to draw them together and to keep them from separating. In chemistry, there is an attractive force exerted between atoms, which causes them to enter into combination. We know, too, that there is an affinity between persons -- a spiritual relationship or attraction wherein individuals are either drawn towards others or repelled by others. Might it not be so in the realm of spirit -- each individual attracted to the parentage for which it is prepared. Our place in this world would then be determined by our own advancement or condition in the pre-mortal state, just as our place in our future existence will be determined by what we do here in mortality.

When, therefore, the Creator said to Abraham, and to others of his attainment, "You I will make my rulers", there could exist no feeling of envy or of jealousy among the million other spirits, for those who were "good and great" were but receiving their just reward, just as do members of a graduation class who have successfully completed their prescribed courses of study. The thousands of other students who have not yet attained that honor still have the privilege to seek it, or they may, if they choose, remain in satisfaction down in the grades.

By the operation of some eternal law with which man is yet unfamiliar, spirits come through parentages for which they are worthy -- some as Bushman of Australia, some as Solomon Islanders, some as Americans, as Europeans, as Asiatics, etc., etc., with all the varying degrees of mentality and spirituality manifest in parents of the different races that inhabit the earth.

Of this we may be sure, each was satisfied and happy to come through the lineage to which he or she was attracted and for which, and only which, he or she was prepared.

The Priesthood was given to those who were chosen as leaders. There were many who could not receive it, yet who knew that it was possible for them at sometime in the eternal plan to achieve that honor. Even those who knew that they would not be prepared to receive it during their mortal existence were content in the realization that they could attain every earthly blessing -- progress intellectually and spiritually, and possess to a limited degree the blessings of wisdom.

George Washington Carver was one of the noblest souls that ever came to earth. He held a close kinship with his Heavenly Father, and rendered a service to his fellowmen such as few have ever excelled. For every righteous endeavor, for every

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noble impulse, for every good deed performed in his useful life George Washington Carver will be rewarded, and so will every other man be he red, white, black, or yellow, for God is no respecter of persons.

Sometime in God's eternal plan, the Negro will be given the right to hold the Priesthood. In the meantime, those of that race who receive the testimony of the Restored Gospel may have their family ties protected and other blessings made secure, for in the justice and mercy of the Lord they will possess all the blessings to which they are entitled in the eternal plan of Salvation and Exaltation.

Nephi 26:33, to which you refer, does not contradict what I have said above, because the Negro is entitled to come unto the Lord by baptism, confirmation, and to receive of the assistance of the Church in living righteously.

Sincerely yours,

David O. McKay

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