



A reformed apologetic examination of perennial racism within Mormonism

RM Sivulka



orcid.org/0000-0002-7755-5958

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Promoter: Prof Fohle Lygunda li-M

Co-promoter: Dr TA Muswubi

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Ph.D. thesis: *A Reformed apologetic examination of perennial racism within Mormonism* is my work and has not been submitted either by me or another person to any other university.

R.M. Sivulka

North-West University. Potchefstroom Campus

South Africa

27 Sept. 2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved wife Tara and children Charis and Zoe for all the sacrifices they made to see me reach this level in my life. Thank you for your patience and prayers. My parents Bob and Deanna Sivulka have also been very supportive of this venture, so this work is also dedicated to them.

I also dedicate the thesis to my North-West University (NWU) promoters Prof Fohle Lygunda li-M and Dr Takalani Aaron Muswubi, and to my friend Dennis Monokroussos. They enlightened, broadened, and shaped my knowledge on this issue. Thank you for your supervision, encouragement, and prayers.

I also dedicate this thesis to my friend Dr Tim Stratton. Without his encouragement in March of 2020 to join NWU, this project would never have happened.

I also dedicate this thesis to my friend Brett Kunkle. His encouragement in June 2020 brought about a lecture I gave to his Maven mission team on racism within Mormonism. This event piqued my interest in turning it into a thesis.

Finally, I wish to thank my editors. Lori Galindo and Eric Johnson did some work on the beginning stages of this thesis. Eduard de Waal did an impressive work on the whole thesis.

ABSTRACT

In June of 1978, President Spencer W. Kimball of *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (LDS) received a landmark so-called revelation that allowed worthy Black men to hold the LDS priesthood. That revelation was presented to the LDS's twelve apostles, who all approved. Many assume this ended racism and any other associated problems in the LDS Church. Since the revelation, though, LDS leaders have increasingly sought to not only distance the Church from its racist past, but to root out other current expressions of racism. This research study attempts to answer the question: Is perennial racism and its other associated problems in the LDS Church merely a thing of the past?

This study has several key findings that help to answer this question. First, the LDS Church has had such a tawdry history on this subject that it is difficult to trust them today as genuine divine revelators. Second, despite recent LDS defenses, their non-biblical scriptural texts more naturally present a divine origination of racism in different contexts. Third, LDS prophets have biblically failed in not only teaching a *prima facie* White supremacy based on God being an exalted White man, but also in revealing prophetic racist statements outside their Scripture. Fourth, the LDS Church as well as its laity continue to operate in racist ways. These findings lead to the obvious conclusion that racism continues to be an issue for the LDS Church. Its racism is not something easily dismissed from simply the 1978 revelation. Racism is a more fundamental problem for the Church.

This research study adds value not only within the LDS Church, but outside it as well. The former offers an introspective look at LDS scriptural texts, prophetic statements, and some descriptive features of LDS members, but the latter offers an in-depth knowledge of Mormonism to incentivize a Reformed apologetic approach of biblical truth, prophecy, Christian living and witness in the world.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Associated Press
BOM	Book of Mormon
BYU	Brigham Young University
CCU	Courageous Christians United
COC	Community of Christ (formerly RLDS)
D&C	Doctrine & Covenants
FAIR	Faithful Answers, Informed Response
FLDS	Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
GTE	Gospel Topics Essay
JD	Journal of Discourses
JST	Joseph Smith Translation
KJV	King James Version
LDS	Latter-day Saint/Latter-day Saints
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NWU	North-West University
PGP	Pearl of Great Price
RLDS	Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
US	United States
USU	Utah State University
UTEP	University of Texas at El Paso

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Reformed apologetic examination of perennial racism within Mormonism

1.1. Key words

GTE,¹ LDS,² Mormonism, Perennial racism, Priesthood ban, and Reformed apologetics

1.2. Background

1.2.1. Motivation

Since 2006 the researcher has served as the president of Courageous Christians United (CCU), a Christian apologetics mission focused primarily on the Mormon community. He lives in West Jordan, Utah, a suburb of Salt Lake City, which is also the headquarters for *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (“LDS” or “Mormon” will primarily be used hereafter for brevity³). It is well known that the state of Utah has many Mormon members,⁴ and, as a result, many of the researcher’s neighbors and friends are members of this church. In addition, he is married to an ex-Mormon, so many of his in-laws are LDS. Consequently, this thesis is a labor of love for people who are very dear to him.

¹ Gospel Topic Essays.

² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormons.

³ In the last couple of decades, the Church has progressively sought to drop the “Mormon” and “LDS” terms to simply be known as the Church of Jesus Christ (MormonInfoDotOrg, 2018a). Many Christians have denied that the LDS Church is in fact the Church of Jesus Christ. The LDS Church is, of course, free to label themselves in any way they like. However, Christians are also free to use the designation that most people are familiar with, and that is “Mormon” or “LDS.” There are all sorts of break-off Mormon churches that claim to be the true successors of their founding prophet, Joseph Smith Jr, so it should also be noted that when the researcher uses the term “LDS”, he is specifically referring to the church which has by far the most members and is based in Salt Lake City, Utah. When he is using the term “Mormon,” he may be referring to that branch or, more generally, to any branch that holds to the Book of Mormon (BOM) and Joseph Smith as a prophet of God. Even LDS reporter Jana Riess (2019) acknowledged, “The AP style guide also makes more sense than what the church is asking reporters to do.”

⁴ At the end of 2023, it was revealed that Utah is no longer a majority Mormon state (Riess, 2023).

Further, the issue of racism in America has been a recurring one in recent years. As such, the researcher believes the study on which this thesis is based will be intriguing and relevant to the larger American community where Mormonism is based.

Finally, the LDS Church has been making ever-increasing inroads into Africa and the church's growth is accelerating (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2017). There are currently five operating temples in Africa with nineteen more either announced or under construction. In May 2022, LDS Apostle David Bednar claimed "that most rapid growth in the Church was happening in Africa" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). Since the researcher's study is conducted through North-West University, and South Africa and Africa in general continue to have racial problems, he believes this thesis will also be an appropriate and beneficial contribution to the African community.

1.3.2. Research context

As already noted, Mormonism is an American-based religion, but it has a worldwide following. In fact, as of 1996 there are more LDS members outside the United States (US) than there are within it (Todd, 1996). As such, the collection of data for this thesis concerns Mormonism around the world. However, to determine whether there truly is a perennial racism within Mormonism that finds its origins in spiritual inspiration or that is allegedly God-ordained, this study must look foundationally at the LDS Scriptures and other sayings of their General Authorities (i.e., the Brethren).

In addition, to understand the racism Mormonism has wrestled with, it will be helpful to understand some of its history in context of racism within the history of the Christian Church as well as American culture. History has been a messy story for much more than just the Mormon Church, and it is this messy story that makes the Mormon story much more excusable to a certain extent.

However, things become much more interesting when one understands their theology of inspiration, particularly with modern-day revelation and their doctrine of the restoration. In this context, culpability for promoting racism takes on a whole new meaning. This study will explain and evaluate this in light of what the Bible teaches.

1.4. Problem statement

1.4.1. Practical problem

About thirty-five years prior to this Gospel Topics Essay (GTE), on June 8, 1978, Spencer W. Kimball—the church’s twelfth president/prophet—issued his revelation that “all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood without regard for race or color” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:294). The only male members not able to be ordained up till this point were those of Black African ancestry.⁵ Thus, there was no longer any official partiality or segregation against Black men as a race, and they were no longer treated as second-class citizens who were kept from the full blessings of God.

Despite this revelation, LDS members continued to perpetuate racist beliefs and practices. As a result, the Church eventually issued its GTE. This landmark essay disavowed “the *theories* advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013a, emphasis added).

Since 1978, the General Authorities have increasingly and openly advocated for a God who does not discriminate and is not racist. Since God is good, he is obviously not evil. If God is a racist, then of course he is evil. God is not evil, so he is not a racist. This is a simple *modus tollens* argument.

Nonetheless, the practical problem that underlies this whole study is the fact that the authority figure seems to be denying racism within Mormonism. As much as the famous parable *The Emperor Has No Clothes* (Andersen, 1837) remind us of the conceited Emperor who gets exposed before his subjects, this research study uncovers an inevitable exposure of perennial racism within Mormonism. This uncovering or exposure of the perennial racism within Mormonism is in LDS texts and teachings. In this regard, LDS leaders are still trying in vain not only to deny its existence, but also to find some remedial ways to mitigate its appearance in their texts and teachings.

1.4.2. Research problem

The research problem has to do with examining what exactly was swept under the carpet. Just because one senses problems does not mean one can articulate what the problems are or even what their causes are. Similarly, one may be able to sense racism within Mormonism without being able to clearly articulate it or

⁵ Priesthood ordination has never been offered to females in the LDS Church.

what the reasons for it may be. As such, this study will attempt to clearly articulate the evidence that may point to Mormonism still having racism.

The research problem is not simply about examining racism *per se* within Mormonism. The problem also extends to what issues follow from any racism that may be discovered, for those are racism issues as well. In this research it is not enough simply to fact-check what has been said and done, because much has already been well documented. Rather, the research must determine whether this racism would rule out Mormonism from having divine origins and divine prophets throughout its history—a conclusion which is of great concern for the Reformed apologetic examination.

1.5. Preliminary literature review

There is a mass of literature on the issue of the LDS priesthood ban and racism in general within the LDS Church, but central to this study is the 2013 GTE: *Race and the Priesthood*. In a recent work that addressed various GTEs, historian Matthew Harris (2020:247) says of this 2013 work, “Without question, the tersely written essay is the fullest, richest, and most authoritative expression to date of Mormonism’s evolving racial teachings.” Again, here the Church condemned all racism and attributed any past racism to mere theories... *even if given by their prophets and apostles*. In other words, the Church agreed that racism does not find its origin in God but in humans. This study will evaluate this claim that all past racism found in the Church leadership is based in mere theory.

Approximately fifty years ago, in the well-known liberal *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Lester E. Bush, Jr. (1973) issued a lengthy landmark essay called “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview.” Everyone wanting to know how scholarly LDS think on this subject should be familiar with this article as well as Bush’s (1969) earlier critical review of Stephen G. Taggart’s *Missouri thesis* for *Dialogue*.⁶ Bush’s controversial view at the time that there was no authorized, canonical revelation for the priesthood ban or for all the racist statements from their leaders is in keeping with what the Church later pronounced in their 2013 GTE.

Forty years after the 1978 revelation, the fall issue of *Dialogue* commemorated the event. Of particular interest is Bush’s (2018) follow-up article to his 1973 article “Looking Back, Looking Forward:

⁶ Since Bush’s articles, LDS scholars have generally given up on what was known as “The Missouri Thesis” (the priesthood ban originated when the Saints came into Missouri in the early 1830s) and now assume the priesthood ban came much later under Brigham Young, the second president/prophet after Joseph Smith’s death in 1844.

‘Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine’ Forty-Five Years Later.” He went to great lengths to provide many details of the events leading up to 1978 and to the events leading up to 2013. Bush also argued that prophets like Brigham Young were simply products of their time, and this is basically what the 2013 GTE affirmed. Bush (24) writes:

The historical record is clear, and is now widely available, that Brigham Young allowed his nineteenth-century beliefs about Cain and nineteenth-century concerns about racial purity to drive a decision to bar Blacks from the Mormon priesthood and temple ordinances. It is still appropriate to acknowledge that, on this particular question, he made a mistake.

However, this requires careful evaluation. Were Young and others just products of their time? Should they have known better? What is the role of prophets and apostles in the LDS Church? Can they affirm racism when they are not speaking for God? Were they truly speaking for God when they made these statements? Can they even be objectively tested for their legitimacy?

Joanna Brooks’ (2020) book *Mormonism and White Supremacy: American Religion and the Problem of Racial Innocence* is an important recent contribution to this topic of racism and Mormonism. As a progressive Mormon, she is hard-hitting towards those of her own faith, as well as those of other faiths, who are conservative and hold to the doctrine of infallibility. This is because she avers it contributes to White supremacy (111). Her critique makes it easier to maintain that Mormonism *may* still have divine origins regardless of past or present racism within her church. Thus, there is a need for an assessment of these ideas.

Her work will also be evaluated for the cultural, behavioral, and anthropological racist factors she attributes to the entire history of her own church, but is her critique fair, particularly given the 1978 and 2013 statements?

In evaluating LDS Scripture, one must note that for LDS, the Bible is part of their standard works. As such, certain topics should be considered here, such as the curses of Cain and Ham, slavery, genocide, that only the Levites were appointed temple workers, the prohibition against Israel intermarrying their neighbors, that Jesus had his disciples bypass the Gentiles, that he called a Canaanite woman a dog, and that Paul called all Cretans degenerates. If these issues cannot be adequately answered, then perhaps both Jewish and Christian faiths are also fundamentally, systemically racist in terms of the Old and New Testaments. If these texts prove to be racist *with divine sanction*, then there would be good reason to assume they are

fallible, just as the communities that produced them. They could not *literally* be the word of God, since God does not err.

However, perhaps it can be established that the Bible does not have the divine sanction of racism. Nonetheless, if one holds to the fallibility of the Bible in other respects, then that is all that is needed to excuse the fallibility of the apparent racism within Latter-day Scriptures. Racism is simply dismissed as an error, but the Scriptures continue to be affirmed. Again, the fundamental issue concerns one's understanding of inspiration. Brooks and other progressive LDS are committed to an exclusive understanding of inspiration that allows for one's fallibility to be the result, and this, of course, needs to be evaluated as well.⁷

More fundamentally, there are relevant issues within LDS Scripture that were never cleared up in the 1978 revelation. Professor Mario S. DePillis (Catholic scholar of American religious history and only the second non-Mormon president of the Mormon History Association) said just a few days after the 1978 revelation in the *New York Times* that "the revelation leaves unsolved other racist implications of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price—Scriptures that are both cornerstones and contradictions" (Tanner, J. & S., 2004). Thus, this study will examine these Mormon Scriptures to determine their racist content and, more importantly, if they contain a divinely sanctioned racism. This study will also include an examination and evaluation of Mormon responses in dealing with these controversial, allegedly racist Scripture passages. The most recent work in this regard is that of W. Paul Reeve (2023), the noted Simmons Chair of Mormon Studies in the history department at the University of Utah. He also had a major role in crafting the 2013 GTE (Bennett, 2017).

Reeve's (2015) major work on race and the LDS Church is *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford). This is an historical overview of how Mormonism's original universal message for all races, without restriction, caused them tremendous persecution in the early US, when Mormons began to be identified as a separate and inferior race. Missourians in the 1830s excused this

⁷ Whether conservative or progressive, Mormons view the Bible as having been corrupted. This explains the relevance for the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), also known as the Inspired Version. The Community of Christ (COC, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or RLDS) sanctions and has published this since 1867. (The COC broke away from the LDS Church. The former followed Joseph Smith III and settled in Independence, Missouri; whereas the latter followed Brigham Young and settled in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1847. Even though the former never imposed absolute restrictions on Blacks being ordained, the COC agreed 113 years prior to the LDS to allow men of all races to have the priesthood [see their Doctrine & Covenants (D&C) 116 which allowed Blacks to be ordained]. In addition, the former have allowed women to have the priesthood since 1984.) The LDS Church sanctions and publishes the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and adds footnotes in it from the JST as well as a sample selection from the JST at the end of their Bible. In 2024, the LDS Church bought the original JST manuscripts among other historic items from the COC for \$192.5 million (Riess, 2024a).

persecution “in part by suggesting that Mormons were less white” (261). To fit in, Mormons began to overcompensate by promoting Whiteness over all other races. Reeve (257) wrote that “a growing admiration for Mormons emerged...[t]he Mormon family in many ways had become a model for the American family—white, middle class, and successful”. The admiration that came about early in the twentieth century was short-lived though. In the middle of that century, as America began to push for civil rights and intermarriage, persecution against Mormons arose again. This sets the stage for the 1978 revelation.

Newell G. Bringhurst (2018) has a recent update to his *Saints, Slaves, & Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People within Mormonism*, which was originally published just three years after the 1978 revelation. The second edition has an additional foreword by Edward J. Blum, and there is an additional preface by Bringhurst as well as two postscripts by Reeve and D.T. Smith. Bringhurst (xv) claims that the first edition “was the first in-depth, book-length study to trace the changing place of blacks within the LDS Church from its founding in 1830 to 1981.” The central thesis was that the priesthood

ban emerged largely as the byproduct of Mormon ethnic whiteness initially articulated in the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price... Mormons utilized these same scriptures [*sic*], along with the Old Testament, to prove that black people were members of a divinely cursed race, given their alleged descent from two accursed Biblical counter-figures—Ham, the misbehaving son of Noah, and Cain, humankind’s alleged first murderer (xvi-xvii).

Wain Myer’s (2015) *From Baptist Preacher to Mormon Teacher* offers a non-scholarly, personal look into what it was like for him converting to the LDS Church as a Black man post-1978 but pre-2013.⁸ Myer’s account gives an important look into the huge role feelings (what Mormons refer to as their “testimony” when God so directs them) play in the Mormon conversion process as well as one’s continued spiritual life. Those feelings override any problems one may have. Those feelings are the words of the Lord given to an individual who needs direction. And as Myer’s girlfriend (later wife) told him when he was trying to make sense of all the racist problems in the LDS Church, “[M]an’s ways are not God’s ways.” (40) Once Myer was convinced that these feelings were God speaking to him, it becomes easier to see how he justifies his actions and beliefs. Myer’s testimony serves as a common story of conversion among Black Mormons.

⁸ For a more detailed review of this work, see Sivulka (2021).

Matthew L. Harris' (2024) *Second-Class Saints: Black Mormons and the Struggle for Racial Equality* is the most recent thorough history on this issue. The text brings fresh insights, behind-the-scenes perspectives of the Brethren based on access to the Church archives.

By way of critiquing the LDS Church from a specifically historic Christian perspective on the issue of racism, much great work presents the problematic racial statements and passages within Mormonism but not much has been written substantially dealing with LDS arguments on this issue, especially since the 2013 GTE was released. For example, Christian researchers on Mormonism, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, were publishing on this issue for almost twenty years prior to the 1978 revelation. Their major work on this issue is titled *Curse of Cain?: Racism in Mormonism* (2004). This is a tremendous historical resource; but, as with most Christian material on this issue, it was done almost ten years prior to 2013, and there is a dearth in responding to the work of LDS apologists and scholars.

To her credit, Sandra Tanner (2018:8-9) did briefly address the 2013 GTE several years after it came out, in which she argues against the claims of the essay, but there is nothing in her article explicitly countering the work of LDS apologists and scholars underpinning the Church essay. Ultimately, in Tanner's conclusion she begs the question that the Book of Mormon (BOM) and Pearl of Great Price (PGP) are racist without dealing with all the work LDS have done to counteract that belief. She says, "While we applaud the LDS Church's efforts to remove racism from its teachings, one wonders if it can truly succeed as long as the Book of Mormon and the *Pearl of Great Price*, with their racist teachings, are embraced as the word of God?" (9)

In another example, the researcher asked noted Christian apologist Robert M. Bowman if he knew of any good responses to an introductory LDS article on the issue of racism and the BOM (cf. Scripture Central, 2019), and Bowman (2021) said, "...I'm not aware of any responses to it."

Twenty-five years ago, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen (1998:179-205) wrote a popular article among Mormon apologists and Christian evangelists to Mormons entitled "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" Basically, evangelical responses to LDS scholarship have been woefully inadequate. Certainly, there have been some notable examples of evangelical responses to Mormonism in the past twenty-five years, but overall, the state of evangelical responses to Mormonism still leaves a lot to be desired, particularly on this issue of racism. As Mosser (2002:77) wrote several years later, "[I]t is important that evangelical critiques of Mormonism keep pace with its defenses."

1.6. Clarification of concepts

GTE (Gospel Topics Essay): the LDS Church published “Race and the Priesthood” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013) in December 2013 to denounce racism completely. The essay attempted to excuse the Church from having the priesthood ban until 1978 and attempted to excuse their past leaders from making racist statements. This study will examine how effective this essay was at meeting its goals.

LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints): the largest manifestation of Joseph Smith Jr’s Church that he founded in 1830. This Church continued through the prophet Brigham Young, who led it to Utah in 1847 where it is based today in Salt Lake City, Utah. This is the group of Mormons that this study will focus on.

Mormonism: the doctrine that issues forth from the LDS Church, particularly from their prophets and apostles. Mormonism affirms the validity of the primitive Church Christ founded, but claims its authority was lost from the earth and needed a complete restoration, not a reformation, brought about via Joseph Smith Jr. This study focuses on whether Mormonism advocates a God-ordained racism or not.

Perennial racism: racism is the philosophy that holds that not all races should be equally valued or that some should be considered inherently inferior to others and, thus, the inferior ones may be discriminated against in various ways. The racism this study is concerned with is not only whether dark skin has ever been a sign of divine disfavor and whether those of Black African ancestry, in particular, were in fact the recipients of divine disfavor by being banned from certain roles and activities that every other people group was encouraged to participate in, but whether there continues to be a God-ordained racism within the LDS Church.

Priesthood ban: the priesthood is distinguished between the lower Aaronic and the higher Melchizedek expressions, and both are given to worthy males to act within the Church. This is relevant to this study, since prior to the 1978 revelation, only Blacks of African ancestry were banned from the priesthood.

Reformed apologetics: an approach that presents the Reformed faith based on the Triune God’s word in contending and defending it against Mormon truth claims. As Reformed, it places a priority on presenting the Bible from an historical-grammatical approach to understand the text in its original context. The contention and defense utilized in this study challenges Mormonism’s claim of divine origins by suggesting

that if their prophets acting in their official capacity promote racism, then Mormonism cannot be a biblically warranted expression of the Christian faith.

1.7. Research questions, aims, and objectives

1.7.1. Research questions

From the research problem statement, the main research question is: Is perennial racism, and its other associated problems, in the LDS Church merely a thing of the past?

Given this main research question, the four related research sub-questions are as follows:

1. What is the context and content concerning perennial racism within Mormonism?
2. How are LDS teachings perpetuating racism?
3. To what extent are LDS cultural practices perpetuating racism?
4. What are the proposed Reformed apologetic solutions?

1.7.2. Aim

The aim of this study is to examine the evidence of perennial racism within Mormonism from a Reformed apologetic perspective.

1.7.3. Objectives

This study's specific objectives, which are tied to the main aim, are as follows:

1. To discuss the context and content concerning perennial racism within Mormonism.
2. To analyze the LDS teachings that uncover their perennial racism.
3. To demonstrate LDS cultural practices that have perpetuated racism.
4. To propose Reformed apologetic solutions for perennial racism within Mormonism.

1.8. Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument for this study is that there is perennial racism within Mormonism. Though the worthy Black men have been allowed to hold the LDS priesthood office by the Brethren, it proves not to be the end of perennial racism and other associated problems in the LDS Church. Apparently, LDS

leaders have increasingly sought not only to distance the Church from its racist past, but to root out other current expressions of racism. This research study attempts to answer the question: Is racism and its other associated problems in the LDS Church merely a thing of the past? This research study adds value not only within the LDS Church, but outside it as well. The former addition of value offers an introspective look at LDS scriptural texts, prophetic statements, and some descriptive features of LDS members, but the latter offers an in-depth knowledge of Mormonism to incentivize a Reformed apologetic approach of biblical truth, prophecy, Christian living and witness in the world.

1.9. Methodology

1.9.1. Research type

This study proposes to approach racism within Mormonism from a qualitative as well as quantitative approach in collecting data. The latter will scientifically ascertain descriptive features within relatively current LDS thinking on supposed racist theological beliefs. This approach will refer to other work on the topic. The former method will be employed to paint a picture, evaluate various terms and meanings, and to ask normative questions of LDS and non-LDS through various sources. *Should* LDS Scripture be taken as racist, *should* the cultural, behavioral and anthropological patterns of LDS be taken as racist, and *should* the statements of the General Authorities be taken as racist? If the answers to these questions demonstrate that LDS have perennial racism, then *should* this demonstrate that their God and, thus, their religion is false?

1.9.2. Research methods

To ascertain these questions, this study must qualitatively analyze what exactly is meant by several concepts and carefully consider how certain concepts are sustained or disavowed (e.g., racism, revelation, theory, the true church, revelators, inspiration, etc.). Of course, the syntax may have different semantics depending on who is using the syntax.

The researcher, along with the LDS Church, assume at least that God has spoken in the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 says: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”⁹ With this approach as a foundation, Christ’s servants are to test all prophecies and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thes 5:20-1).

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical references will be from the New International Version (NIV). This should be uncontroversial since the LDS Church has recently clarified their approval of other modern translations like the NIV for “readability and doctrinal clarity” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2025).

When it comes to researching what the Bible and other LDS Scriptures and General Authorities teach, this study will be utilizing the historical-grammatical method. Put simply, this method attempts to get at the original intent of the author by uncovering the historical and grammatical context in which the author wrote. The quest of this study is for the plain meaning, not some allegorical, spiritual, or possibly hidden one we arrive at via subjective means. This historical-grammatical method is concerned with the *science* of hermeneutics or interpretation.¹⁰

Proper interpretation is not always easy. The Apostle Peter indicates that there are certain Scriptures from the Apostle Paul that are “hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16). To understand what a particular author likely intended, it is important to consider some key factors for the historical-grammatical method. It is often helpful to read various translations of the Bible to get a better feel for the meaning of a particular passage. When the translations appear contradictory and leave the reader confused, knowing the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek) is also helpful. The better a language is known, the better ordinary words as well as nuances or figures of speech are understood. Commentaries, especially by those who are familiar with the original languages, are also helpful for gaining insight on passages. Further, the most important rule for understanding a term or an idea is understanding both its specific as well as a general context. Theologian Timothy A. Stratton (2020:11-2) summarizes the goal of the historical-grammatical approach well when he states: “It is necessary to view ancient writings through ancient lenses to reach correct interpretation. This is best accomplished by possessing a proper understanding of genre, compositional devices, and other literary conventions in which the original author of a particular book of the Bible and/or any other ancient writing employed.” Stratton employed the approach in understanding what the Bible taught on the topic of free will vs. determinism.

There is also the further and more primary issue of textual criticism, which is the science of uncovering or piecing together what the author said in the original syntax. There is always more than one way to say the same thing. However, if it is impossible to ascertain the words an author uses, there is no point in being dogmatic over a particular semantic reading. Despite what skeptics claim, we can piece together what the authors of the Old and New Testaments say with a high degree of accuracy. This is done, just like with any

¹⁰ For a practical work on this method, see *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Fee & Stuart, 1982) and *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Duvall & Hayes, 2020). For a more scholarly work, see *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Vanhoozer, 1998).

other ancient work, by examining all the various available early manuscripts as well as quotations from outside sources.¹¹ The famous Princeton New Testament textual scholar, Bruce Metzger, said,

We can say that we have in the Greek New Testament and in faithful translations of the New Testament, we can say with assurance, this is God's word. ...Let me say, that despite these variant readings, very few of them pertain to any doctrine. Many of these variant readings have to do with spelling in the Greek language. Many of them have to do with the order of words in the Greek language, and the order of words in the Greek language, unlike English, does not really reflect a difference of meaning. There are however a few places that bear on doctrine, but none of these doctrines is hinged only on one passage that's in doubt. (AncientPathsTV, 2024)

Even Metzger's famous agnostic student, Bart Ehrman (2005:252), largely agrees with this. He acknowledges that he and Metzger largely agree on what the original New Testament looked like. Ehrman went on to say that he "does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger's position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."

God has not only clearly spoken in the Bible, but he has also clearly shown his nature and his will in the things that are made so that people are without excuse (Rom 1:18-32). The Psalmist affirms that the "heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps 19:1). God has ordained his voice to be clearly heard in a way that does not utilize the sound of speech, and it is perfect and trustworthy (Ps 19:2-3, 7). The Bible validates a natural theology based on natural revelation. This is why Wisdom in Proverbs calls out from the public square and the simple are instructed to go learn various lessons by observing nature (e.g., Prov 1:20-23; 6:6).

The qualitative research methods employed in this study involve an analysis of various materials on apparent racism primarily in Mormonism, but also in Christian history and Scriptures. This analysis of relevant information from leading and relevant voices is conducted to determine and evaluate their past and present viewpoints, all of which are critical for a historical perspective.

Quantitative research methods must determine if there is any relatively current racism held by LDS members. Therefore, this study proposes evaluating research done on this subject primarily post-2013. This entails researching surveys and other pieces of information that may convey general LDS people's thinking

¹¹ For a recent work supporting New Testament textual criticism while also correcting evangelical apologists' excesses, see *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Hixson & Gurry, 2019).

since the GTE (2013) was published. This study will examine previous experimental research about what percentage of members of the LDS Church still hold to racist beliefs (e.g., that Blacks are of the lineage of Cain and Ham and whether that indicates they were a divinely cursed race in any way). It will also be helpful to determine, as far as possible, the various classifications of LDS respondents (e.g., age, sex, race, educational status, location, etc.). Amassing this information would be an interesting study since it would reveal how well the 2013 pronouncement has filtered into the general LDS population. Have they gotten the message? If not, what factors have prevented that from happening?

1.9.3. Research techniques

A host of research techniques could be used for this study, but the following are simply a handful that serve as a good foundation. The famous British philosopher of religion, Richard Swinburne (1986:11-6), lays out four basic principles of inductive inference for the mental life of others that will be helpful for this study as well. Swinburne suggests these are “the basic principles used by science” (16). This study will use the following principles to form an inference as to the best explanation concerning the subject matter of this study.¹²

1. The *principle of credulity*: One is naturally inclined and ought to believe a thing based on one’s comparable past seeming states until presented with further evidence to the contrary. Swinburne (12) claims: “Without this principle, there can be no knowledge at all.”
2. The *principle of testimony*: One ought to believe the testimony of others’ seeming states until presented with defeaters. Swinburne (13) claims that “we must assume trustworthiness in the absence of counterevidence.”
3. The *principle of simplicity*: One is justified in choosing between alternative theories based on the simplest theory that best fits with what one takes to be true in other areas of knowledge which were formed on the principle of credulity. However, that one is justified does not entail that the simplest belief is always true (15-6).

¹² For a more detailed recent example of defining and using such an inference to examine the foundations of both Christianity and Mormonism, see *Jesus’ Resurrection and Joseph’s Visions: Examining the Foundations of Christianity and Mormonism* (Bowman Jr., 2020:36ff.).

4. The *principle of charity*: One ought to assume that others are quite like oneself and want to believe true things and avoid false things. Obviously certain individuals do not operate this way, but until one has reason to think otherwise, one ought to assume the best of others' intentions (15).

Science also presupposes the laws of logic. Science demands one pay attention to the laws of logic, or the result will simply be an autobiography of one's feelings, fallacies of thinking, irrationality, or plain nonsense. Thus, the laws of logic, which are not in and of themselves a scientific domain (these laws are of the domain of philosophy and are presupposed of all disciplines and thinking in general), are used to make this study intelligible and factually worthwhile for everyone. This study, while primarily a theological one, is still scientific. It obtains and analyzes information. Theology has historically been known as "the queen of the sciences" and "[n]othing about science essentially excludes philosophical or theological concepts from entering into its very fabric" (Moreland, 1989:13).

There are many elements to good logical thinking.¹³ Employing good deductive logic from Scripture demands validity and soundness. The terms "validity" and "soundness" in arguments are used in varying ways. The way this study uses the term "validity" applies only to deductive logic and has to do with a proper formal structure—when the premises are true, the conclusion must be true. Such is not the case for inductive arguments where the premises do not guarantee the truth of the conclusion. Soundness in logic has to do with a deductive argument having validity as well as true premises.

1.10. Ethical implications of the research

The researcher estimated that the risk level of the research would be a **low risk** since the emphasis of the study will be on a literature review and textual analysis. All sources used will be referred to, and due effort will be made to articulate the viewpoints of various scholars in a fair and balanced manner. The research study respected the North-West University (NWU) code of ethics, and an ethical formality will be sought. All personal and confidential information susceptible to harm was prohibited and also, the researcher will use no inflammatory or stereotypical language. As Kreeft's fictional C.S. Lewis tells the fictional President John (Jack) F. Kennedy, "The point is not for *me*, Jack, but for truth. The whole point of debating, for me, is not for me or you to win but for truth to win; not to see *who's* true but to see *what's* true. In fact, I won't 'argue away' unless you're with me on this." (Kreeft, 1982:34)

¹³ For a good introduction from a Christian perspective, see *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Geisler & Brooks, 1990).

1.11. Schematic presentation of research

Research title: A Reformed apologetic examination of perennial racism within Mormonism			
Timelines	Research questions	Aims and objectives	Research methods
September 2024	Chapter 1: Introduction, problem statement, and research method		
November 2024	Question 1: What is the context and content concerning perennial racism within Mormonism?	Objective 1: To discuss the context and content concerning perennial racism within Mormonism.	Chapter 2: Literary analysis of relevant LDS Church and scholarly material.
February 2025	Question 2: How are LDS teachings perpetuating racism?	Objective 2: To analyze LDS teachings that uncover their perennial racism.	Chapter 3: Exegesis on Christian and LDS Scriptures using a grammatical-historical method and social-historical and social-scientific methods of relevant anthropological, cultural, and behavioral material.
April 2025	Question 3: To what extent are LDS cultural practices perpetuating racism?	Objective 3: To demonstrate LDS cultural practices that have perpetuated racism.	Chapter 4: Literature analysis of relevant LDS Church and scholarly material of practices that have perpetuated racism.
June 2025	Question 4: What are the proposed Reformed apologetic solutions for Christian mission praxis?	Objective 4: To propose Reformed apologetic solutions for perennial racism within Mormonism.	Chapter 5: Synthetic interpretation will be done to propose a Reformed apologetic solution.
August 2025	Chapter 5: Summary, conclusion, and recommendations for Christian mission praxis		

1.12. Provisional chapter division

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: The context and content of perennial racism within Mormonism

Chapter 3: The analysis of LDS teachings regarding their perennial racism

Chapter 4: The analysis of LDS cultural practices regarding their perennial racism

Chapter 5: The proposed Reformed apologetic solutions for perennial racism within Mormonism

Chapter 6: Summary, conclusion, and recommendations for Christian mission praxis

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF PERENNIAL RACISM WITHIN MORMONISM

2.1. Introduction

This chapter sketches the history (context) and theology (content) of perennial racism within Mormonism. While Joseph Smith Jr, the founder and prophet of the Mormon Church, allowed Black men to be ordained throughout his tenure, his successor, Brigham Young, instituted a public policy that denied the priesthood to Black men of African descent. For at least 126 years, institutionalized racism denied Black African members the same kind of authority afforded other men through the priesthood. Though it is still a scholarly debate as to how much (i.e., the quantity) and how deep (i.e., the quality) perennial racism is within Mormonism, this chapter answers the basic question: What is the context (history) and content (theology) of perennial racism within Mormonism? In that regard, this chapter will explore this question by discussing six aspects: first, the origin of racism within Mormonism's history; second, the factors behind their racial policies; third, their institutionalized racist policies within their priesthood and temple framework; fourth, attempts to fight perennial racism; fifth, the dissembling pattern within their perennial racism; and sixth, recent attempts to excuse their perennial racism.

2.2. The origin of racism within Mormonism's history

2.2.1. Overview

In his recent work, historian W. Paul Reeve (2023:7) divides the history of the LDS Church's stance on matters of race into three phases: 1) "no barriers", 2) "barred priesthood ordination and temple admission from people of Black African descent", and 3) "reestablished a commitment to the founding principles of the Restoration".¹⁴ He states that the institutionalized policies of discrimination that came about were not

¹⁴ The Restoration is a reference to the Mormon Church. Mormonism is just one of a handful of American

in keeping with the Church's founding Scripture and the way the Church operated since its inception. Basically, if the 1978 revelation restored the Restored Church, it then necessarily follows that the Church had been led astray for most of its history, approximately 130 years.

2.2.2. The early LDS period: no racial restrictions

Many people today assume Blacks were unable to become members of the LDS Church prior to 1978.¹⁵ However, this was clearly not the case. Blacks were baptized members from the earliest days of the Church, which was founded in 1830. Reeve (2015:112) says, "One of the first African Americans to join the fledgling movement was a former slave known in the historical record as 'Black Pete.' Pete was a part of the enthusiastic reception that the first Mormon missionaries received in the Kirtland, Ohio, region in 1830."

The LDS Scripture of the BOM and Doctrine & Covenants (D&C) seemed to support that which was practiced in the early Mormon Church. The BOM, which was published a month before the founding of the Mormon Church, taught that "all the earth shall see the salvation of the Lord... every nation, kindred, tongue and people shall be blessed" (1 Nephi 19:17). 2 Nephi 26:33 famously says that the Lord "inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, *black and white*, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (emphasis added). Likewise, Moroni 8:18, also in the BOM, claims, "God is not a partial God." D&C 58:64 shows the Lord telling Joseph Smith in 1831 to preach the gospel "unto every creature". Also in 1831, D&C 38:16 shows Jesus saying, concerning salvation, that whether rich or poor, all flesh is his and he is "no respecter of persons". Therefore, clearly, the early Mormon message was one of inclusivity.

That inclusive message also extended to the priesthood. Many assume that from its inception the LDS Church has had a priesthood ban against Blacks with African ancestry. However, this was not the case. The Church today has officially stated: "There is no reliable evidence that any black men were denied the priesthood during Joseph Smith's lifetime." (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013a) In

restorationist churches that came about because of the Second Great Awakening. The basic idea is that the established Church of Christ died sometime after the time of the apostles and needed to be restored. Consequently, all other Christian churches today outside of "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" (D&C 1:30) are dead churches.

¹⁵ See for example, Hartlep (2012:3).

addition, historian Matthew L. Harris (2022:7) claims that “at least a handful of Black men had been ordained to the LDS priesthood during Smith’s tenure as founding prophet.” Harris (2024:1) also says:

Elijah Abel, Q. Walker Lewis, Joseph T. Ball, each of whom held the priesthood and at least one of whom (Abel) received temple blessings, while another (Ball) served as a presiding member in a Mormon congregation. And there’s good evidence (though inconclusive) that three other Black men—William McCary, Enoch Lovejoy Lewis, and Peter Kerr (also known as ‘Black Pete’)—also held the priesthood.

Elijah Abel¹⁶ was a Black man¹⁷ who “was ordained... in 1836 with the sanction of Joseph Smith Jr. himself” (Reeve, 2015:109). Later in that same year, Abel was even ordained as a Seventy; three years later he was active in the Nauvoo Seventies Quorum; and in 1841 as well as after he arrived in Utah in 1853, he had his Seventy’s certificate renewed (Bush, Jr., 1973:17).¹⁸

Q. Walker Lewis was ordained by Apostle William Smith, the younger brother of Joseph, “in 1843 or 1844” (Reeve, 2023:13). It is not entirely clear whether this was before or after Joseph’s death in June of 1844. If before, it is not clear that Joseph was aware of the ordination. Nonetheless, if there was an express ban under Joseph sometime after Abel’s ordination, Joseph’s brother apparently was not aware of it. Further, Apostle Wilford Woodruff described Lewis as an elder not long after Joseph’s death (Reeve, 2023:14). Also, the Church (2013a) has acknowledged that even Brigham Young, three years after Smith’s death, referred to Lewis as “one of the best Elders, an African”. All these facts point to priesthood ordination being offered to Blacks throughout Joseph Smith’s tenure and Blacks having priesthood beyond his tenure.

In addition to these examples, the 1836 rules governing the Kirtland Ohio Temple were for “old or young, rich or poor, male or female, bond or free, black or white” (Bush, Jr., 1973:17). There was also no policy of discrimination set out in 1840 for the Nauvoo Illinois Temple. During that time, the First Presidency expected people of “every color” to worship in the temple (18).

2.2.3. Racial factors that contributed to the priesthood ban

2.2.3.1. Accommodation for survival

¹⁶ Also spelled “Able” or “Ables”.

¹⁷ Technically, Abel was one-eighth Black, since his grandmother was half White and half Black (Harris, 2024:8).

¹⁸ This was the Third Quorum of Seventy (Harris, 2024:9).

Given these facts, who was to blame for these untrue assumptions relating to Blacks in the Church? Reeve's entire book, *Religion of a Different Color*, argues that these facts were conveniently overlooked by LDS to appear whiter to a White supremacist nation. The Church used an accommodation or appeasement tactic for their survival.¹⁹ Reeve (2015:214) says, "Mormons had secured a white identity for themselves at the expense of their black brothers and sisters." These Blacks were "replaced in collective Mormon memory by a white priesthood, white temples, and a segregated theology that insisted that God implemented Mormonism's bans and that they had been there from the start". Reeve (2023:87) also states, "Church leaders moved incrementally away from their own Black members toward whiteness and its corresponding acceptability."

Brooks makes a similar statement:

Mormonism isn't predominantly white by accident. I thought we were white just 'cause; we were white on purpose. We were white because Brigham Young established a territorial theocracy where in his vision, white men would rule over black, and he established slavery as much to keep black people out of the territory as he did to keep them as a captive labor force. Mormonism was white on purpose. (RadioWest, 2020)

It would have been more accurate for Brooks to have said that Mormonism was not Black on purpose. That would be consistent with the evidence Pierce (2016:180) provides to substantiate his thesis that Mormons *largely* were not trying to establish Whiteness on purpose. Instead, he claims that Utah was overwhelmingly White "by accident". According to Pierce, "with the exception of their feelings regarding [Black] Africans", LDS are not conscious of promoting the White race over any other race. But perhaps there is a consistency between the two theses when one considers that Pierce makes that exception regarding Blacks and says "largely by accident". That would seem to indicate that Mormons discriminated against Blacks and "largely" did not focus on promoting their White race over any other races. They simply had good success in reaching out to Northern Europeans. It was not as if LDS avoided everyone else.

¹⁹ Pierce (2016:202) echoes this sentiment when he says that non-Mormon Americans claimed these poor, "servile Mormons had exchanged their whiteness for a false religion." He concludes: "Non-Mormon Americans, however, often used the rhetoric of racial desirability to attack the Mormons as somehow less than white. Their religious practices allegedly led believers into a state of racial decline, not unlike other undesirable groups, and no peoples who gave up freedom for subservience could truly be white. For decades to come, the Mormons would continue to be seen as an anomaly, an other, and they would work hard to demonstrate their patriotism, loyalty, and status as equal, white citizens." (205)

LDS proselytized among the Native Americans, and this took on a restoration element, since Mormons considered all these Indians to be the actual descendants of Israel (183). Thus, Mormons had a special emphasis on recruiting these people, since of course they would be the ones to build the New Jerusalem in the Western hemisphere. As it turned out, the vast majority of Native Americans were not interested. LDS also proselytized among the Pacific Islanders with great success, although these converts mostly remained local and did not relocate to Utah. So, the focus was not on Whiteness; it was on all the races minus the Black Africans. Regardless of the Church's intention, everyone agrees the outcome was the same: Mormonism, in Utah in particular, became overwhelmingly White.

2.2.3.2. Slavery

Had it not been for the issue of slavery in the US, it appears likely that the Church would never have adopted this accommodation or appeasement tactic, since it was this tactic that first issued in discrimination of their Black brethren. It was also the same tactic that in 1890 rid the Church of its practice of polygamy, which ultimately resulted in Utah achieving statehood in 1896. In addition, this same tactic brought about the revelation in 1978. As has become quite apparent, accommodation or appeasement has had drastic effects in the history of the Mormon Church.

So how did this tactic play out regarding the slavery issue? In 1833, D&C 101:79 said, "Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another." Also in that same year, many of the Saints had migrated to Missouri, which was a slave state. The editor of the LDS publication *The Evening and Morning Star*, W.W. Phelps, released a statement there that was called and directed to "Free People of Color". In this statement Phelps (1833:109) said:

Slaves are real estate in this and other states, and wisdom would dictate great care among the branches of the church of Christ, on this subject. So long as we have no special rule in the church, as to people of color, let prudence guide; and while they, as well as we, are in the hands of a merciful God, we say: Shun every appearance of evil.

This signaled to all Missourians that the Church was inclusive and abolitionist, and the results were explosive. Stevenson (2015:7) puts it well when he says that "the charge of abolitionism was akin to the charge of terrorism." Bigoted Missourians did not want a huge influx of Blacks coming into their state. Reeve (2023:25) paints this picture of what Missourians most likely felt:

White people sometimes expressed fears that four million freed Black people emancipated at once would have no means of support and would become an unwelcome burden on public coffers. The American economy could not absorb that many freed people at once, the gradualists contended, so it was better to slowly emancipate them. More significantly, many white people who may have disliked slavery still feared race mixing and suggested that immediately freeing the enslaved would destroy the social order and threaten the white race. Black men would rape and attack white women, they predicted, or marry them. In either case, race mixing would darken the white race and make it unfit for democracy.

Reeve (28) also claims that these Missourians feared the Church was inviting free Blacks to come and incite a slave rebellion.

Phelps very quickly released a supplemental edition to allay the fears. However, it appears he overcompensated by lying about the facts. Reeve (29) admits that “[i]t was a desperate attempt on Phelps’s part to quiet fears and was simply not true”. Phelps claimed he was trying to stop these free Blacks from coming to the state and becoming Church members. It was too little, too late, and the Church was forced to move on once again.

This was the first attempt to curry the favor of the populace while at the same time downplaying their Black brethren. Self-preservation took precedence over self-sacrifice and love in presenting the gospel to everyone else.

This is somewhat reminiscent of what Peter did with the Judaizers in Galatians 2. Before they showed up, he was freely eating with Gentiles. However, when the Judaizers showed up, Peter distanced himself from the Gentiles, since he feared the former—the dominant, majority class. Paul saw that Peter was not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, and he called Peter out to his face. Paul claimed elsewhere, in a different context, that he was ready to die for the sake of the gospel (cf. Acts 21:13), that this was his priority, and that it should have been Peter’s as well.

Nonetheless, what happened in Missouri had left a bad taste in the mouth of the Church toward immediate abolitionists. It was too much too soon, and Mormons were convinced that society could not handle immediate abolitionism at that time. Three years later, in Kirtland, Ohio, when abolitionist James W. Alvord visited, Mormon leaders “worried about his success because of the parallels that outsiders might draw between themselves and the abolitionists” (Brigham, 2018:13). Certainly, the Church’s new

position attempted to allay the fears of typical Americans that the Church was attempting a slave revolt. This explains the 1835 D&C 134:12 Scripture in which the Church declared it would not upset the will of enslavers over their slaves. That included going so far as to refrain from preaching the gospel to slaves, insisting that it could not be done without their masters' permission.

The next year Smith joined most Christian churches in supporting slavery, as found in the Bible. The standard proof-text was from Genesis 9 where Noah cursed his son Ham by telling him that his son Canaan and his descendants would be slaves to Ham's brothers. The traditional biblical interpretation was that Blacks were part of the line of Canaan and that this line went all the way back to Cain. Thus, the thinking was that no one could undo this prophecy. Blacks would be the race subjected to their brethren of other races, at least until God saw fit to put an end to it. As far as it is known, this curse, according to Smith, was never promoted for a priesthood ban. He only regarded the biblical curse as allowing for slavery.

Stevenson (2015:9) says, "Joseph's positions on slavery reflected the immediate pressures he faced. ...He annoyed pro-slavery factions while alienating abolitionists." Bush (1973:21) says: "Smith led the Church from seeming neutrality on the slavery issue through a period of anti-abolitionist pro-slavery sentiment to a final position strongly opposed to slavery." His final position came near the end of his life in 1844. This position was based on the belief in human equality regardless of race and held that Blacks would have the same or better outcomes as Whites if only circumstances were different. As a candidate for the presidency of the US, Smith ran on a platform to eliminate slavery through a sort of compensation to slave owners. He dropped his prior position that the Bible justified slavery and began using the Bible, as well as the US's founding documents, to affirm human equality regardless of race.

Likewise, Brigham Young's position also evolved over time. In a letter to Apostle Orson Hyde, Young (1849) wrote that "our desire is to leave that subject [of slavery] to the operations of time, circumstances and common law, you might safely say that as a people we are adverse to slavery, but that we wish not to meddle with this subject, but leave things to take their natural course". And in 1851, when Young became the territorial governor of Utah, there were no restrictions on slavery, and slaves were also able to freely come and go. However, Bush (1973:23-24) says this "laissez-faire" approach ended in 1852 when Young legalized the slavery of Indians and Blacks. The slavery of the former was known as *An Act for the Relief of Indian Slaves and Prisoners*, and the slavery of the latter was known as *An Act in Relation to Service*. Both types of slavery had certain unique provisions, but evidently since Indians were regarded as ancient

Israelites²⁰ and Mormons were also considered the true Jews, the former had a much better deal than the “descendants of Ham and Cain”, as they were called.

It eventually took the US government, not the LDS Church, to put an end to this practice in Utah, and the U.S. Congress finally banned slavery in all their territories on June 19, 1862.

2.2.3.3. Interracial marriage

The other issue that was closely tied to Mormons discrimination against Blacks was that of amalgamation or interracial marriage between Blacks and Whites. This was a fear not just among Mormons, but also with most in nineteenth-century America. It was not only socially unacceptable; it was also illegal in most of the US.

While in Nauvoo, Smith fined some Black men who had intended to marry White women. There is no indication that this was anything other than Smith acting as the authority in Nauvoo, upholding Illinois state law, although it is clear that at the end of his life he did think that Blacks should be segregated and not intermarry with Whites, even though they should both be regarded as equals (Smith, 1978:5:217-8).

Later, in 1847, Young sent William I. Appleby to the east coast to survey their various churches. In Lowell, Massachusetts, Appleby was shocked to find that Q. Walker Lewis’s son Enoch had married a White woman and that both were Church members. Appleby reported to Young about this matter and asked what the Church taught concerning not just this amalgamation, but also about ordaining Blacks to the priesthood. Young claimed that this marriage was deserving of death, but only in the hypothetical case, that they “were far away from the Gentiles” (Reeve, 2023:59). Young continued to teach this position throughout his tenure and later preached from the pulpit at general conference: “Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.” (Journal of Discourses [JD], 1863:10:110) As for Appleby’s priesthood question, there is no record of Young ever answering Appleby on the matter. Nonetheless, Reeve (2023:61) says that this matter “informed [Young’s] decision on priesthood and helps to account for his shift in position”.

2.3. Priesthood ban

²⁰ The central BOM storyline described ancient Israelites populating the Western hemisphere “as numerous almost, as it were the sand of the sea” (Mormon 1:7). Thus, Mormons assumed that the Native Americans must be Israelites.

Blacks never participated in any of the Church's sacred/secret temple ordinances once they were put in place in Nauvoo, Illinois (Tanner, S., 2018:1-2). Even though Elijah Abel, for example, was able to partake in the washing and anointing ceremonies in the Kirtland Ohio Temple, and was able to be baptized for his deceased relatives in Nauvoo, he never participated in these other sacred/secret ordinances when they were instituted not long before Smith died.²¹ Abel was conspicuously assigned mission work in Cincinnati, Ohio around the same time the new secret ordinances were added to the temple ceremony in 1842. Perhaps this was Smith's way of discriminating against Blacks being full participants of the temple. While Abel repeatedly petitioned the Church to receive these ordinances throughout his life, he was always denied.²² If Abel had received this endowment while in Nauvoo, there would have been no need to petition the Church for it. He had no reason to have sealings until he was married in 1847. Just as there is no evidence that all Blacks were denied the priesthood under Smith's tenure, there is also no evidence that any Blacks ever participated in these new temple rituals under that tenure. However, this does not entail that Smith instituted racial discrimination against them. That certainly occurred after his death, but the record is unclear when exactly it started.

Given this is the case, the priesthood ban and its precise origin is distinct from, albeit related to, the refusal to let Black priesthood holders participate in the special new temple ordinances. Reeve disagrees with LDS historian Ronald Esplin over when the priesthood ban occurred (Bennett, 2017).²³ The latter has argued that the ban occurred prior to Young's tenure, sometime late in Smith's tenure (Esplin, 1979). When Reeve was asked for a comment on Esplin's thesis, he was perplexed and stated that all the evidence indicates that Blacks were indeed ordained from the earliest days of the Church.

²¹ Reeve (2023:75) admits that "Able had received his washing and anointing rituals in the Kirtland Temple and now hoped to receive the rest of his rituals in Salt Lake City".

²² Richley H. Crapo (2008) documents that in 1853 Brigham Young denied Elijah Abel his temple endowment. Reeve (2023:75) claims there was no written record for that application to Young, that there was just "a belated remembrance from Joseph F. Smith". Reeve goes on to tell how Abel appealed to President John Taylor in 1879 and how his appeal was denied. Reeve says that Taylor allowed Abel to keep his priesthood all the while thinking that the Lord gave further revelation and corrected Joseph Smith's error. If that was the case, then it makes no sense that Taylor did not revoke Abel's priesthood.

²³ For a further critique of Esplin, see Harris (2024:245-6).

However, providing those examples does nothing to invalidate Esplin's thesis. Esplin may very well accept Reeve's examples, but they are irrelevant to his case. Why? Because Smith *could have* obviously instituted something new not long before he died. Whether that was a full-scale priesthood ban or whether it was simply discrimination against Blacks participating in all the temple ceremonies is something that scholars may continue to debate.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, up until the time of Lester Bush Jr.'s 1973 article "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview", many assumed the ban came sometime under Joseph Smith, even if they were not sure about its explicit revelatory basis. Joseph Fielding Smith²⁴ (1958:110-11) summarized the prevailing view up until Bush: "This doctrine did not originate with President Brigham Young but was taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith. ...[W]e all know it is due to his teachings that the Negro today is barred from the Priesthood." Fielding Smith invoked President George Q. Cannon in 1895 to substantiate the claim.²⁵ It was not that Fielding Smith's racial views were never challenged or questioned while he was alive (see Harris, 2022:18-20), but Reeve (2015:259) states that it was this Bush article that "was especially persuasive in modifying opinions".

Bush (1973:26) claims there actually was never an authoritative, canonized revelation for the ban. However, it is unclear why that would even matter. There is also no authoritative, canonized revelation for commonly held beliefs like the continual wearing of temple garments for the worthy members (both male and female) or, for that matter, any of the ordinances that take place in the temple, as these things are considered too sacred to be discussed in specificity outside the temple. There is also no authoritative, canonized revelation that allows LDS to imbibe hot chocolate and not coffee or tea even though the *word of wisdom* clearly prohibits "hot drinks" (D&C 89:9). There is also no authoritative, canonized revelation explaining why worthy White women who have never had the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood were allowed to participate in the temple endowment ceremony when Blacks who were denied the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood were denied the endowment. LDS assume that these are simply matters the Lord has intended for his Church in these latter days, that the Lord works through his Church in mysterious ways and that the Almighty is under no obligation to explain everything. As then-Apostle Dallin Oaks (currently the President of the LDS Church) once claimed, "I don't know that it's possible to distinguish between policy and doctrine in a church that believes in continuing revelation and sustains its leader as a

²⁴ N.B.: President Joseph Fielding Smith was the son of President Joseph F. Smith, nephew of Joseph Smith Jr. To maintain clarity, the researcher will use "Fielding Smith", "F. Smith", and "Smith".

²⁵ Harris (2022:17) says that Fielding Smith's published works "established him as the Church's foremost authority on the priesthood and temple ban." Coincidentally, he died the year before Bush's landmark article was published.

prophet” (AP, 1988:21). As such, there is no reason why such a priesthood ban could not have come about later under Smith, and he may very well have simply enacted a new policy not long before he died, with or without a revelation.

Bush (1973:26) also claims the evidence for the ban originated directly with Brigham Young. Young never blamed Smith for it; instead, Young appeared to claim it for himself.

Bush further acknowledged that Church leaders were not immune from their zeitgeist. For example, he says that Smith was not “completely free of nineteenth century prejudices” (20), and later, Bush (28-9) talks about the “enlightened” racist nineteenth century commonalities with Young. So, both had their racist prejudices influenced by their society. There is simply no clear indication that Smith ever publicly denied priesthood or certain temple ceremonies to Blacks as Young did.

2.3.1. The first formal priesthood ban

According to Bush (25), the earliest “Church decision” on the *priesthood ban* was in February of 1849. According to Harris and Bringhurst (2015:36), this was simply a decision Young made in response to Apostle Lorenzo Snow’s proposal to show some sort of leniency toward the African race without specifically mentioning priesthood. However, the Bush (1973:25) quote of Young makes it clear that “priesthood” was prohibited to the seed of Cain. A couple years prior, Apostle Parley P. Pratt stated, “McCary had ‘got the blood of Ham in him which lineage was cursed as regards the priesthood’” (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:31). This priesthood ban understanding was clearly in circulation at the time. The language Pratt used clearly harks back to the language of the Book of Abraham, which will be considered in the following chapter, and which was first published in 1842 under Smith’s tenure.²⁶ Recall, too, that this was the same year that the special secret ordinances were added and Abel was conspicuously assigned a church mission in Cincinnati.

Nonetheless, it was not until 1852 that Young formally and publicly articulated his position on Blacks and the priesthood in the authority of the Lord Jesus. According to Wilford Woodruff’s journal, on January 16th, Young said,

²⁶ In personal correspondence, Tanner (2022) says that “priesthood/temple teachings were in flux during the 30s and 40s. Smith never seemed constrained by what he said the day before so it’s hard to make sense of some statements and actions.”

...until all the seed of Abel are redeemed any man having one drop of the seed of Cain... cannot hold the priesthood and if no other prophet ever spoke it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ I know it is true and others know it the Negro cannot hold one part of government (Woodruff, 1852:362-3).²⁷

This idea was again articulated on February 4th in front of the Utah territorial legislature when *An Act in Relation to Service* passed. The priesthood ban was again tied to Blacks (enslaved or freed) being part of the cursed lineage of Cain. Blacks were banned until all other descendants of Abel received the priesthood. So, whether enslaved or free, in a sense their priesthood ban was tied to slavery and Blacks could not rule over any other race regarding priesthood. Blacks were to be ruled.

On February 5th, *An Act in Relation to Elections* passed, and limited voting to White men over twenty-one years old. Young (1852:2-3) again articulated the ban on Blacks receiving priesthood, saying this was the reason why Blacks could not vote or rule over Whites by voting. Young clearly went against the U.S. doctrine of the separation of church and state when he claimed that if there was no rule of Blacks in the Church, there would be no rule of them in the state (4-7). Theocracy was clearly in play in the Utah Territory. He also claimed that the Church would lose the priesthood if it ever allowed the amalgamation of Black and White (5-6). The basis of all this was that Blacks were the children of Cain who were under a divine curse. Young (2) again seemed to invoke his prophetic status when he addressed this matter:

If there never was a prophet, or apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before, I tell you, this people that are commonly called negroes are the children of old Cain. I know they are, I know that they cannot bear rule in the preisthood [*sic*], for the curse on them was to remain upon the, until the resedue [*sic*] of the posterity of Michal and his wife receive the blessings, the seed of Cain would have received had they not been cursed; and hold the keys of the preisthood [*sic*], until the times of the restitution shall come, and the curse be wiped off from the earth, and from michals [*sic*] seed. Then Cain's seed will be had in remembrance [*sic*], and the time come when that curse should be wiped off.

2.3.2. Pratt challenged Young's justification

Apostle Orson Pratt stood against Young when it came to the slavery issue. Pratt was a thorn in Young's side on various issues, but they both agreed that Blacks were to be banned from the priesthood even though Pratt and Young disagreed as to the justification.

²⁷ Bush (1973:26) says concerning this statement: "This clearly is one of the most important statements in the entire history of this subject."

However, Pratt had a problem with leaving the explanation at simply Cain's transgression. If that was all there was to the story, then the view was seemingly inconsistent with the 2nd Article of Faith, which said, "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013e:60) This was Smith's denial of the doctrine of original sin. For Pratt, Blacks seemed to be unfairly punished for Cain's sin if they were simply his cursed lineage. So, Pratt thought that Blacks were still deserving of their punishment, but only because they were *all* responsible. Where had they incurred the punishment? Pratt theorized that their transgression must have taken place in the heavenly pre-earth life. Young never accepted this position concerning extending the culpability to the pre-earth life.

Pratt's theory was like the theory first advanced by Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde in 1845. Harris (2022:7) says that "Hyde was the first Mormon leader to link black skin with moral impurity." He did this by postulating the pre-earth life doctrine to explain the existence of the Black African race. Hyde (2017:30) claimed that the sin was that certain spirits in the great war between Jesus and Lucifer²⁸ were basically lazy. Yes, they were on Jesus' side, and thus were allowed to come to earth, but they did not fight actively. As a result, they came to earth punished with Black bodies.²⁹ Pratt took this a step further and claimed that this story also explains why Blacks were punished by not being able to have the priesthood. It was this explanation that won out over Young's view, and despite detractors, Pratt's view held sway in the Church until the 1978 revelation.³⁰

²⁸ Although the idea that Blacks received their bodies on earth because of moral impurity in a pre-earth life is not taught anymore, the great war in the pre-earth life is still a fundamental belief in the LDS Church (2009:15-21). The war centered around the Heavenly Father choosing Jesus and his salvation plan of agency over his brother Lucifer's plan to constrain belief and obedience out of all God's spirit children. Those who followed Jesus were allowed to come to earth and inhabit more tangible bodies of flesh and bone; whereas those who followed Satan were forever denied coming to earth and thus having tangible bodies of flesh and bone.

²⁹ LDS Apostle John Widtsoe (1944:385) denies both Young and Hyde's positions but is closer to the latter's position by claiming that the answer must be found in "the pre-existent state". Widtsoe says that Blacks had not committed Cain's sin and, concerning whether Blacks were neutral in the pre-earth war, he states, "There is no evidence, as far as found, to justify this belief." Widtsoe seems content with not knowing what the specific reason was in that pre-mortal state.

³⁰ It is important to note that even Joseph Fielding Smith acknowledged in 1907 that these justifications for the ban were the traditions and opinions of early Church leaders (Harris, 2022:9). Harris (12) also says that neither Fielding Smith nor his colleagues could ever answer the question where the revelation was that banned Blacks from the priesthood. Furthermore, the First Presidency in 1912 acknowledged, *contra* Hyde, that there was no revelation—ancient or modern—stating that Blacks were neutrals or lazy in the war in heaven (9). See also Harris (2024:15-8) on this as well as how Fielding Smith later became convinced that "Mormon racial teachings were 'doctrine'" and Blacks of African ancestry "were not 'obedient to the first principles of the gospel' in a prior life".

2.4. Institutional racist policies

2.4.1. *The nature of LDS priesthood*

The priesthood is the power and authority of God which is offered to worthy males of the LDS Church. The priesthood allows one to “preach the gospel, administer the ordinances of salvation, and govern God’s kingdom on earth” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:67). As such, the priesthood is a necessary condition for being able to hold any authoritative position open to males in the Church structure. Beginning at age 12, males may receive this priesthood and begin to act on God’s behalf. Being a member of the Church is a necessary condition for holding the priesthood, but membership is obviously not a sufficient condition. For instance, there are women members, but they cannot hold the priesthood.

No matter how sincere one is, no one outside Church membership has the priesthood and truly acts for God. God does “not recognize ordinances [a non-member] performs”. This is why Christ’s Church needed restoration. None of the Christian churches prior to Mormonism hold that the priesthood originally instituted in the Old Testament. Those outside the LDS Church exercise what the Book of Mormon calls “priestcraft”. 2 Nephi 26:29 says that “priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:103).

One receives genuine priesthood by being found worthy to receive it by other priesthood holders. This power is conveyed only by laying their hands on the recipient’s head.

Priesthood holders govern over all other non-priesthood workers in the Church, and without the former there would be no hope of eternal salvation. This explains why the late Apostle Orson Pratt (1854:255) taught:

But who in this generation have authority to baptize? None but those who have authority in the church [*sic*] of Jesus Christ of Latter day [*sic*] Saints : all other churches are entirely destitute of all authority from God ; and any person who receives Baptism or the Lord's supper from their hands will highly offend God ; for he looks upon them as the most corrupt of all people. Both Catholics and Protestants are nothing less than the ‘*whore of Babylon*’ ... any person who shall be so wicked

as to receive a holy ordinance of the gospel from the ministers of any of these apostate churches will be sent down to hell with them, unless they repent of the unholy and impious act.

That all other Christian churches are dead follows from D&C 1:30 which stated that the LDS Church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth”.

The real priesthood consists of two elements. The lesser and introductory form is the Aaronic, and the greater is the Melchizedek.³¹ The LDS Church (2013a) teaches that in the Church beginning from sometime under Brigham Young neither of the two elements were given to Black men until Spencer W. Kimball’s 1978 revelation. Blacks could receive *certain* holy ordinances during this time, but not all, and they were unable to bestow any ordinances on anyone else since they could not hold the priesthood.

2.4.2. Temple work

The Church has stated that Christ’s atonement will one day give everyone—inside and outside the Church—resurrection and the power to live eternally. Apostle Bruce McConkie (1979:669) refers to this as “[u]nconditional or general salvation”. He claims it is “that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law... [it] is synonymous with immortality; it is the inseparable connection of body and spirit so that the resurrected personage lives forever”.

However, “if we are to live forever with our families in Heavenly Father’s presence, we must do all that the Savior commands us to do. This includes being baptized and confirmed, and receiving the ordinances of the temple” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:233). If one wants to live in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom where one’s family may live together eternally with the heavenly Father, one needs the temple. The Church goes on to state that a member must “[a]ttend the temple as often as possible. After we have gone to the temple for

³¹ Historic Christianity holds that the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood is no longer operating today since the ultimate Lamb was slain and the New Testament High Priest is Jesus who continues to live forevermore since his resurrection (Heb 7:16). He will never die or give his priesthood to another mortal priest (Heb 7:24). Further, no one else can save to the uttermost; it is Jesus’ divine nature that is separate from sinners and higher than the heavens (Heb 7:25-6). Historic Christianity also holds that there is no order of Melchizedek priests today that men may enter into, since Melchizedek was a unique priest who did service to God prior to the Levitical priesthood. Jesus was not a priest in the Levitical priesthood since he was not of the tribe of Levi and Aaron. Instead, Jesus’ priesthood is *like unto* Melchizedek, since Melchizedek appears in Scripture without genealogy, and no reference to his death is ever made. Thus, Christ and Melchizedek are priests forever and both are regarded as king-priests, and particularly kings of righteousness and of peace (Bowman, 2012).

ourselves, we can perform the saving ordinances for others waiting in the spirit world” (238). Therefore, most of the work done inside temples is for the dead.³²

To enter the temple, a member must be found worthy. There are two worthiness interviews a member must receive to obtain what is called a “temple recommend,” namely one from a member of one’s bishopric and another from a member of one’s stake presidency. This recommend is a card one uses to enter the temple.³³

It is only in the temple where families may be sealed for “time and all eternity.” All other civil marriages are only for time—this life or “until death do us part.” LDS who are not worthy may have civil marriages and later may have temple marriages whenever they do become worthy. Since temple marriages require a temple recommend to attend, non-worthy family members may not be a part of the ceremony. Sealing ceremonies may also include the sealing of children to parents.

Further ordinances include being washed and anointed, receiving temple garments to wear inside and outside the temple, and receiving a new sacred/secret name that one uses later in the endowment ceremony. The husband is also instructed to use the sacred name of his wife to call her up on the day of resurrection.³⁴ The endowment is for worthy adults to instruct them on covenants to uphold, the creation, the fall, and the way back to the Heavenly Father. Learning how to get back to him entails learning certain sacred/secret tokens (handshakes), oaths, and passwords.³⁵

Blacks may have been living worthy lives in all other respects; but since the men were banned from the priesthood, they, as well as Black women (who could not hold the priesthood anyway, since they were women), could not participate in all these temple rituals. As a result, they had no hope in this life of being sealed with their families at the highest level of the celestial kingdom.

³² This explains why Mormons are so involved with genealogy work. They are diligently finding dead non-Mormons, so that they too may be able to receive all the blessings of the Mormon gospel.

³³ The researcher’s wife’s grandmother was buried with her temple recommend in her hands.

³⁴ To watch the entire endowment ceremony filmed with a hidden camera, see NewNameNoah (2012).

³⁵ The LDS Church (s.a.f) acknowledges that Smith joined the Masonic fraternity in March of 1842, and the Church also acknowledges “similarities between Masonic ceremonies and the endowment, but there are also stark differences in their content and intent”.

2.4.3. *Segregation*

2.4.3.1. Afterlife

As stated in the previous section, LDS believe Jesus' atonement provides everyone with resurrection and being able to live eternally. The question now arises: Where do LDS believe people end up after death? The LDS Church teaches there are two places one goes to, immediately after death, until the judgment: paradise or spirit prison (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:243-4). All Mormons go to the former, and all non-Mormons go to the latter. Those in the former preach to those in the latter. Those who repent and accept the gospel and the ordinances done on their behalf in temples "may leave the spirit prison and dwell in paradise" (244) while they wait for the judgment.

Those who refuse to repent in spirit prison will remain in this temporary hell throughout the Millennium. After judgment they will end up in the lowest degree of glory—the telestial kingdom (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, s.a.e).³⁶ These are the wicked of the world, and they are the overwhelming majority of those who live on this earth. The Church (2009:272) claims that the occupants of this kingdom are "visited by the Holy Ghost but not by the Father or the Son".

The next highest degree of glory is the terrestrial kingdom. This is for honorable individuals who 1) rejected Mormonism on earth but accepted it in spirit prison, and 2) for those who accepted Mormonism while on earth "but then were not valiant". These occupants are "visited by Jesus Christ but not by our Heavenly Father".

The highest degree of glory is called the celestial kingdom. This is reserved for the faithful. However, the "highest degree" is relative here since within this kingdom there is an even higher degree of glory known as exaltation. This is absolutely the highest degree of glory, where the Father and Son dwell. This is where faithful LDS members on earth may live with their sealed families (provided their own individual worthiness) throughout eternity. The exalted may continue to produce their own spirit-children and eventually send them to a world or set of worlds, so that they may worship their own Heavenly Father and not the Heavenly Father of this world. The celestial kingdom is where LDS may be exalted into being gods, just as their Heavenly Father was exalted. Coincidentally, this doctrine came about during the same

³⁶ There is also a kingdom lower than this kingdom, though it is not a kingdom of "glory". It is a kingdom of dishonor, since it is reserved for those "who had testimonies of Jesus through the Holy Ghost and knew the power of the Lord but allowed Satan to overcome them. They denied the truth and defied the power of the Lord... with Satan and his angels forever" (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:273).

period in which the special ceremonies were instituted in the Nauvoo temple. Lorenzo Snow first stated the doctrine in 1840, and later Smith developed it.³⁷

Given this eschatology, the Church began discriminating only against Blacks with African ancestry to *apparently* segregate them into a position somewhere less than exaltation. They could be faithful, valiant baptized members and, until the 1978 revelation, they were denied the highest their religion offers. Since the highest their religion offers requires participation in the special ceremonies of the temple and since Blacks with African ancestry were prohibited from these ceremonies due to the priesthood ban, there was no way for Blacks with African ancestry to receive the highest their religion offered. They could reach the celestial kingdom if they were faithful. However, according to late Apostle Mark E. Petersen, they would go there only as servants (Harris, 2015:70).³⁸

Having said that, though at the time nothing was offered to Blacks to reach exaltation, it does not mean that LDS held Blacks would forever be segregated from exaltation. As previously mentioned, Young taught that this apparent segregation in the eternities will eventually be abolished only after certain events transpire. Though not explicitly stated, it seems faithful LDS Blacks who died prior to 1978 would still be able to do whatever is required to obtain exaltation.

2.4.3.2. Churches

Segregation, of course, occurred when Blacks were denied entry to special temple ceremonies.³⁹

However, there was also a segregation policy within certain LDS chapels. That may have been an

³⁷ Although Smith may have begun teaching polytheism in 1832 (see D&C 76:23-4, 50, 58, 95, 108), the doctrine was not fully developed and may have been compatible with Christian deification, which is monotheistic. However, the LDS doctrine of the Father having to undergo a process of exaltation to become a God, as all his children are invited to, was not explicitly stated until the 1840 Snow statement. Further, in 1843, Smith tied exaltation to being married in the temple for time and all eternity under the “new and everlasting covenant” (D&C 132), and this sanctioned polygamy. Smith also developed Snow’s statement in his King Follett Sermon and his Sermon in the Grove shortly before his death. LDS author Charles R. Harrell (2011:127) says it was only in Nauvoo where the absolutist view of God gave “way to a finitist view in which God was seen as existing in time and having progressed to his status as God”.

³⁸ In 1894, President Wilford Woodruff finally granted Jane Manning James’ request to be adopted and sealed to Joseph Smith as part of his family in the celestial kingdom, but given she was Black, only as a servant (Harris, 2015:52, 166).

³⁹ In 1953, however, the First Presidency overlooked this fact when it said that ““there is no segregation in any Church gathering or activity”” (Harris, 2024:55).

unintended result because of the temple ban, but segregation increased by intention depending on location.

Reeve (2023:86-7) documents the case of a Black member, Marie Graves, who in 1920 was visiting Black friends in Atlanta, GA. Graves came from Oakland, CA, where there was not the racial tension found in Atlanta. While there, she brought those friends to an LDS branch to introduce them to her church. The leader there then escorted them outside and basically told them that this was a White church and they were not welcome there. Graves was horrified and wrote President Heber J. Grant about the experience. Grant took the side of the Atlanta branch and claimed that their mission was not directly to Blacks. Grant had the California mission president relay that message to Graves, who continued to dutifully attend the LDS Church for the rest of her life. Again, the Church bowed to its racist American culture.⁴⁰

2.4.3.3. Interracial marriage

The teaching against intermarriage between Blacks and Whites goes all the way back to Joseph Smith. Just a year prior to his death, he stated: “Had I anything to do with the negro, I would confine them by strict law to their own species, and put them on a national equalization.” (Smith, 1978:5:217-8)

It has already been noted what Brigham Young thought of the intermarriage between Blacks and Whites. The penalty was death on the spot. This probably was not to be taken literally. Reeve (2023:60) labels Young’s statements on this matter as “extreme hyperbole” and even quotes Young saying that when he says to cut one’s throat, he does not really mean it. Nonetheless, the amalgamation between Blacks and Whites was certainly looked down upon, since it kept them and their posterity from entering exaltation. Thus, it was important for worthy LDS to note who exactly was considered Black and segregate from them.

In 1954 the late Apostle Mark E. Petersen gave an infamous address to religious educators at Brigham Young University (BYU), where he said:

Now what is our policy in regard to intermarriage? As to the Negro, of course there is only one possible answer. We must not intermarry with the Negro.

⁴⁰ For many other examples of the Church practicing segregation, see Harris’s (2024:62-92) chapter on the subject.

...I would be willing that they have all the advantages they can get out of life in the world. but [*sic*] let them enjoy these things among themselves. I think the Lord segregated the Negro and who is man to change that segregation? It reminds me of the scripture [*sic*] on marriage, ‘what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.’ Only here we have the reverse of the thing—what God hath separated, let not man bring together again. (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:70-1)

2.4.4. Limitation of proselytization

The 1835 D&C 134:12 limited the proselytization of slaves. That limitation allowed for the preaching to slaves, but their owners would first need to give their permission. After the priesthood ban was instituted, proselytization became even more limited.

Reeve (2023:85-6) tells the story of how that limitation was directed more to Blacks in general. In 1908 an issue arose in South Africa, where Ralph A. Badger had been a mission president there but by that time had served his term and returned home to the States. He asked the Church what should be done with those “tainted with negro blood” when they embraced Mormonism and should the Mormon gospel even be preached to them. Joseph F. Smith, who was President at the time, informed the Church council that Elijah Abel’s ordination was invalidated by Joseph Smith himself.

The result of all this was that Blacks, or those tainted with their blood, should in general not be preached to. If, for some reason, they still desired baptism and membership, they needed to be informed that ““nothing further can be done for them”” (Reeve, 2023:86). That policy was reflected in a South Africa missionary’s 1908 statement in which he said that they only worked among Europeans there. Reeve also documents that this policy was reflected in 1909 in the US Northern States Mission. In response to White investigators who visited the LDS Church there and were bothered by the presence of Blacks, the mission president stopped the missionaries from preaching to Blacks in the area.

2.5. Conditions that counteracted perennial racism

2.5.1. Introduction

Brooks (2020:161-2) indicates that, according to Spencer W. Kimball’s son, Edward, the factors that moved his father to seek the Lord on the priesthood ban were scholarly writings on the subject, changing attitudes on race in the US, an interest in the Church expanding in Africa, the challenges of figuring out,

in places that did not support segregation, who had Black ancestry, and his own humble temperament. This section will examine some of these important factors.

2.5.2. Determining blackness

Reeve (2023:42-3) gives an example of Sarah Ann Mode, who received the special Nauvoo temple rituals in 1845 (the year after Smith died). However, Reeve acknowledges that even though early census records labeled her family as Black, from 1840 on census records labeled her White. She obviously passed as White, but Reeve says that there is no indication that those who officiated her going through the temple knew that her ancestors were White as well as Black. Nonetheless, Mode was the first known person with Black ancestry to receive these special new temple rituals in Nauvoo; but had her ancestry become known, it would have ruled her out from being able to perform the special temple rituals because it did not matter how far back the Black ancestry went.

No matter how worthy the individual, if there was *any* known Black ancestry, there was no priesthood given and/or no admittance to the sacred/secret temple rituals. However, if the individual with any amount of known Black ancestry was deemed worthy, that individual was instead allowed to be baptized and confirmed in the LDS Church. The individual was also allowed to have a limited-use temple recommend to participate in proxy baptisms for dead family and friends. This was the so-called “one-drop” policy instituted in 1907 under President Joseph F. Smith (82).⁴¹

This rigid policy engendered perplexing questions about determining race and what to do in certain cases arising in the Church. Harris (2024:29-33) talks about how in the early twentieth century mission to South Africa this problem was handled. The LDS mission president, Raph Badger, came to South Africa in 1906. Among other things, he had to sort out racial issues. Badger was not sure what to do with White LDS who had some mix of Black ancestry or who intermarried with Blacks, or with Whites who did not want to sit in church next to someone who was of the cursed race. These issues were exacerbated in 1948 when South Africa imposed apartheid. Some years after 1948, the Population Registration Act made it clear that South African law was unclear on “how to classify South Africans with any degree of precision or certainty” (30). In 1948, Evan Wright became the South African mission president. The Brethren told him to have his mission research South Africans’ ancestry to determine who was Black. This resulted in

⁴¹ This was a qualification of the “one-drop policy” first issued under Brigham Young in 1852. At this point, Young merely ruled out anyone with any amount of Black ancestry from holding the priesthood and governing.

the young LDS missionaries attempting to solve complicated genealogical problems. Harris (32) says that “despite his best efforts, Wright knew that individuals with ‘cursed’ lineages were being ordained to the priesthood”.

Racial problems also became an issue in other places where Black ancestry existed. For example, during this same period, the Church considered expanding in Cuba (Reeve, 2023:93). Heber C. Meeks, who was the president of the Southern States Mission, took an exploratory trip to Cuba in 1947. There Meeks realized that Cubans often intermarried, but there were no legitimate records to determine who had and who did not have Black ancestry. This was the case for basically all Latin America as well, and the Church was aware of that. Segregation simply was not an issue as it was in the US. Reeve claims, “As the Church opened or expanded missionary efforts in these countries, it attempted various strategies designed to limit gospel outreach to people of African ancestry” (94). The focus became exclusion instead of inclusion, but exclusion was virtually an impossible task, so of course many with some percentage of tainted Black blood ended up being baptized. The more people in these areas converted, the more the Church had people who just did not care about the racial restrictions the Church wanted to impose. The Church had created a complicated mess, and it led to many ad hoc solutions.

If the potential individual for the priesthood or temple recommend was not sure about his or her race and Church leaders also were not sure, then ignorance was bliss. Edward Kimball (2005:214) notes that his father (President Spencer W. Kimball) reaffirmed President David O. McKay’s policy that LDS leaders must have “convincing evidence”, rather than mere assumption, prior to withholding the priesthood and full access to the temple from individuals of Black ancestry.

Apostle Spencer W. Kimball was himself involved in stretching the rules long before becoming president and receiving his revelation in 1978. Reeve (96-8) shares the following examples from Kimball prior to and after becoming president. In 1966, an Ecuadorian convert named Guillermo Cuesta told the missionaries that he had Lebanese ancestry when he joined the Church. Prior to his ordination, the missionaries met with another family who identified as Black and was therefore offended by the Church’s priesthood ban. As it turned out, the missionaries discovered that this family was related to Cuesta, which meant that he was also Black. The missionaries asked Kimball, who was coming to Ecuador, to meet with Cuesta and deal with the situation. Kimball then met him and, convinced the Lord wanted Cuesta to be ordained, Kimball ordained him. The Apostle of the Lord had spoken; case closed.

On another occasion, a few months prior to the 1978 revelation, the branch president in Columbia ordained Horacio Insignares, who was known to have Black ancestry. The president was impressed by Horacio's internal rather than his external qualities. Kris Olson, the mission president, who did not want to cause a church split over such an issue, found out about this and asked Kimball for clarification. Kimball acknowledged that Insignares was a good man who had the priesthood. Nonetheless, Kimball wanted Insignares simply to not use his priesthood during that time. After the revelation Olson asked Kimball if Insignares should be reordained. Kimball simply repeated what he had said about Insignares already having the priesthood and that he could start using it again.

2.5.3. *Changing societal attitudes*

After World War II, various events began to steer America's thinking in a more inclusive direction.⁴² In 1954 the Supreme Court of the US ruled in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*. This landmark ruling determined that segregating children based on race in public schools was unconstitutional. According to Dr Ben Carson (2022:55), "[P]rogress was slow, as states felt the decision from the Supreme Court violated their right to manage their educational systems. In 1959 over 90 percent of African American students were still attending segregated schools." In 1955 a 14-year-old Black boy named Emmett Till was brutally lynched after a White woman accused him of offending her. Later that same year Rosa Parks was arrested for not accommodating White passengers by giving up her seat and moving to the back of the bus. In the aftermath of these and other events, race riots and protests ensued. Dr Martin Luther King Jr's nonviolent protest marches brought much attention and sympathy to the injustices perpetrated against Blacks.

A key element in bringing these events to the national consciousness was the televised media. According to Carson (2022:132-3):

⁴² Alston (2014:110) quotes South African LDS Mission President Evan Wright, who in 1952 acknowledged that this more inclusive thinking was a zeitgeist for the world as well. In responding to the questions regarding the seed of Cain and their apparent discriminations, Wright said, "This is particularly perplexing in view of the present world trends towards social and economic equality of races." South Africa during this time was not following the trends, and during this period Mormonism looked more South African than American. However, after 1978 Mormonism began to look more American than South African (112).

It's not so much that people didn't know that Blacks were being treated unfairly in the South. It was the comfort of ignorance about the details of that unfairness that was disturbed by the media-led visualization every night on the national news. Racism became a national topic of interest because of the media. And suddenly there were Freedom Riders and a plethora of civic-oriented nonprofit groups focusing their attention on the atrocities going on in our nation.

There were specials on television about the civil rights movement, and there was much coverage of the fact that the movement's leader, Dr Martin Luther King Jr, received the Nobel Peace Prize. Whenever he was imprisoned for peacefully protesting, the media was ubiquitous, proclaiming from the rooftops the injustice of the situation. This brought even more support, both emotional and financial, which helped promote one of the biggest social revolutions in the history of mankind.

Given all Mormon prophetic history, though, it was difficult for the LDS Church to immediately move with the times, since a conservative faction held sway over most of Church leadership. On the other hand, some individuals were more open to accommodating Blacks.

One of those individuals *may* have been none other than President David O. McKay. In 1954 McKay had a private conversation with University of Utah philosophy professor Sterling McMurrin, in which McKay told him there never has been a doctrine that Blacks had any sort of divine curse (Reeve, 2023:90-1); there was merely Church *policy* or *practice*, which would one day be changed. At least that was the story from McMurrin.⁴³

That was quite a different sentiment than the one McKay proffered in 1947, prior to becoming president. At that time McKay stated, "I know of no scriptural basis for denying the Priesthood to Negroes other than one verse in the Book of Abraham (1:26)." (Lund, 1967:91) Further, McKay was also part of the First Presidency when it released its August 17, 1949 statement. That official statement⁴⁴ clearly said:

⁴³ Interestingly, a similar claim was made by the late President George Albert Smith's son a few years earlier (Harris, 2024:32). He said his father held that the matter was one of custom, not revelation.

⁴⁴ According to Harris (2024:2), this statement moved what had been "a policy and practice to a firm entrenched doctrine".

The attitude of the Church with reference to the Negroes remains as it has always stood. It is not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord, on which is founded the doctrine of the Church from the days of its organization, to the effect that Negroes may become members of the Church but that they are not entitled to the Priesthood at the present time. The prophets of the Lord have made several statements as to the operation of the principle. President Brigham Young said, ‘Why are so many of the inhabitants of the earth cursed with a skin of blackness? It comes in consequence of their father’s rejecting the power of the Holy Priesthood, and the law of God.’ They will go down to death. And when all the rest of the children have received their blessings in the Holy Priesthood, then that curse will be removed from the seed of Cain, and they will come up and possess the priesthood, and receive all the blessings which we now are entitled to.’

President Wilford Woodruff made the following statement: ‘The day will come when all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have.’

The position of the Church regarding the Negro may be understood when another doctrine of the Church is kept in mind, namely, that the conduct of spirits in the premortal existence has some determining effect upon the conditions and circumstances under which these spirits take on mortality and that while the details of this principle have not been made known, the mortality is a privilege that is given to those who maintain their first estate; and that the worth of the privilege is so great that spirits are willing to come to earth and take on bodies no matter what the handicap may be as to the kind of bodies they are to secure; and that among the handicaps, failure of the right to enjoy in mortality the blessings of the priesthood is a handicap which spirits are willing to assume in order that they might come to earth. Under this principle there is no injustice whatsoever involved in the deprivation as to the holding of the priesthood by the Negroes. (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:66)

It seems McKay changed his mind sometime thereafter when he spoke with McMurrin in 1954. However, while McKay was president in 1969, the First Presidency released another official statement that said, “Our living prophet, David O. McKay, has said, ‘The seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is not something which originated with man; but goes back into the beginning with God.’” (82) McKay never signed this statement, though, given his ill health, and died one month later. Harris (2022:19-21) said that they were close friends and that McKay vowed to keep Joseph Fielding Smith from excommunicating McMurrin. Bringhurst never acknowledged McMurrin’s claim in *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks* but said that “David O. McKay, who served as Church president from 1951 to 1970, defended this practice [of the priesthood ban] both in public and private” (Bringhurst, 2018:162).

McKay's statement to McMurrin is credible given the conclusions of a special committee appointed by the former, also in 1954, to investigate the ban and whether it could be lifted. Their private findings were known as the Bennion Report because Apostle Adam Bennion chaired the committee. Spencer W. Kimball's son Edward says, concerning this committee, "They concluded that the priesthood ban had no clear basis in scripture [*sic*] but that Church members were not prepared for change." (Kimball, E., 2008:19)⁴⁵ Apostle Adam Bennion also affirmed this conclusion to a group of dissenters called "the Swearing Elders" who used to meet at the University of Utah between 1950 and 1955 (Harris, 2024:58). This obviously contradicted McKay's 1947 statement. Evidently, McKay had come to hold the ban was not based on any specific revelation but was just a practice. Nonetheless, it was a practice he was not willing to change unilaterally, evidently due not only to Church members, but to many hardliners within the Brethren.

Nonetheless, Hugh B. Brown of McKay's First Presidency certainly attempted to accommodate Blacks as much as he could, as Brown was a prominent force in moving the Church toward racial equality. Reeve (2023:91) says of Brown, "He reasoned that because there was no revelation that began the racial bans, no revelation was needed to end them." Conservative leaders flatly disagreed and claimed that a revelation was needed.⁴⁶ Brown became a thorn in their side, especially because Brown also disagreed with his Church over the issue of civil rights.

Utah, which had an overwhelming majority of LDS at the time, had a civil rights problem reminiscent of the South (Bringhurst, 2018:158-9). The civil rights movement began "to make itself felt in American society generally and in Utah in particular by the late 1930s" (168). However, in 1964 US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law, and thus prohibited discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. The Church continued to be pressured—by members as well as non-members—over the civil rights issue, and these pressures shone an unfavorable national light on the Church.

⁴⁵ This conclusion was consistent with what the First Presidency under Joseph F. Smith had concluded approximately a half century earlier (Harris, 2024:13).

⁴⁶ Harris (2022:12) recounted the story of how Apostle David O. McKay was told by President Heber J. Grant in 1921 that until the Lord reveals and allows Blacks to have the priesthood, they "will have to maintain the policy of the church".

Brown's disagreement with his church subsequently played out over an upcoming October 1963 general conference, when, prior to this event, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) threatened to mount a massive protest outside general conference about Utah's neglect of civil rights. Given the country's position at the time, the Church was quite concerned about this negative attention. As a result, President McKay allowed Brown to speak out in favor of civil rights and equality for all citizens of the US, with the proviso that it not be an official First Presidency statement. So, Brown gave the civil rights statement and then continued his talk, thus giving the impression it was an official statement, even though technically it was not (Harris & Bringham, 2015:75). Regardless, it got the intended result, and the NAACP backed down.

Just two years later, though, the ultra-conservative Apostle Ezra Taft Benson downplayed the civil rights movement and claimed it was a trojan horse to introduce communism into American society, as well the Church. He also took a not-so-subtle jab at Brown and others, labeling them "traitors" (76-9). This was repeated during the October general conference.

As a result of civil rights continuing to be a persistent problem, the Church issued the December 1969 First Presidency statement. This was a proper official statement which reaffirmed Brown's 1963 quasi-official general conference statement on civil rights. In addition, Brown had the support of a majority of the Twelve Apostles, as well as N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency, to lift the priesthood ban in December 1969 (80).⁴⁷ However, when Senior Apostle Harold B. Lee and Apostle Alvin R. Dryer returned from out of the country on church assignment, they prevailed upon the majority to get back in line and to sign the 1969 First Presidency statement, which included the words "the priesthood must await His [God's] revelation" (83). Even though Brown was forced to sign the statement, at least this time, the rationale for blaming a curse on Cain's posterity and/or Blacks being lazy in the pre-earth life was officially gone. The Church had now moved to an agnostic position concerning the rationale—"for reasons which we believe are known to God, but which He has not made fully known to man" (82).

⁴⁷ Interestingly, just two years prior, N. Eldon Tanner told *Seattle Magazine*, "'The church has no intention of changing its doctrine on the Negro'... Throughout the history of the original Christian church, the Negro never held the priesthood. There's really nothing we can do to change this. It's a law of God.'" (Tanner, S., 2018:4)

Now that the civil rights issue overlapped with the priesthood issue, it was unclear to many outside the Church how the Church could justify equality yet continue to have a priesthood ban in place. This became evident during the athletic boycotts against BYU in 1965, when BYU's Milton Hartvigsen, Dean of Physical Education, declared that they were now limiting their recruiting to non-Blacks (Bergera, 2013). The rationale behind this idea was an attempt to seem to look out for Blacks' best interest by not requiring them to navigate interracial courtships and marriages with diverse family and cultural settings. Basically, however, it was an attempt to avoid interracial marriages.

As a result, beginning in 1968, there was a lot of national attention concerning various major universities boycotting BYU athletic events. Bergera argued that Martin Luther King, Jr's murder was the impetus for University of Texas at El Paso's (UTEP) seven Black track and field athletes boycotting their competition against BYU. This happened just over a week after King's murder, and the perception of these UTEP athletes was that Mormons thought of them as racially inferior. Soon many other schools followed suit.

Though Fielding Smith continued to wrangle with Brown over the priesthood ban, the former became much more in agreement with the latter over the civil rights issue (Harris, 2022:25-7). The issue had softened Fielding Smith's heart from being a rigid Church theologian. He even went so far as to deny the fact that he had once claimed that Blacks were an "inferior race" (26). He still was not as open as Brown, but it became clear that the civil rights issue was causing Fielding Smith to be more accepting towards Blacks. Harris (34-6) says that Fielding Smith's acceptance included those who passed as White but still had some distant Black ancestry. As noted previously, it became impossible to rigidly enforce racial boundaries. It should also be noted that under Fielding Smith's tenure as president, he authorized the formation of the Genesis Group in 1971 to support Blacks in the Church.

In 1975, the Church announced it would be building a temple in São Paulo, Brazil. The Church was fully aware of what that entailed, as Blacks were behind the building project and would obviously be the ones who were going to operate and attend once it opened. In a private meeting with Christian missionary Chris Vlachos and Christian minister Wesley P. Walters on August 16, 1978, Apostle LeGrand Richards indicated this as a key factor in the revelation. He stated:

I might tell you what provoked it in a way. Down in Brazil, there is so much Negro blood in the population there that it's hard to get leaders that don't have Negro blood in them. We just built a temple down there. It's going to be dedicated in October. All those people with Negro blood in them have been raising the money to build that temple. If we don't change, then they can't even use it. Well, Brother Kimball worried about it, and he prayed a lot about it. (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:114)

2.6. The dissembling pattern of perennial racism

2.6.1. Introduction

LDS leaders have a long history of bowing down to external forces, and much of that entails a pattern of dissembling and deceit in obscuring the record. Brooks (2020:165) has called this practice “undergrounding”. She claims it began with the open political conflict Mormons had with nineteenth-century American society over the polygamy issue. The “Mormon ‘underground’ was a system of social networks that harbored LDS men and women evading prosecution or persecution for polygamy or unlawful co-habitation”. What resulted in LDS circles was

nontransparency in public relations, cultivation of distinct ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ narratives of belief and practice, and careful speech to protect private knowledge. An ethos privileging opacity, institutional loyalty, hierarchy, and guardedness developed in LDS Church institutions (including Deseret Book and Brigham Young University) as Mormons attempted to preserve a residue of theocracy and difference even as they were assimilated into broader US society. The private-public split resulted in a form of self-consciousness described by one Mormon studies scholar as a ‘divided sense of self’ and related habits of double-coding in public speech, especially in situations where LDS people perceive a threat to their way of being. Mormons sometimes joke about this practice as ‘lying for the Lord’ (165-6).

Former Mormon author, Latayne C. Scott (2017:107), says,

This has become so pervasive that even in the day of anyone’s ability to check facts on the Internet, Mormonism has created an entire culture of verbal misrepresentation in an attempt to ‘protect’ its members—and its reputation. This church-wide practice has continued, claims former BYU

professor David Knowlton, who spoke publicly about what he called the ‘institutional lying’ of church officials.

The full quote of Knowlton came from a 1992 Salt Lake TV interview concerning the Church keeping secret files on its members. Knowlton said that keeping secret files “‘doesn’t belong in a church that purports to represent Jesus Christ... I’m ashamed, frankly, of a church that doesn’t want to tell the truth. I’m ashamed of institutional lying’” (Anderson, 1993:48).

The justification for this practice is based in LDS Scripture. In the PGP, God is the one who commands Abraham to lie about his wife Sarai being his sister (Abraham 2:22-5).

2.6.2. Phelps

Though Brooks gives an apt description of undergrounding, its history seems to go back even further than the polygamy conflict. Mormonism was a persecuted church from its inception in 1830. However, the dissembling over the subject of racism in the Church seems to go back to Phelps in 1833 when he backtracked on the claim that Church had no rule concerning Blacks and prudence should be the guide. After the uproar from Missourians, he claimed he was misunderstood and was trying to dissuade free Blacks from coming to Missouri to join the Church.

2.6.3. Smoot and Coltrin

Abraham Smoot was a wealthy businessman and a slave owner in Provo, UT. He was also the stake president there. On March 5, 1879, he met with President John Taylor, his secretary John Nuttall, Brigham Young, Jr., and Church Patriarch Zebedee Coltrin at Taylor’s home. Taylor interviewed Smoot and Coltrin on their recollections concerning Abel’s ordination, since Abel was requesting to be sealed to his wife and kids for time and all eternity in the temple. Coltrin had joined the Church in 1831 and moved to Utah in 1847, and he told Taylor that Joseph Smith himself told him in 1834 that “‘the negro has no right nor cannot hold the Priesthood’ and that Abel had been ordained to the Seventy as symbolic

compensation for labor on the temple but dropped when his ‘lineage’ was subsequently discovered” (Brooks, 2020:44). Smoot then agreed with Coltrin, and the former claimed that Smith told him not to baptize or ordain slaves while Smoot was on a mission to the southern states in 1835-6.

There were, however, some problems with both Smoot’s and Coltrin’s testimonies. Coltrin had actually ordained Abel a Seventy in Kirtland in December of 1836 but testified to Taylor that he had felt sickened doing so. It was as if he was claiming that despite what Smith told him, in a moment of weakness he bowed to pressure and forged ahead with an unauthorized ordination. However, that ordination record “was commemorated in two certificates affirming his membership in the quorum in the 1840s and 1850s” (45). Further, Smoot’s claim had nothing to do with Abel, who was a free Black man. Up to the time of this meeting, Abel had had an “open, ongoing, and uncontested participation in LDS leadership”. Brooks basically calls both Coltrin and Smoot liars when she says:

Both men withheld this vital testimony from President Taylor. Both men instead purposefully provided testimony that obscured the ordination, obscured vital differences between slave and free, and attributed an anti-ordination stance to Joseph Smith himself. Abraham Smoot and Zebedee Coltrin together bore false witness to bar full participation by Black men in the priesthood and temple ceremonies.

The result was that the institutional ban remained in place and subsequently Abel was denied full access to the temple. Harris and Bringhurst (2015:46) say,

Apostle Joseph F. Smith pointed out certain inconsistencies and expressed skepticism that Joseph Smith had inaugurated black priesthood denial. Elijah Abel’s case compounded apostle [*sic*] Smith’s doubts. After carefully examining Abel’s situation, the apostle concluded that Joseph Smith had continued to recognize Abel’s priesthood authority right up to the time of his death in 1844. In rationalizing the conflicting accounts, the Council of the Twelve declared that Abel had ‘been ordained before the word of the Lord was fully understood.’

2.6.4. Joseph F. Smith

Concerning Abel, Joseph F. Smith said in 1904 that Abel’s priesthood was a mistake that was never corrected. However, Reeve (2023:85) claims F. Smith just four years later had a “new memory” when he

said, “Abel’s ‘ordination was declared null and void by the Prophet himself.’” That is quite a charitable take on what F. Smith did.

2.6.5. *Joseph Fielding Smith*

F. Smith’s 1908 statement was passed onto his son, Apostle (President of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time) Joseph Fielding Smith, who in 1954 claimed there were two Elijah Abels in Nauvoo in 1840s. The Black was not ordained, but the White was. Harris (2024:73) says there is no evidence for Fielding Smith’s claim. Fielding Smith went on to state that the Black one was mistakenly ordained and claimed that his great-uncle acknowledged the mistake.

In 1961, Fielding Smith dissembled to news agencies when he told them that the LDS Church can do more for Blacks’s salvation than any other Church. The Church can baptize them by means of someone who has the genuine authority of God, and this allows them to the opportunity to enter the highest kingdom (98). Of course, this conveniently overlooked the fact that other churches teach that Blacks, just like anyone else, may reach the highest destination in the Father’s presence without the LDS Church and their pseudo-divine authority.

In 1963, Fielding Smith responded to a news report from an LDS individual and lied about ever claiming that Blacks were inferior. Fielding Smith went on to talk about their potential for great achievements (98-9). His book *The Way to Perfection* had gone through several editions at this point. There, he notoriously says,

Not only was Cain called upon to suffer, but because of his wickedness he became the father of an inferior race. A curse was place upon him and that curse has been continued through his lineage and must do so while time endures. Millions of souls have come into this world cursed with a black skin and have been denied the privilege of Priesthood and the fulness of the blessings of the Gospel. These are the descendants of Cain. Moreover, they have been made to feel their inferiority and have been separated from the rest of mankind from the beginning.

...In the spirit of sympathy, mercy and faith, we will also hope that blessings may eventually be given to our Negro brethren, for they are our brethren—children of God—notwithstanding their black covering emblematical of eternal darkness. (Smith, J.F., 1958:101-2)

2.6.6. 1953 First Presidency statement

As the culture swung in a more inclusive direction, the LDS, to represent itself in a similar way, became more sensitive to charges of inequality. In response to LDS scholar Chauncy Harris' concern over news articles in the early 1950s that skewered the LDS Church over its racist policies, the First Presidency said that Blacks could attend and participate in all general Church meetings; but simply that Blacks could not currently hold the priesthood. The conclusion was that ““there is no segregation in any Church gathering or activity”” (Harris, 2024:55). This raises the question as to whether the endowment and sealings in the temple were considered Church gatherings and activities.

2.6.7. Ernest Wilkinson

In 1962, BYU Chancellor Ernest Wilkinson told news outlets that Church Educational System instructors at the University of Utah, Lowell Bennion and Edgar Lyon, were “promoted by being reassigned” (92). Harris calls this line a “ruse” and the real reason was that they were fired for being too liberal, particularly on this race issue. Fielding Smith used this same ruse.

Wilkinson also feared interracial dating and marriage at BYU. The school's promotions claimed that all races were welcome. However, Harris (131) says that “wasn't true”. William Berrett, Wilkinson's deputy, guided admission officials on how to dissuade potential Black students from attending.

In 1969, Wilkinson had to respond to federal civil rights investigators, who had given the school ample time to comply with their demands or BYU would lose federal funding. Wilkinson insisted that BYU was actively recruiting Black students in Utah and Wyoming. Harris (148) calls this “a dubious claim given the paucity of Black people in those states. His strategy was disingenuous at best, unethical at worst. The

crafty president could say that BYU was trying to recruit Black students, even though he knew that it wouldn't yield the results the investigators demanded". Harris goes on to say, "Wilkinson was playing a dangerous shell game with federal investigators. He insisted that BYU was recruiting minority students when the school wasn't, as he later admitted."

In 1970, Wilkinson signed a tract called "Minorities, Civil Rights, and BYU" to smooth over tensions with the University of Washington that had stated it was cutting all ties with BYU, particularly athletic events. Wilkinson's Public Relations assistant, Heber Wolsey, wrote the piece. Newspapers in Washington, Oregon, and Utah carried the tract. The piece misleadingly stated: "Individual salvation in the hereafter, according to the Mormons, will be a reward for individual effort and will not be based on race." (170) This of course failed to mention that exaltation was not available to Blacks given the ban. Wilkinson also cherry-picked a couple passages from the BOM that seem to teach that God is against racism (i.e., 2 Nephi 26:33; Mosiah 23:7). Wilkinson conveniently ignored other notorious passages where God cursed people with dark skin to segregate them from righteous white skin people, and as the former repented, their curse was taken from them (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:21-4; Alma 3:6; 3 Nephi 2:14-6). Harris (171) says,

The tract attempted to give the impression that the university had a history of racial inclusion, but this was highly misleading. BYU didn't welcome Black students, and the tract failed to mention the federal government's ongoing investigation into BYU's hiring practices. Moreover, it was disingenuous to suggest that the church's racial teachings didn't affect BYU's admissions policies. The week before the tract was published, for example, Wilkinson wrote in his diary that 'intermarriage' would be 'one of the tragedies that will inevitably result if we have a sizeable number of Negro students at BYU.'

2.6.8. Hugh B. Brown

In 1962, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, Hugh B. Brown, leaked to the press that the Church was considering lifting the ban. Brown said he was misquoted, but Harris (97) says it was not true.

With the NAACP threatening to picket a general conference if they did not support a couple of civil rights bills on employment and housing, Brown pushed to make an official First Presidency statement endorsing civil rights at the 1963 fall general conference. President McKay allowed Brown to read the statement, but only on the condition that it was his own and not a First Presidency statement. Brown basically ignored McKay's instructions by reading the statement before he began his conference address. This gave the impression that the civil rights statement was an official First Presidency statement. Harris (109) calls this "Brown's stunt".

In 1965, Brown explained to the press that the ban was because there were not very many Blacks in the Church and that they were not advanced positionally to be leaders. Harris (118) says numbers had nothing to do with it and Brown knew this.

In 1969, Brown lied to an LDS student at the University of Utah that the Brethren were all united at that point on not lifting the ban until the president says so and, when he does, everyone will be united with him (152-3). Behind the scenes, the Brethren were in turmoil. Most of them were hardliners who refused to lift the ban.

Apostle Harold B. Lee forced Brown to sign the 1969 First Presidency Statement. Brown obviously did not believe that this ban was a teaching of all the prophets/presidents of the Church. He did not believe that "[r]evelation assures us that this plan antedates man's mortal existence, extending back to man's pre-existent state". He also did not hold that the lifting of the ban "must await [God's] revelation" (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:82-3).

2.6.9. George Romney

In 1963, Michigan Governor and well-respected Mormon George Romney (father to Mitt Romney) claimed he had never been taught that Blacks were inferior. He also said that since they are children of God as well, they are entitled to civil rights like everyone else. He completely dodged the issue if they are entitled to the priesthood of God just as every other race is and continued to focus his attention on equal civil rights. Harris (103-4) says Romney "wasn't truthful" in claiming he had never been taught about

Black inferiority. Why? Because Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection* was clearly taught in LDS Sunday school classes as well as worthy LDS homes, and he clearly stated there that Blacks were an "inferior race" and "the descendants of Cain" (1958:101).

The next year, Romney seemed to lie again about this same issue to the popular columnist, Clare Boothe Luce. This time, the stakes were even higher since he was eyeing the US presidency. Romney wrote Luce a letter claiming she misrepresented his religious views concerning Blacks having inferior souls to other races, and that she had "'religious bias and prejudice' against his church" (Harris, 2024:106).

2.6.10. *The Bensons*

Apostle Ezra Taft Benson and his son Reed were right-wing extremists who fought the civil rights movement. In 1965, Reed, who was the regional coordinator of the John Birch Society, began a rumor campaign to stoke fear that the civil rights riots were also coming to Utah. Harris (119) claims these Benson "antics" valued their politics over the "unity of the church".

In 1967, the apostle dissembled what he was going to speak about at the fall general conference. He told President McKay that he would innocuously discuss the plight of Blacks and the need for peace instead of riots. Benson used his talk to launch an attack on the civil rights movement for being a tool of communists. Harris (125) calls the talk "dystopian", as well as "so controversial and so inflammatory".

2.6.11. *Floyd Millet*

In a 1968 news article, BYU's athletic director Floyd Millet denied that the Church taught Blacks were inferior. Former LDS seminary teacher John Fitzgerald wrote to Millet to correct him by quoting Fielding Smith's *The Way to Perfection*. Fitzgerald also sent a copy to UTEP track coach Wayne Banderberg, since the school had declared a boycott of competing against BYU track.

2.6.12. Elder Alexander B. Morrison

In an *Ensign* article, Seventy Elder Morrison (2000) states, “How grateful I am that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has from its beginnings stood strongly against racism in any of its malignant manifestations.” While technically correct that the Church had no racial barriers in its early days, it still supported problematic racism in the form of its Latter-day Scriptures (more on this in the next chapter). Further, the rest of Morrison’s article made no mention of the institutional racism later promoted by the Church. The impression clearly was that the LDS Church has had no racism throughout its history.

2.7. Recent LDS attempts to remedy perennial racism

2.7.1. 1978-2013 overview

There was much to clean up after the 1978 bomb dropped. One should not think that racist ideas totally went away. Even to this day, the Church continues to encourage its members to root out any racist ideas from among themselves (Weaver, 2020b). But what were the factors post 1978 that set the stage for the 2013 GTE?

When Walters asked Richards a couple months after the 1978 revelation how this affected the Church’s thinking on Blacks being less valiant in their pre-earth life, Richards reaffirmed the 1969 position that the Church has not thought that way about it for a while. He said, “We don’t know just what the reason was... Now the Church’s attitude today is to prefer to leave it until we know. The Lord has never indicated that black skin came because of being less faithful.” (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:115)

A year later, Apostle Bruce R. McConkie’s (1979:527) 26th printing of *Mormon Doctrine* still claimed under the entry “Negroes” that “interracial marriages are discouraged by the Brethren”. Nonetheless, the entry no longer stated:

The negroes are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are [*sic*] concerned, particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom, but this

inequality is not of man's origin. It is the Lord's doing, is based on his eternal laws of justice, and grows out of the lack of spiritual valiance of those concerned in their first estate. (1974:527-8)

Under the entry "Cain", McConkie (1979:109) stated, "The Lord placed on Cain a mark of a dark skin, and he became the ancestor of the black race. (Moses 5; Gen. 4; *Teachings*, p. 169.)." Under the entry "Ham", McConkie (343) stated:

Through *Ham* (a name meaning *black*) 'the blood of the Canaanites was preserved' through the flood, he having married Egyptus, a descendant of Cain. (Abra. 1:20-27.) Ham was cursed, apparently for marrying into the forbidden lineage, and the effects of the curse passed to his son, Canaan. (Gen. 9:25.) Ham's descendants include the Negroes, who originally were barred from holding the priesthood but have been able to do so since June, 1978.

Under the entry "Races of Men", McConkie (616) claimed:

Racial degeneration, resulting in differences in appearance and spiritual aptitude, has arisen since the fall. We know the circumstances under which the posterity of Cain (and later of Ham) were born with the characteristics of the black race. (Moses 5:16-41; 7:8, 12, 22; Abra. 1:20-27.) The Book of Mormon explains why the Lamanites received dark skins and a degenerate status. (2 Ne. 5:21-23.) ...[A]ll these changes from the physical and spiritual perfections of our common parents have been brought about by departure from gospel truths. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, pp. 148-151; vol. 3, pp. 313-26.)

The race and nation in which men are born in this world is a direct result of their pre-existent life.

The LDS Church's publication *Mormon Doctrine* finally went out of print in 2010. However, to date, the Church is still publishing Joseph Fielding Smith's *Doctrines of Salvation* and *Answers to Gospel Questions*, both of which contain similar racist statements found in *Mormon Doctrine* (cf. <https://www.deseretbook.com/>).

A couple years after the 1978 revelation, Robert S. Wood, a Mormon academic who later became a Seventy, published a children's filmstrip cartoon that had a Lamanite girl ecstatic that her skin pigmentation had changed. The Heavenly Father made her skin, and that of all other righteous Lamanites, "pretty", "wonderful", and "white" (R B, 2020).

In 1997 well-known Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss sent a report to Elder Marlin Jensen of the First Quorum of Seventy titled "Racial Ideas as a Continuing Problem in the Church" (Harris & Bringham, 2015:127-9). Mauss admitted to Jensen that even though the 1978 revelation occurred almost two decades prior, "the doctrines themselves continue to circulate, not only in conversations and classes among the Saints at the grassroots, but indeed in authoritative books still published and distributed through the Deseret Book Company, among other outlets" (128). Therefore, contrary to popular belief, the 1978 revelation did not clear up all racial problems in the Church.

The following story gives a vivid example of the inadequacy of the 1978 revelation. Sometime shortly after 1993, potential Black convert Wain Myers (2015:41) asked the LDS missionaries why Black men could not hold the priesthood. Amazingly, one of the missionaries took Myers to the infamous 2 Nephi 5:21 passage in the BOM, where it states that the people had hardened their hearts against the Lord, and "as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:66). Myers said that this angered him, so he asked the missionary if Blacks "are" cursed. Myers said, "Without missing a step, my missionary gave an emphatic, 'Yes!'" This is interesting, since LDS nowadays are typically quick to distinguish the cursed Native American dark people in the BOM as opposed to those of Black African ancestry.

In the late 1990s, the researcher's wife had recently graduated high school in Utah and had moved to Dallas, Texas. At her work, she somehow brought up a conversation with her Black Christian co-worker about the pre-earth war and how Blacks were subsequently cursed by entering this world through the cursed line of Cain. The researcher's wife simply assumed that every so-called Christian believed these things. Her co-worker quickly corrected this assumption.

Numerous racial problems continued to persist in the Church, to the point that the president of the Genesis Group, Darius Gray, informed President Gordon B. Hinckley about what was going on. In April 2006 priesthood session of general conference, Hinckley (2006:58) stated:

Racial strife still lifts its ugly head. I am advised that even right here among us there is some of this. I cannot understand how it can be. It seemed to me that we all rejoiced in the 1978 revelation given President Kimball. I was there in the temple at the time that that happened. There was no doubt in my mind or in the minds of my associates that what was revealed was the mind and the will of the Lord.

Now I am told that racial slurs and denigrating remarks are sometimes heard among us. I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church of Christ. How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?

Correcting personal racial insults while, curiously, allowing certain old blatantly racist works by the Brethren to be published was one thing, but correcting the racist theology being aired out in the national press during an election year when their beloved Mitt Romney was running for president of the US, was quite another. Such was the messy case with the LDS Church and its BYU religion professor Randy Bott. In an interview he had with Jason Horowitz of the *Washington Post* in early 2012, Bott recounted the standard old story of Blacks being cursed with their skin in Cain's lineage through Ham's son Canaan and that this is what marked them as being unworthy to hold the priesthood, as the Book of Abraham seemingly taught (see 1:21-7). Bott even went so far as to liken Blacks to children who were not capable yet of driving, as well as claiming they were blessed for not being able to fall from the top of the ladder since they were not on the top of the ladder (Horowitz, 2012).

The very same day after this article appeared, the Church issued two statements. The first was a specific reply to the *Post* article, where the Church was emphatic that Bott's statements "absolutely do not represent the teachings and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. BYU faculty members do not speak for the Church" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012a). The

second article was a general statement of Church beliefs on racial matters. Both statements unequivocally condemned “racism, including any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church” (2012a & b).

In fairness, it seems that Bott was a sacrificial lamb and that the Church bears responsibility for not ever setting the record straight on the curse of the Cain/priesthood issue prior to this Bott issue. They should have seen this coming and not allowed the Brethren’s old racist ideas to be published. Harris and Bringhurst (2015:202) notes that as late as 2008, the Church-owned BYU TV was airing this curse of Cain teaching. Harris and Bringhurst (137) say that, up to the time of the Bott incident, “there was never a First Presidency statement, an *Ensign* article, or a general conference address” clearing this matter up. In fact, Harris and Bringhurst note that later in 2012, one of Bott’s colleagues in the BYU religion department admitted they all taught what Bott taught and had no idea the Church had changed its position.

It should also be noted that just a few months prior to this Bott incident, General Authority and Church historian Marlin Jensen admitted that many have left the Church and that the primary reason for that is due to the younger generation’s ability to quickly look up Church history problems online (Henderson & Cooke, 2012). In fact, just after Jensen’s admission, a survey came out that revealed what exactly was motivating people to leave the LDS Church (Open Stories Foundation & Mormon Stories Podcast, 2012). The first three factors were the Book of Abraham translation, polygamy, and Blacks and priesthood.⁴⁸ It is not surprising that the Church responded as quickly as they did to the Bott incident. They had to do something to stop the hemorrhaging.

2.7.2. Common justifications

Reeve’s (2023:110-30) concluding chapters in his recent work attempt to make sense of the past LDS racist policies from LDS perspectives. He proffers four of the “most common justifications in circulation among Latter-day Saints today” (115) and then he argues why he thinks these justifications are incorrect. They are:

⁴⁸ Interestingly, even after 12 years, the subject of racial issues is still in the third spot for historical problems that motivated certain LDS to leave their church according to the Coates and Cranney survey of the B.H. Roberts Foundation (Riess, 2024).

1. The Lord gave the gospel to the Jew and then the Gentile, so the Lord may also give the gospel to Whites and then to Blacks today.
2. God withheld the priesthood in the Old Testament from non-Levitical tribes, so he may have withheld the priesthood from Blacks for a period in the New Testament (116).
3. Ordaining Blacks in the pre-civil rights period of the US would have destroyed the Church.
4. The priesthood ban was simply the product of “an unenlightened past. Everyone was a racist back then” (117).

The first two are attempted biblical justifications, which will be dealt with in the following chapter on Scripture.

As for the danger to the Church of ordaining Blacks in the pre-civil rights period, Reeve (116-7) claims that this justification ignores the fact that Blacks were ordained early in the LDS Church and that they were also admitted to the temple through Nauvoo. It did not destroy the Church then, so why would it subsequently? Further, Reeve also says that the Church was not destroyed for openly practicing polygamy when the nation was adamantly against it (117).

However, these examples would have been more convincing had there been continuity for them. So, indeed, the Church did ordain Blacks in the early years, but they yielded to societal pressures and thus became outright racists by banning Blacks from the priesthood. Indeed, the Church also publicly practiced polygamy in its history, but they then abandoned the practice and became monogamists.⁴⁹ As a result, Reeve’s argument cannot make its case since the examples do not demonstrate a practice that continued without destroying the Church. He needed an example of something controversial to the larger American culture that continued to the present.

⁴⁹ They were at least monogamists in terms of only having one living spouse while on earth. In the LDS Church, temple marriage is for “time and all eternity”. So, when a death occurs, the husband, and not the wife, is at liberty to be sealed to another spouse for time and all eternity. The wife is at liberty to marry only for time (i.e., here on earth). The researcher’s mother-in-law remarried a man for time only since she was previously sealed to the researcher’s late father-in-law for time and all eternity. However, the former president of the Church, Russell M. Nelson, as well as the current president, Dallin H. Oaks, are both sealed for time and all eternity to multiple women even though their previous wives had died (McKeever, 2008).

A better argument against this common justification is based on the fact that other churches were ordaining Blacks at that time, and they were not destroyed—churches like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which were formed in the early nineteenth century. These churches had Black pastors and are still in existence today. Absalom Jones was the first Black American priest, and he was ordained in the Episcopal church in 1804 (Tolly, 2007).

A more convincing argument against this common justification is based on the understanding that if this was really God's Church, he would do what he wanted and would protect his Church. However, Mormons believe that the Church died after the apostles and that God ended up restoring it in 1830. Even if this were the case, then what would be the problem with ordaining Blacks and having God's Church destroyed? Obviously even Mormons must admit that this could not stop God's purposes; he is God and has unlimited resources to restore his Church whenever he deems it appropriate.

Some LDS may attempt to answer this problem by saying that even though the Church ordained Blacks from the beginning of its restoration, they were no longer obligated to continue the practice since the Almighty allows his Church not to keep his commands when his enemies become too strong for his people. D&C 124:49 said,

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings.

Thus, the premise is that when racism began to be overwhelmingly persistent from outside the Church, the Church could forego their ordination of Blacks and fall in line with those who are disobedient to God.

However, this surely does not sound like the God of the Bible. Again, take the example of Jewish pressure on Peter to not eat with the Gentiles. God rebuked Peter through Paul. Or take the example of

Pharoah and his armies continuing to persecute the Lord's people and hindering them from leaving Egypt to worship the Lord in the wilderness (see Ex 7-14)—a story that has nothing to do with the faithfulness of God's people but demonstrates that even Pharoah's obstinacy could not thwart the purposes of the Almighty. That is why the biblical narrative does not allow the saints to quit when the going gets too tough. The mandate is to trust the Lord in all circumstances because he is faithful to do what he said he would. The Bible says that "the just will live by faith" (Rom 1:17), not by giving up.

As for the common justification that racial discrimination was a product of an unenlightened past, Reeve argues persuasively against this position. Even though The Declaration of Independence was inconsistently applied, Reeve (2023:118) favorably gives the example of Jefferson writing that "'all men were created equal'". Reeve also gives the example of Charles Copland freeing his slaves after the Revolutionary War because God created everyone free and slavery goes against "'the clearest dictates of natural justice.'" Reeve even gives examples from his own nineteenth century Church leaders—Sidney Rigdon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Orson Pratt. Rigdon condemned slavery and promoted Blacks having the rights of citizenship. Smith ordained Blacks. Young acknowledged Q. Walker Lewis's priesthood and even claimed the Church did not care about skin color. Finally, Pratt argued that Blacks should be able to vote.

Further, the Bible is clear that God has revealed his character in the things that are "made so that people are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Anything that goes against this revelation is sin. Therefore, people cannot stand before God at the judgment and claim they were merely products of their culture. People are more than robots programmed by societal influences that yield certain determinative outputs. People are in the image of God even after the fall (Jas 3:9) and they are expected to govern his world appropriately according to the knowledge that God has revealed to them.

2.7.3. Reeve's and the Church's solution

Reeve is clear in the way he answers all the past racism in his church. Basically, he admits that his leaders are not infallible, and they have certainly made mistakes. These mistakes were obviously not the revelations of God, who alone is perfect; humans, including his prophets, are not. As Reeve (2023:110) says:

As I have come to see it, the racial restrictions took on a life of their own after Brigham Young articulated and then defended them. They were not set in stone at his first utterance, nor were they poured down from heaven. The context is earthly, and they grew over time to accumulate historical weight with each succeeding generation unwilling to violate the precedent of the previous generation.

...I do not believe the racial restrictions were of divine origins.

In the following chapter, he goes on to say:

God refuses to violate our agency, even that of prophets. It is the foundation of the plan. If we voted for agency in the premortal realm, then we voted for messiness; when human beings exercise agency it inevitably gets messy.

...Agency is so sacred, we answer, that God will not violate it even when we use it to destroy the agency of others.

...Yet, we sometimes assume that God would violate Brigham Young's agency when he articulated a cursed racial identity for people of African descent. Orson Pratt never did agree with Brigham Young's racial stance. 'We have no proof,' he declared, 'that the Africans are the descendants of old Cain.' God refused to violate either man's agency. He let them assert their divergent positions regarding race and slavery and then in the long course of the racial restrictions He let those positions harden over time. Because He allows us our agency, however, it does not mean that God approves of our actions. (120-1)

Later, Reeve (128) says, "We do not need an infallible prophet when we have an infallible Savior."

Keep in mind what the GTE on "Race and the Priesthood" states, particularly since Reeve had a significant role to play in its formation. The GTE states:

Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages

are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013a)

Without specifically saying so, this statement claims that past Church leaders were in error and utilized their agency inappropriately to advance racist *theories*. The Church has finally set the record straight, albeit in a scholarly online essay that most Church members have probably never read. But, most importantly, the Church now claims the ban was due to racism rather than having divine origins. The Church instead lays the origin of the ban on Brigham Young. The Missouri Thesis has been repudiated. The agnostic 1969 statement on this matter is a thing of the past. The GTE has also walked back the Church's views on interracial marriages.

Such is the Church's stated justification for dealing with all the racism that came from their past leaders. It turns out that Reeve's solution to past racism in the Church is now the Church's solution. As such, it is critical to carefully evaluate this claim. If all past racism is simply bad theory or interpretation of Scripture coming from fallible Church leaders, then on the face of it, Mormonism no longer has *perennial* racism. Similarly, Southern Baptist leaders used their agency inappropriately on this issue, but since they have acknowledged this was the case and publicly apologized, no one today accuses them of having "perennial" racism, even if certain individual members may still harbor racist beliefs. So why not show the same charity toward the LDS Church?

To understand this issue, it is essential to evaluate the way the LDS Church views prophets and the words that come from them. It is also helpful to contrast their view with the typical view of historic Christianity. It is prophets who lead the LDS Church, while the Southern Baptist Church, for example, has no such office. That is quite a difference. Prophets stand in the place of God to speak his words to his people. The leaders of the Southern Baptist Church, though, fallibly offer what God has already infallibly stated in his word—in the Bible; they do not pretend to give new Scripture. Even if there are those who exercise the New Testament gift of prophecy, they still do not give new Scripture for the whole worldwide Body of Christ. Most importantly, these prophets may or may not be leading a particular church and, if they do, their gift is secondary to their role as a pastor.

In understanding the LDS Church's view of prophets, it is important to emphasize the term "living" when speaking of the authority of prophets. *Living* prophets take precedence over dead ones. The living ones are God's mouthpieces and are directing his Church now.

The second prophet/president of the LDS Church, Brigham Young, referred to his own sermons as "Scripture". In February of 1870, he said:

The Lord is in our midst. He teaches the people continually. I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it is as good Scripture as they deserve. The people have the oracles of God continually. (JD, 1870:13:95)

Young reiterated the point later that same year (264). It is as if he were making the same point the Church's *Gospel Principles* made concerning further Scripture coming through living prophets, but only in the nineteenth century (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:45-8). Apostle George Q. Cannon (1861: Preface) even referred to the JD as "one of the standard works of the Church". However, these days, LDS do not consider these old sermons to be Scripture, let alone a "standard work." For LDS, today's Scripture may become tomorrow's errant opinion.

For example, take Brigham Young's teaching that Adam is none other than the Heavenly Father. Young declared:

When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a *celestial body*, and brought Eve, *one of his wives*, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, *the Archangel*, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken — He is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do.

...Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven. Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation. (JD, 1852:1:50-1)

Young considered this a doctrine that God gave him. Young (1873:4) said, “How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me—namely that Adam is our Father and God.” This past scriptural doctrine is now regarded as an errant theory of a prophet of God.⁵⁰ Reeve (2023:127) quotes the late LDS Prophet Spencer W. Kimball, labeling this “theory” as “false doctrine”. Why? Because President Kimball (1976) said it was “not according to the scriptures [*sic*]”. Reeve (2023:127) qualifies that by quoting from the late President Joseph F. Smith, who said it did not stand the test of “the revealed and *accepted* word of God” (emphasis added).

If that is the case, then why bother emphasizing *living* prophets, especially when LDS acknowledge that their prophets and apostles are still men and, as such, can make mistakes? Perhaps the living prophets are wrong in what they perceive to be the accepted word of God. The late LDS apostle and member of the First Presidency Charles W. Penrose (1912:1045) answered the question about whether LDS believe that the president of the Church is infallible when speaking in his official capacity in the following way: “We do not believe in the infallibility of man. When God reveals anything it is truth, and truth is infallible. No President of the Church has claimed infallibility.” Just over one hundred years later, LDS apostle and member of the First Presidency Dieter F. Uchtdorf made a similar claim, saying:

And, to be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine.

I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect, and His doctrine is pure. But He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes. (Uchtdorf, 2013)

On the other hand, LDS leaders have also seemed to teach that their latter-day revelations are infallible. This is a messy issue in LDS theology.⁵¹ People naturally assume that when functioning as a prophet and offering what they claim to be revelations from the Lord, there should be no room for error, since the prophet is a tool of an infallible and omnipotent God. D&C 1:38-9 says:

⁵⁰ Only fundamentalist Mormons still hold to this doctrine today. Fundamentalists include many more churches than simply the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS).

⁵¹ For more on LDS apologists defending the fallibility of prophets, see FAIR, s.a.c.

What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and the earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same. For behold, and lo, the Lord is God, and the Spirit beareth record, and the record is true, and the truth abideth forever and ever. Amen. (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:4)

If this is the case, then there seems to be no margin for error. How, then, is it possible for a human to get it so wrong?

On May 2, 1844, Joseph Smith (1977:368) taught: “When did I ever teach anything wrong from this stand? When was I ever confounded? I want to triumph in Israel before I depart hence and am no more seen. I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught.”⁵²

Brigham Young taught something similar when he said:

What man or woman on the earth, what spirit in the spirit world can say truthfully that I ever gave a wrong word of counsel, or a word of advice that could not be sanctioned by the heavens? The success which has attended me in my presidency is owing to the blessings and mercy of the Almighty. Why I have referred to this is to show you that I realize the importance of obeying the words of the Lord, which he gives through his acknowledged servants. When revelation is given to any people, they must walk according to it, or suffer the penalty which is the punishment of disobedience; but when the word is, ‘will you do thus and so?’ ‘It is the mind and will of God that you perform such and such a duty;’ the consequences of disobedience are not so dreadful, as they would be if the word of the Lord were to be written under the declaration, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ (JD, 1867:12:127-8)

Young later taught the following:

I am here to give this people, called Latter-day Saints, counsel to direct them in the path of life. I am here to answer; I shall be on hand to answer when I am called upon, for all the counsel and for all the instruction that I have given to this people. If there is an Elder here, or any member of this

⁵² Perhaps speaking from “the stand” is to be considered inerrant. However, in 1831 Smith acknowledged that there are alternative revelations not from the Spirit of God that originate from men and devils (D&C 46:7). This is consistent with David Whitmer (1887:31) testifying about Smith excusing a failed prophecy about the copyright of the BOM being sold in Canada by claiming, “*Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of men: and some revelations are of the devil.*” If that is the case, then Smith was confused, and therefore wrong, in his 1844 claim that there was no error in his revelations; so, perhaps revelations from the stand may be in error.

Church, called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who can bring up the first idea, the first sentence that I have delivered to the people as counsel that is wrong, I really wish they would do it; but they cannot do it, for the simple reason that I have never given counsel that is wrong; this is the reason. (JD, 1873:16:161)

The late LDS Apostle Joseph F. Merrill (1941:51) taught in general conference:

Do the people of the Church want a safe guide to what is well for them to do? It is this: Keep in harmony with the Presidency of this Church. Accept and follow the teachings and advice of the President. At every Conference we raise our hands to sustain the President as prophet, seer and revelator. Is it consistent to do this and then go contrary to his advice? Is anyone so simple as to believe he is serving the Lord when he opposes the President? Of course, the President is not infallible. He makes no claims to infallibility. But when in his official capacity he teaches and advises the members of the Church relative to their duties, let no man who wants to please the Lord say aught against the counsels of the President.

In the spirit of helpfulness let me give you a key. When in doubt go on your knees in humility with an open mind and a pure heart with a real desire to do the Lord's will, and pray earnestly and sincerely for divine guidance. Persist in praying in this way until you get an answer that fills your bosom with joy and satisfaction. It will be God's answer. If obedient to this answer you will always act as the President indicates. You will then be safe.

The late LDS President Wilford Woodruff in general conference famously taught the following, which later became part of LDS Scripture:

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme [*sic*]. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:292)

The late Apostle M. Russell Ballard (2014) echoed this statement when he said, ““Keep the eyes of the mission on the leaders of the Church. ... We will not and ... cannot lead [you] astray.””

Much earlier, the late Apostle Marion G. Romney (1960:78) agreed with what the late LDS President Heber J. Grant told him. The former said that “there never will be a President of this Church who will lead the people astray”.

A year after the famous 1978 revelation, the late First Counselor in the First Presidency, N. Eldon Tanner (1979), gave a First Presidency Message that supported the idea that “[w]hen the prophet speaks the debate is over”. Thus, prophets obviously have the final say on earth, since they are the ones who speak for the Lord.

Therefore, are they fallible or infallible in their supposed revelations? There appears to be no clear and consistent answer here. Further, what happens when LDS prophets run contrary to past LDS prophets? Again, the emphasis is on the words of “living” prophets. It is not merely the word of God that has been revealed in the past. Again, nothing is more important than what God has said is the “*accepted* word of God” (emphasis added), as Joseph F. Smith explained.

Further, who must confirm that a word, said to be from God, is really God’s word? *LDS merely beg the question that this refers to the present attitudes of their leaders.* There is no good reason to think the acceptance by their present leaders—that a word is a word of God—takes precedence over their former leaders’ acceptance of a contrary word. If they were wrong before, they may well be wrong again now.

Nevertheless, the Church assumes they have no other option but to look to who is in charge now to know what the Lord may or may not be revealing, or what the Lord has or has not revealed. Notice that something has taken the place of God and his word. LDS are programmed to not rest in God and his word, but to rest in the ability of living, fallible men, to fallibly *accept* what the word of God is. The focus is on the one true and living Church. This is why point three in the late Apostle and later President Ezra Taft Benson’s (1980) speech “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet” was: “The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.” He went on to state that “[o]ur marching orders for each six months are found in the general conference addresses, which are printed in the *Ensign* magazine. ...Beware of those who would pit the dead prophets against the living prophets, for the living prophets always take precedence.”

Some may claim that those statements themselves were just the opinion of a dead prophet and are no longer binding upon the Church. However, what this dead prophet stated is still being taught in the LDS Church. In the April 2023 general conference, Elder Allen D. Haynie (2023) said:

Knowing by revelation that there is a living prophet on the earth changes everything. It causes one to be uninterested in the debate about when is a prophet speaking as a prophet or whether one is ever justified in selective rejection of prophetic counsel. Such revealed knowledge invites one to trust the counsel of a living prophet, even if we do not fully understand it. After all, a perfect and loving Father in Heaven has chosen the pattern of revealing truth to His children through a prophet, someone who never sought such a sacred calling and who has no need of our help to be aware of his own imperfections. A prophet is someone God has personally prepared, called, corrected, inspired, rebuked, sanctified, and sustained. That is why we are never spiritually at risk in following prophetic counsel.

...President Russell M. Nelson has testified that ‘God’s long-established pattern of teaching His children through prophets assures us that He will bless each prophet and that He will bless those who heed prophetic counsel.’ So the key is to follow the living prophet. Brothers and sisters, unlike vintage comic books and classic cars, prophetic teachings do not become more valuable with age. That is why we should not seek to use the words of past prophets to dismiss the teachings of living prophets.

...When parents ignore the counsel of the living prophet, they not only lose the promised blessings for themselves but even more tragically teach their children that what a prophet says is insignificant or that prophetic counsel can be picked through in a smorgasbord fashion without concern for the resulting spiritual malnutrition.

The words of living prophets serve as a corrective to any alleged misstatements of past Church leaders, including those in the standard works. Every one of the standard works, which were given through living prophets at one point, has undergone substantial changes.⁵³ If the Bible were prone to corruption, would

⁵³ For examples of changes to the BOM, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s book *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon* (1996). These are much more than mere grammatical, punctuational, or other syntactical changes. One such example, Mosiah 21:28, now reads that “king Mosiah had a gift from God.” Originally, it read that “king Benjamin had a gift from God.” For examples of changes to the Pearl of Great Price, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s book *Flaws in the Pearl of Great Price: A Study of Changes and Plagiarism in Joseph Smith’s Pearl of Great Price* (1991). Here are two such examples: 1) The 1851 version of the Pearl of Great Price spoke of the angel Nephi appearing to Joseph Smith. That angel was later changed to Moroni. 2) The original Articles of Faith had four ordinances whereby individuals are saved, but the 1902 version changed these to simply being the “first principles and ordinances.”

not other LDS Scriptures be as well? Of course, all Scripture would be, at least in principle, subject to updating. Similarly, dead prophets are subject to updating by living prophets.

It should be noted, however, that the description of “living prophets” is not precise enough. A better description for LDS as to what counts as Scripture and/or doctrine would be what the living prophets are *currently* teaching. This is because a living prophet may have words in the past that are contrary to what he is currently teaching. He is a prophet and, as such, he is the fallible tool the Lord uses in the current moment to lead the Church. The prophet is how the Lord reveals further light. The prophet may be thick-headed and use his agency in ways that are not open to the light *the Lord may choose to reveal* in a particular situation. If the Lord is not revealing any light on a particular matter, then a prophet is still presumably using his capacities to do the best he can. Be that as it may, *he can still get things wrong, even claiming he has received a revelation when in fact the Lord gave none*. This is what Apostle Bruce R. McConkie (1978) said concerning his sudden and radical change in accepting the revelation:

[P]eople write me letters and say, ‘You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?’ And all I can say to that is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.

We get our truth and light line upon line and precept upon precept (2 Ne. 28:30; Isa. 28:9-10; D&C 98:11-12; 128:21). We have now added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter anymore.

It is noteworthy that many times Christian apologists think that if a particular LDS prophet makes any sort of statement, then that statement must be considered as the word of God, binding on the whole LDS Church, unless it is obviously intended otherwise. So, for example, even if it can be demonstrated that Joseph Smith believed and taught that men lived on the moon and they dressed like Quakers (Witte, s.a.:11-3), this is not a sufficient reason to dismiss him from being accepted as a prophet of the Lord. Similarly, and more relevant to the topic of this current study, just because David O. McKay’s 1947 statement claimed that he knew of no other scriptural basis for the priesthood ban other than the one verse in the Book of Abraham (Lund, 1967:91), it does not follow that McKay was claiming to have spoken for God on this matter. No LDS recognizes McKay’s statement as the word of God. A prophet’s

statements—whether from a biblical prophet or an LDS prophet—are not necessarily Scripture and may, indeed, err.

It should be obvious that when the prophet Samuel thought that surely Eliab, son of Jesse, was the Lord's anointed to be king of Israel, Samuel was wrong; Eliab's youngest brother David was to be anointed (see 1 Sam 16:6-7). Or suppose one were to have asked a biblical prophet who was going to win the upcoming Gladiator games and the prophet claimed a certain individual would win but that individual ended up dying in the games, would that prophet no longer be considered a prophet of God? Not necessarily. Joseph Smith (1978:5:265) put it this way: "[A] prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such." Mormons are correct to assume that prophets are entitled to non-inspired opinions which may end up being wrong. In this sense, Reeve (2023:120) is correct when he claims that "God refuses to violate our agency, even that of prophets". For LDS, that also applies even when their prophets speak in their official capacity. They may have claimed they have never erred here, but it seems clear that LDS still hold they *can* still err... even when they claim they have never erred. Thus, what is offered as Scripture is understood as only provisional Scripture until the living and current prophet says otherwise.

Consequently, there is an important distinction to be made between *prophetic statements* on the one hand and *statements by individuals who are prophets* on the other hand. The former are considered inspired or the words of the Lord as far as they know or *prima facie* (allowing for the possibility that they may turn out not to be); whereas the latter are ambiguous. The statements may or may not be inspired or may even not be the words of the Lord. The degree of certainty is far less with the latter.

Whether it is right or whether it turns out later to be wrong, Mormons are still instructed to follow the prophet's "inspired teachings completely. We should not choose to follow part of his inspired counsel and discard that which is unpleasant or difficult. ... 'For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith' (D&C 21:4-5)" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:42). To be concerned about what counts as an "inspired" teaching misses the point that all their teaching is inspired, even if it turns out later to have been wrong.

For LDS, prophetic inspiration does not entail infallibility. In other words, God may move upon an individual and not guarantee a divinely intended outcome. If a particular statement turns out to err, then LDS merely assume the fault lies not with God but with humans using their own agency. This is why the BOM said in Mormon 8:12 that there are "imperfections" in the record and verse 17 said that "if there be faults they be the faults of a man" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:482).⁵⁴ God's

⁵⁴ Cf. 1 Nephi 19:6; Mormon 9:32-4; Ether 12:23-5.

work brought the BOM out of the earth and presented it to the world (Mormon 8:16). Thus, technically, the BOM as a whole should be considered, at best, the “inspired” *work* of God, not necessarily the *word* of God, contrary to the 8th Article of Faith, which states that “we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013e:60). Given that God does not err, but the BOM contains errors, the best that may truly be said from an LDS perspective is that it *contains* many prophetic statements or the word of God, but it also contains errant statements made by fallible men who are still legitimate prophets of God. Thus, the BOM cannot be the infallible word of God completely.

2.8. Concluding thoughts

To summarize, this chapter sketches the history (context) and theology (content) of perennial racism within Mormonism. While Joseph Smith Jr allowed Black African men to be ordained throughout his tenure, his successor, Brigham Young, instituted a public policy that denied the priesthood to Black men of African descent. This chapter answers the basic question: What is the context (history) and content (theology) of perennial racism within Mormonism? In that regard, this chapter explores this question by discussing six aspects: first, the origin of racism within Mormonism’s history; second, the factors behind their racial policies; third, their institutionalized racist policies within their priesthood and temple framework; fourth, attempts to fight perennial racism; fifth, the dissembling pattern within their perennial racism; and sixth, recent attempts to excuse their perennial racism.

In the discussion of the history (context) and theology (content) of perennial racism within Mormonism, many aspects become clear, but three stand out. Firstly, the LDS Church originally had no official racial barriers. However, not long after the Church was founded, its survival became a central issue. That meant accommodating itself to the broader American racist culture. This was manifested in condoning slavery and prohibiting interracial marriage. This set the stage for an official priesthood ban for only those of Black African ancestry. With this, Blacks were unable to participate in the temple, which became the ultimate and necessary means for exaltation.

Secondly, this segregation also affected and naturally enforced segregation in the day-to-day life for Black members outside the temple. For instance, it manifested itself in reinforced interracial marriage

prohibitions. Whites who were temple worthy naturally would not want to take a chance on someone who could keep them from exaltation.

Thirdly, for at least 126 years (from 1852 to 1978), there was institutionalized racism against Black members, which included the Brethren teaching and defending their position from the pulpit and in print. From 1978 onwards, Blacks are no longer *officially* seen as second-class citizens. However, a certain worldview persists. Not all racial matters were immediately eradicated once and for all. As the next chapters will demonstrate, racism persists on some levels and continues to be rooted out. Despite recent LDS apologetic and peacemaking attempts, they should not be trusted for giving divine direction. Even the Church itself has admitted that their past revelators have made racist statements, and thus, the issue remains perennial.

Given that the LDS Church has promoted, at least apparently, an inconsistent message concerning their revelations being fallible and infallible, it seems that they have, nonetheless, used this ambiguity to their advantage, and have given themselves an escape hatch when anything turns out to be patently wrong. Never mind that the Church has been wrong on this subject for most of its history. Never mind that their leaders dissembled in their attempts to sustain their Church when the culture shifted to equality. “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain,” the Wizard of Oz tells Dorothy and her friends. Inconsistent prophetic messages are simply the mistake of fallible men leading Christ’s Church. Is it not the important thing to give them unquestioning obedience since this surely is the Lord’s Church? Trust that God has always been working through these men and communicating with them even if they are not able to keep in step with his will.

Again, do the leaders deserve trust? When racial discrimination turns out to be clearly wrong and when the leaders continue to lie in order to sustain it, can the Mormon prophets be the Lord’s prophets at all? If this point does not count as an objective test to demonstrate the Church’s falsity, then no test will.

Then again, perhaps an objective test is really beside the point. The following chapters will address this issue in more detail.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANALYSIS OF LDS SCRIPTURES, TEACHINGS, AND TESTIMONIES REGARDING PERENNIAL RACISM WITHIN MORMONISM

3.1. Introduction

LDS affirm that all their Scriptures are the word of God regardless of apparent racist passages. Most Mormons maintain that even if a divinely sanctioned racism is apparent in their Scriptures, this racism would not be real. It would be considered manufactured through improper exercise of free agency. Because of this conclusion, new interpretations of Latter-day Scriptures have arisen. The basic question this chapter attempts to answer is: Is the LDS affirmation of their Scriptures as God's word proper if they turn out to teach a divine sanction of racism? It is always an option, after all, for more liberal Mormons to affirm that a divine sanction of racism is indeed taught in the Scriptures, but these Mormons simply claim that their Scriptures are wrong on this point. So, again, should they be considered God's word?

In that regard, this chapter surveys and analyzes the LDS Scriptures, teachings, and testimonies regarding perennial racism. The chapter also analyzes how LDS affirm and maintain their Scriptures via their testimonies despite the problematic nature of apparent divinely sanctioned racism contained in them. The careful examination of new interpretations for Latter-day Scriptures and prophets is demonstrably inadequate and improper. It is clear from LDS testimonies that the LDS Church naively accepts the LDS Scriptures and their prophets even though they were and are still racially wrong. As for teachings by the prophets outside of their Scriptures, these may or may not be affirmed by the current Brethren. LDS are encouraged to always trust and follow the current Brethren. However, this chapter demonstrates that the current Brethren are not always right.

3.2. Understanding LDS scriptures

For LDS, the term “Scriptures” refers to divinely inspired writings. For LDS, that includes much more than simply the books of the Bible. The Church accepts four books of Scripture that are known as their “standard works”: Bible, BOM, D&C, and PGP. In addition, the Church teaches that there are many more Scriptures outside of this category.

After the following survey of LDS Scriptures, the chapter will present the primary passages in the standard works that have been used to justify racism in the Church. These passages will be listed here in the order in which they appear within the LDS standard works. After each passage, there will be a brief explanation why it *prima facie* implies a divine sanction of racism. Afterwards, there will be a demonstration how LDS and others have understood and continue to defend these passages *sans* a divine sanction of racism. The evaluation of each defense of the standard works will include a grammatical-historical exegetical approach to attempt to uncover the text’s original intent.

3.2.1. A survey of LDS scriptures

3.2.1.1. The Bible

The LDS Church publishes their own King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. The LDS 8th Article of Faith says, “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013e:60) Of course certain terms and phrases do not translate well into other languages. An Italian friend of the researcher once gave up on telling a joke from the friend’s native country, because it made no sense in English. It was “lost in translation.” So, translation problems

are a default position of Mormons when it comes to biblical passages that apparently do not line up with Mormonism. This is why the early LDS Apostle Orson Pratt said, “Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of the translation, and who in his right mind, could for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original?” (Pratt, 1851:47).

In addition to translation problems, Mormons are taught in the BOM that through the “great and abominable church”, “many plain and precious things [were] taken away from” the Bible (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:25). This assumption of the corruption of the Bible is also a typical naturalistic one outside the LDS Church. Ever since the age of the Enlightenment, western society has continued to swallow naturalism in various ways. The *phone game* is a common analogy for the naturalistic assumption about how the Bible was passed onto this present day. Here is how this would hypothetically play out in the researcher’s family. The researcher whispers something to Tara; Tara whispers it to Madi; Madi whispers it to Jameson; Jameson whispers it to Felicity; Felicity whispers it to Charis; Charis whispers it to Zoe; and when Zoe finally gets it back to the researcher, of course it is going to be quite distorted from what he originally whispered in Tara’s ear. Everyone’s capacity to transmit the content they receive is fallible and different from everyone else’s. So even giving “the great and abominable church” the most favorable benefit of the doubt in all its transmissions of the Bible over thousands of years, it is easy to see why naturalists assume there is no reason to trust that there are faithful versions today.

The transmission problem as well as translation problems explain the need for further revelation in LDS thinking. A scholarly pursuit of textual criticism to reconstruct what was most likely given through the biblical prophets and apostles is not necessary when God himself corrects the problems through latter-day revelation. He did that by not only giving further books of Scripture and the words of living prophets, but he also updated the Bible to make it more trustworthy.

However, if that is the case, why did God wait so long? Why did he allow all these people through the ages to be deceived by an untrustworthy text when he could have easily fixed problems as they sprung up? The LDS Church gives the story of a total apostasy in which the authority of God was taken from the earth, and so the Bible lingered in its errors until there was a miraculous intervention with prophets. Yet this still does not answer the problem. Why did God wait so long (about 1,800 years) to bring back revelators? The only answer seems to be that God has his own timetable and that is all that may be said about it.

The other problem is: Why assume a telephone game when it comes to the Bible rather than God giving scholars the good sense to piece together what the authors most likely said? Why is supernatural revelation called for rather than simply using and comparing early manuscripts?

Further, whose supernatural revelation should be accepted? Why not, for instance, should we not accept the NWT (the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation)?

3.2.1.2. A restored Bible

The answer for Mormons is that God supernaturally updated the Bible through the prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. God gave him the "Inspired Version" or the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible. The foreword to this work originally published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now named Community of Christ [COC]) says that Smith "completed the initial revision" of the Bible in 1833 (Smith Jr, 1976:1). However, the foreword also claims, "The original manuscripts indicate additional editing by Joseph Smith after that date. It was his intention to have the printing done, as evidenced from statements he made as late as 1841 concerning the urgency of this project (D&C 107:28). However, it was not published during his lifetime."⁵⁵ The COC sanctions and has published the Inspired Version since 1867. The LDS Church sanctions and publishes the KJV, adds footnotes in it from the JST, and in the back of their Bibles has extended excerpts from the JST too lengthy for footnotes (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:797-813).

The late LDS Apostle Bruce McConkie (1979:384) stated the following concerning the Inspired Version: "In all cases where major changes were made, the student with *spiritual insight* can see the hand of the Lord manifest; the marvelous flood of light and knowledge revealed through the Inspired Version of the Bible is one of the great evidences of the divine mission of Joseph Smith." (emphasis added) McConkie (1984) also said,

The Joseph Smith Translation, or Inspired Version, is a thousand times over the best Bible now existing on earth. It contains all that the King James Version does, plus pages of additions and corrections and an occasional deletion. It was made by the spirit of revelation, and the changes and

⁵⁵ The D&C mentioned in this quote is the COC's and it differs substantially from the one used by LDS. Unless otherwise noted, the latter D&C will be used. For the former, see The Church of the Latter Day Saints (1835).

additions are the equivalent of the revealed word in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Given these glowing statements of the JST, one would think that the other LDS Apostle, Orson Pratt, would have known better when he claimed in 1851 that no one can know whether any verse of the Bible has escaped pollution. Joseph Smith supposedly knew. Further, LDS scholar Robert J. Matthews (1983) implied that others knew as well. He said,

The Doctrine and Covenants, as well as the Prophet's journal, letters, Church periodicals, the JST manuscript, and other documentary sources, demonstrate that the translation was frequently discussed in the early Church and that several attempts were made by the Prophet to publish his work in its entirety, although such a publication was never realized in his lifetime.

After Smith's death, his wife Emma retained the JST manuscripts. She lent them out to Dr John Milton Bernhisel, who copied his own manuscript and made several of the corrections in his own Bible in 1845 (Matthews, 1971:255-7). He remained LDS and later went to live with the Mormons in Utah in 1848, but in 1866 Emma gave the JST manuscripts over to her son Joseph Smith III (founding prophet/president of the COC).

3.2.1.3. The Book of Mormon

The BOM is allegedly a record of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas who migrated from the Middle East. Mormons are not sure exactly where in the Americas these events took place. LDS author and tour guide to supposed BOM lands in Mesoamerica, Dr John Lewis Lund (2007:9), has admitted, "Many members of the Church are confused about the disagreements over where the primary events of the Book of Mormon took place. This confusion is the result of well-meaning members of the Church advocating three different geographical places. Adding to the confusion are contradictory statements made by some Church leaders." The Church has admitted that there are "theories" of events occurring in North, South, and Central America, but all the Church is committed to is that these events primarily happened in the Americas (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, s.a.c). The events center on Jesus Christ's appearance to these inhabitants not long after his resurrection, and his instructions to them concerning his gospel.

The bulk of the BOM has to do with the family line of Lehi, who migrated to the Americas from Jerusalem around 600 BC.⁵⁶ Lehi's family broke off into two tribes—the Nephites and the Lamanites. The former were generally the righteous branch, whereas the latter were the unrighteous branch. They went through periods of peace and war, but the BOM ends with the last Nephite named Moroni burying these historical records inscribed on gold plates in the Hill Cumorah in 421 AD.

Just over 1,400 years later (September 21, 1823), that same Moroni appeared as an angel to Joseph Smith, Jr and revealed to him the precise location of these gold plates not far from his home in Manchester, New York. Though they were written in an unknown language called Reformed Egyptian, God miraculously provided Smith with the means of translating them into English in 1830. They were translated “by the gift and power of God” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b: Introduction).

3.2.1.4. The Doctrine and Covenants

The D&C was originally published in 1835. The Scripture was the later version of the 1833 Book of Commandments. The doctrine part in the title of the D&C was contained in a series of lectures called *The Lectures on Faith* and was removed in 1921.⁵⁷ The covenants part of the D&C is a collection of revelations almost entirely through Joseph Smith, Jr. These covenants, nonetheless, contain doctrinal aspects as well.

The latest revelation contained within the D&C is pertinent to this study. It is called “Official Declaration 2”. This concerns the late Prophet/President Spencer W. Kimball's pronouncement based on his alleged revelation on June 8, 1978, which allowed all worthy men of any race to obtain the privileges and blessings of LDS priesthood. At this point in the entire history of the LDS Church, the only race prohibited from LDS priesthood was the Black race of African descent.

⁵⁶ The BOM also talks about two other migrations. An earlier family migration left around the time of the Tower of Babel and were known as the Jaredites. A later migration left after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, and these people came from Mulek, who the BOM claims was the only surviving son of the last Old Testament king of Israel—Zedekiah.

⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, this change was due to the Church's evolving theology. For example, *The Lectures on Faith* taught that within the Godhead there are only two personages—the Father and the Son—by whom all things were made and the mind shared between them is the Holy Spirit. The Father is “a personage of spirit” and the Son is “a personage of tabernacle” (The Church of the Latter Day Saints, 1835:52-8). However, the current LDS D&C teaches: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:265).

3.2.1.5. The Pearl of Great Price

The PGP is a collection of works originally published in early Church periodicals but was eventually canonized in 1880. It begins with the Book of Moses (which includes some selections from the Genesis Inspired Version), followed by the Book of Abraham, a selection of the Matthew Inspired Version, Joseph Smith—History (a brief selection of the early formation of the restored Church), and The Articles of Faith.

3.2.1.6. Official correlated publications

In addition to issuing the standard works, the Church also publishes a book called *Gospel Principles*, and it says that “the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture [*sic*] to us. Their words come to us through conferences, the *Liahona* or *Ensign* magazine, and instructions to local priesthood leaders” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:45-8). Thus, LDS hold that God continues to speak to his church through these means.

3.2.1.7. Patriarchal blessings

Further, patriarchs in the LDS Church also function to bring “the word of the Lord personally to us” (77). The patriarchs give blessings to individual church members so that they may know their talents, abilities, and callings. These blessings are considered inspired direction from the Lord, and they are written out. As such, they function as a Scripture of sorts.

3.2.1.8. Testimonies

An individual may receive an answer straight from the Lord. This is a confirmation that fills one’s heart with “joy and satisfaction” (Merrill, 1941:51) in following everything the president of the Church advises. This is not written and is thus not considered Scripture *per se*. However, it is still considered a personal revelation from the Lord, so it may be thought of as God’s writing upon one’s heart.

The BOM gives a promise in Moroni 10:3-5. It said,

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of

men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:529)

Mormons also know from Smith's First Vision story that he read James 1:5 and asked God to reveal what church he was to join. In James 1:5, God promises to give wisdom liberally to all who ask Him. Just as Smith asked about a particular item of knowledge and received his answer, everyone else may do the same with regards to the BOM and the latter-day revelation of Mormonism in general. When God confirms the truth, then he has testified. This is what LDS refer to as their "testimony", "witness of the Spirit", or "personal revelation".

What exactly does this look like? LDS often speak of such an experience as a "burning in the bosom". An example of this is found in D&C 9:8-9. There Smith gave a revelation to Oliver Cowdery concerning his role in recording the former's translation work. Cowdery was told,

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:16)

This is commonly how LDS measure the rightness and wrongness of spiritual matters, including more generally the truthfulness of their church and (more specifically relevant to this thesis) matters concerning racism. LDS Apostle Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2006) says,

When we talk about testimony, we refer to *feelings* of our heart and mind rather than an accumulation of logical, sterile facts. It is a gift of the Spirit, a witness from the Holy Ghost that certain concepts are true. ...These promptings of the Spirit, rather than human logic alone, will be the true foundation upon which our testimony will be built.” (emphasis added)

Uchtdorf goes on to say that one of the pieces for gaining a testimony is to “[h]ave questions; study them out; search in the scriptures [*sic*] for answers”. Therefore, study and logic have a proper place in LDS epistemology. Yet they are not sufficient—they are the occasion by which a sincere seeker may receive certain feelings, which LDS merely assume is a testimony of the Holy Ghost to the prophetic status of Joseph Smith.

What happens when study and logic contradict the feelings of the Spirit? Then-Apostle Dallin H. Oaks (1997) has said:

If we teach in the manner the Lord has prescribed, he can send his Spirit to edify and enlighten those whom we teach. If we do not teach in his way—if we teach according to our own knowledge and according to our own intellect, and if we slavishly tie ourselves to our own preparation or to someone else’s wisdom or text—our teaching ‘is not of God.’

...If we rely on debate techniques or sales methods or group psychology, we are preaching the gospel in some other way, and it is not of God.

We must teach the gospel by the Spirit, and we must testify to the truth. When this is done, the Holy Spirit will testify to the sincere seeker that the things that have been said are true.

Intellectual things—reason and logic—can prepare the way, and they can help us in our preparation. But if we are tied to them instead of to the Spirit of the Lord, we are not teaching the gospel in the Lord’s way.

Thus, an individual’s understanding must yield to the feelings of the Spirit. Preparation is normal. However, Oaks was clear that there needs to be a willingness “to be led by the Spirit and [to be] willing to put aside all our preparation and follow the Spirit’s direction.” Under the section “Revelation Is [*sic*] a Feeling,” Oaks went on to describe

a feeling of comfort and serenity. That is the witness many receive. That is the way revelation works.

Truly, the still, small voice is just that, 'still' and 'small.'

'The language of peace, as spoken by the Lord, embraces a sense of quiet confidence, comfort, and warmth. It is gentle and calm, amiable and sweet; it is temperate and kind; it is orderly and identified by happiness, joy, and feelings of love.'

The presentation of this testimony (what Mormons call "bearing one's testimony") becomes a form of not just self-hypnosis, but of evangelism or proselytization. Former Mormon, Dr Corey Miller (2017:30-1) described this event:

Emotively expressed in a series of 'I know' statements as the LDS person looks his audience in the eye with what appears to be and often is utter sincerity. It is as though the more expressively a person tells it the more true it becomes, for all hearers involved. Mormons are under the impression that repeating the testimony will make everyone ecstatic with desire to join the church. Students will confound the wise and the learned. Testimony will trump any and all arguments that can ever be forged against it. It is that powerful.

The now defunct LDS website Mormon.org used to have a vivid example of all this. In a video entitled "Jennifer Remembers Her Decision of Faith," a Mormon woman shared her testimony. She said,

It was not a decision I made with my head... This was the first time in my life that I was making the biggest decision I had ever made based on something that I didn't feel that I could or had to prove on paper. I knew that God told me this was true. I knew that I'd read the Book of Mormon and that I had prayed and that I had done everything the missionaries told me to do. And that I, without any question, knew that this 14-year-old boy in New York, Joseph Smith, was actually a prophet of God. And that the Book of Mormon was actually the word of God. And that the truth had been restored. And I couldn't prove it, I didn't... I didn't have any proof and... and so it wasn't anything that was logical. To ask me what I was thinking, *I wasn't thinking. I was feeling.* And I hadn't ever really been in touch with my emotions before and didn't realize how much more powerful that would be. (Kunkle, 2012:47)⁵⁸

⁵⁸ This presentation may also be found on YouTube (MormonInfoDotOrg, 2018c).

Thinking and study are only the occasions by which knowledge results via a personal revelation or testimony from God to those who are prayerfully sincere. One may think and study, and due to one's imperfection, arrive at either wrong conclusions or no answers. However, because the individual sincerely prays and asks for God's confirmation, the promise from Moroni 10:3-5 stands. One will get an answer from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. That answer is ultimately understood through the feelings He gives. This is why the researcher has been told by many Mormons that if he sincerely wants the truth, then he is not to worry about what this or that scholar has to say on a matter. One just needs to go straight to the Source of truth, who will directly and liberally give the correct answer after sincerely reading, studying, pondering the BOM, and then sincerely praying about it.

This is why President Dallin H. Oaks said that “research is not the answer” (Swensen, 2019) to spouses who are wondering how to best research and respond to matters of Church history and doctrine—research which has led other spouses to church inactivity. However, Swensen said that Oaks did not completely rule out asking questions and doing research, since he went on to say that the Church has given

answers to many familiar questions through its Gospel Topics Essays found at [lds.org](https://www.lds.org).

‘But the best answer to any question that threatens faith is to work to increase faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,’ ... ‘Conversion to the Lord precedes conversion to the Church. And conversion to the Lord comes through prayer and [scriptural] study [in contrast to scholarly study or research provided in the Gospel Topics Essays] and service, furthered by loving patience on the part of spouse and other concerned family members.’

President Oaks also offered suggestions on teaching children. Answering a child's difficult question is one of the most important things a parent can do.

‘When you are asked a difficult question, such as a puzzler about Church history, be honest and, if necessary, say you don't know. But then be sure to say what you do know: “I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God”.’

This version of knowledge is not in principle objectively evidential or determined outside one's inner life or perception. It is a private matter. Some may call this “blind faith,” but it depends on how one understands the description. If it means there is absolutely nothing to it, much like “a leap of faith” is commonly understood, then it is not an accurate description, since the knowledge is based on something.

However, if the description is taken the same way that love is often referred to as “blind,” then this would be more accurate. It is based on subjective “evidence” and no outside influences matter at this point. It is being “hooked on a feeling” as B.J. Thomas used to sing.

Interestingly, however, the *LDS Bible Dictionary* says for the term “faith”, “Miracles do not produce faith but strong faith is developed by obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ; in other words, faith comes by righteousness, although miracles often confirm one’s faith.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013d[appendix]:669) The BOM in Ether 12:12 and 18 also teaches, “For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them. ...And neither at any time hath any wrought miracles until after their faith; wherefore they first believed in the Son of God.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:509-10) D&C 63:9 says, “But, behold, faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:115) The BOM in Alma 32:16-22 claims that miracles produce a compulsion to have a more objective knowledge, and this knowledge is inferior to a strong personal faith. Thus, according to Mormonism, even certain reasons like miracles have nothing to do with producing faith or “strong faith”.

That faith must be present prior to receiving a personal revelation from God as Moroni 10:3-4 say. LDS assume that faith must be the cause of a personal revelation miracle and this type of miracle is not through objective evidence as a public miracle would be.⁵⁹ This personal revelation is a matter of feelings, understood to be the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). LDS claim to have this fruit. However, so do other religious groups who claim to follow Christ. Yet, in no way can they all be right, for they all contradict each other on very fundamental points about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the gospel, their Scriptures, etc. For Mormons, however, this is irrelevant. When God reveals the knowledge of Mormonism, all objective knowledge—defeaters or evidence to the contrary—be damned. The subjective means trumps the objective means.

⁵⁹ This explains how the LDS Church defines knowledge in the Moroni passage. They have stated, “In order to know that the Book of Mormon is true, a person must read, ponder, and pray about it. The honest seeker of truth will soon come to *feel* that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004:38, emphasis added)

Thus, this study for many Mormons is a mere intellectual exercise. Yes, it may be interesting for some Mormons, and some may engage in what may be called negative apologetics for their faith. They simply play defense and take on the challenges to their faith, but they leave faith conversions to a personal experience with the LDS God. For most LDS, though, this research makes no difference to their faith. Their faith has given way to knowledge revealed personally to them by God.

3.2.2. *Problematic racial biblical passages*

The Bible itself has cases of *prima facie* racism and those cases have been and continue to be used to promote racism both within the historic Christian Church as well as within the LDS Church.⁶⁰

Fortunately, the vast majority in these churches no longer see the Bible as a means of promoting the divine sanction of racism or for endorsing perennial racism. At least in the defense of the biblical passages, both LDS and non-LDS perspectives will be incorporated. Today, these biblical defenses are an area in which much of Mormonism agrees with historic Christianity. In fact, both may utilize much of the apologetic grammatical-historical work from the other, since both have concluded that the Bible does not teach that God promotes racism.⁶¹

3.2.2.1. Curses of Cain and Ham

Genesis 4:10-5 says,

10 The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'

13 Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear.

⁶⁰ President Oaks mentions a number of these in his address on "Racism and Other Challenges" (2020).

⁶¹ Of course, fundamentalist Mormon groups continue to believe these passages support a divine sanction of racism.

14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'

15 But the Lord said to him, 'Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.'
Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.

This passage has been used to demonstrate that Cain's curse and mark was black skin, and he perpetuated the Black race. The curse and mark were conflated. Denison (2020) points out that given Cain's curse, "This claim was used to justify the enslavement of Africans." Not only enslavement, but the text was used to deny Blacks the Mormon priesthood. Bontrager says, "The LDS Church used the mention of God putting a mark on Cain in Genesis 4 as referring to dark skin and that this interpretation of Genesis 4 actually prevented Blacks from holding in the priesthood in the LDS Church until that policy was changed in the late 1970s." (TheologyMom, 2019a)

In addition, Genesis 9:21-7 says,

21 When [Noah] drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.

22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.

23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

24 When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him,

25 he said, 'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.'

26 He also said, 'Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem.

27 May God extend Japheth's territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.'

This passage has been also used to justify the slavery of the Black race, and not just by Mormons. Dr Tony Evans (2010) shares how as a teen, his White minister as well as *The Old Scofield Reference Study Bible* used this passage to get Blacks to “endure the humiliation of American racism”. Since Ham was thought to be the father of Blacks, working to overcome their slavery was tantamount to going against biblical prophecy. Bontrager says about this passage, “This statement was repeatedly used by the founders of SBTS [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary] to argue that it was the destiny of Canaan and his descendants to serve as the slaves of Noah’s other sons and that Black slavery was the outcome of this” (TheologyMom, 2019a). Dr Louis Talbot (1938:72-9) argued the plausibility of some Canaanites fleeing to Africa and becoming the subjugated Black race referred to in this passage after Israel’s conquest. Talbot (77) said that “it is not by chance that the Negro has been ‘a servant of servants.’ This fact is but prophecy fulfilled”.⁶²

The JST is even more explicit. It says in Genesis 9:30 that “Canaan shall be his servant, and a veil of darkness shall cover him, that he shall be known among all men” (Smith, 1976:29).

In assessing this common understanding of the curses of Cain and Ham, Reeve (2023:49-51) claims,

The use of supposed racial curses, whether from the Bible, book of Abraham, or Book of Mormon, were grounded in misunderstandings of what curses actually meant to the people who wrote them into scripture [*sic*].

...The curses of Cain and Ham are two notable examples. The Old Testament uses ‘curses’ in both experiences to signal that Ham and Cain had violated accepted norms. ...Importantly, however, neither curse was racial...

Yet, those who read those two Old Testament curses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sometimes added their own interpretations to them and turned them into racial curses designed to justify discrimination in their day.⁶³

⁶² Talbot (1938:79-80) nonetheless, spoke about the Christian responsibility “to treat them as human beings for whom Christ died. ...Our God is ‘no respecter of persons’ (Acts 10:34). ...We should treat them as fellow-Christians, or as those who need our Savior, and love their souls for Christ’s sake”.

⁶³ Reeve (2023:120) notes that LDS apostle Orson Pratt rejected Brigham Young’s racism and claimed that there is no proof tying African ancestry to Cain.

In the text concerning Cain, the closest reference to an unfavorable skin color is when Genesis 4:15 speaks of a mark that was placed on Cain. However, Denison (2020) argues that the term for “mark” here is the Hebrew term “ot” and not once in the eighty times it is used in the Old Testament does it refer to skin color. It simply refers to some sign or a token. Even LDS apologist Mike Parker (2015) admits that the mark was not part of Cain’s curse; the mark was part of his protection. Parker also says that the passage specifically describes Cain’s curse as the earth not yielding its strength to him, and he would be a fugitive and a vagabond. Parker adds that there is nothing in the passage that indicates this mark of protection was passed on to Cain’s posterity. Parker finally claims that whether referring to the curse or the mark, nothing in the passage mentions anything about priesthood. Thus, this passage has no basis for a priesthood ban.

As for the Ham passage, it contains absolutely nothing that would indicate that Cain’s curse continued with Canaan marrying a descendant of Cain. Parker admits that this passage also does not mention anything about a change of skin color or a priesthood ban, and notes that Ham’s son Canaan was cursed, and he was the forefather of the Canaanites whom the Israelites wiped out and subjugated when they crossed the Jordan river. These Canaanites were completely different from the Blacks who inhabited Africa via Ham’s other sons. Evans (2010) says that “the descendants of Ham's other sons-[*sic*]Cush, Mizraim, and Put-[*sic*]have continued to this day as national peoples in Ethiopia (Cush), Egypt (Mizraim), and Libya (Put)”. Bontrager states that the idea that Noah’s prophecy in Genesis 9:26 refers to the subjugation of the Canaanites to the Shemites (Israelites) has become the majority view among Old Testament scholars and “has nothing to do with the origin of the races” (TheologyMom, 2019b).

Talbot’s view, on the other hand, focused on the origins of the races. His contention that some of the Canaanites fled to Africa and became the cursed Black race is pure speculation. It is not pure speculation that some Canaanites fled to Africa under Joshua’s conquest. However, it is pure speculation to assume that Noah’s prophecy explains why the Canaanites became the Black race even though other races in Africa are not as black. Talbot seemed to imply, even if unintentionally, that the darker blackness of a particular ethnicity was a resultant divine punishment correlated with servitude. However, the Scripture never mentioned this, and thus it is an argument from silence.

As for the JST adding “a veil of darkness shall cover him, that he shall be known among all men”, this does not necessarily mean a literal skin pigmentation rather than a figurative reference to relative depravity. More importantly, regardless of the proper interpretation here, there is absolutely no reason to think this statement belongs in the original text of the Old Testament. There is no Hebrew manuscript,

Church father citing, or early lectionary that states what the JST has here. As such, there are reasons to think this JST statement does not belong in the Bible.

3.2.2.2. Slavery

Exodus 21:2-11 says,

2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.

3 If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.

4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.

5 But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,'

6 then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

7 If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as male servants do.

8 If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her.

9 If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

10 If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.

11 If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

This passage describes the way Hebrew slavery had to function. Slavery was a system of indentured servitude to pay off debts. There were also allowances for manumission of these slaves. Its temporary nature became more complicated with marriage, so certain provisions applied. However, these hired servants had to work no longer than six years or until the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:39-42).

In contrast to these temporary workers, Leviticus 25:44-6 says,

44 ‘Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves.

45 You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property.

46 You can bequeath them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.

These types of slaves were permanent and came from outside of the house of Israel. It is this type of slavery that appears most racist because it subjects other races or treats them as inferior.

The New Testament also allows for the practice of slavery. Ephesians 6:5 says, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.” So, since slavery is in the Bible, does that mean that God endorses the practice and does it entail that God sanctions racism?

As for assessing the common understanding of slavery in Scripture, Holzapfel *et al.* (2009:66) state:

Slavery was ubiquitous in antiquity, and the institution and practice of slavery lies beneath the surface of almost every book in the Bible. Slaves were considered property and therefore had few legal rights. Laws governing slaves and slavery are found in many law collections, including the Laws of Hammurabi. Few questioned the institution, simply accepting that people could be bought and sold just as animals and personal possessions were. Unlike American slavery, ancient slavery was not based on ethnicity. People became slaves by capture in war (Num 31:25-37), by default on debt (Exod 22:2), and sale by family members (2 Kgs 4:1). Some people voluntarily sold themselves as slaves either to get out of debt or to find security (Lev 25:39; Deut 15:16-17).

... Women and children were most vulnerable to abuse in this system, including physical and sexual abuse; therefore, most of the laws in the Bible regulating slavery attempt to humanely define the relationship between slaves and masters (Lev 25:43-55; Deut 15:12-18). People could be freed from slavery, and there is evidence that this practice of manumission was common. Built into the law of Moses was a system that freed Israelite slaves every seven years (Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12, 18), although it is doubtful this ideal was regularly practiced by all Israelites. Some Israelite prophets and kings questioned debt slavery and attempted to end its practice (Jer 34:8-22; cf. Exod 21; Lev 25; Deut 15).

Thus, biblical slavery in the Old World was not a matter of racism as the antebellum American slavery system was. So even though slavery may have been an inhumane system in many ways, it did not necessarily entail racism. That is, slavery may exist without any racism.

Another noteworthy point was that Exodus 21:16 strictly prohibited kidnapping under penalty of death. The slave trade in America relied on West Africans kidnapping other Africans and having Europeans transporting them (Library of Congress, s.a.). Thus, the Leviticus 25 passage dealing with permanent foreign slaves ought to be understood in this context as well as the context of several chapters earlier. Leviticus 19:33–4 says, “When a foreigner [*ger*] resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

Further, God regulated the case law pertaining to slavery so that slaves were not abused as they were in other ancient societies. He never demanded that this flawed and messy institution be the way all societies did their business. In many ways slavery is like divorce. Neither are ideal, but God still allowed them with certain regulations for a best-case scenario under the circumstances. In Matthew 19, Jesus tells the Pharisees, who ask if it is lawful to divorce for any reason, that what God has joined together, let no one separate (v. 6). Malachi 2:16 had God saying that he hates divorce. The Pharisees ask Jesus why Moses allowed it, and Jesus respond that it was because of the hardness of their hearts even though it was not what God intended from the beginning (Matt 19:8).

Within this system of slavery, servants were to honor God and obey their masters as well as others in authority despite their conditions (cf. Rom 13:1-5). On the other hand, Paul tells the Corinthians that slaves should gain their freedom if possible and that one should not become a slave of humans, but of God (1 Cor 7:21-4). Copan (2011:134) concludes a chapter on slavery by saying,

Though Israel's laws on servitude weren't the moral ideal, they show far greater moral sensitivity than other ancient Near Eastern texts. In doing so, they point us back to God's ideal at the beginning: all humans are God's image-bearers (Gen. 1:26-27). Contrary to what Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris say, servanthood in Israel can hardly be called 'a warrant for trafficking in humans' or a means of treating people 'like farm equipment.' No, God's ultimate intention wasn't for humans to 'keep slaves.' In fact, the Genesis ideal is that all humans are equal and that they do not work for another; rather, each person under God's care is to be his own 'master,' sitting under his own vine and fig tree (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zech. 3:10).

3.2.2.3. Genocide

Joshua 10:40 says, "So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded." Genocide of a particular race seems to be racist by definition. Even more troubling, God was the one who sanctioned this. How is this not racism?

As with the slavery issue, genocide does not entail racism. God destroyed all the people groups outside of Noah's family in the flood... including Noah's extended family. That does not entail that Noah's immediate family was inherently better than all other groups of people. Genesis 1:26 states that all humanity is made in God's image. However, Genesis 6:8-9 declares that Noah found favor with God because Noah was righteous and faithfully walked with God. Humans are judged on their character, an internal quality, and not their outward race. Humanity was bent on evil, but one man humbled himself before God and that is why God wanted to start over with just Noah (vv. 5-8).

If this evil was true for generally all humanity, then obviously it can be true for a subsection of humanity like the Canaanites. God only promised to never wipe all humanity out by a flood again (Gen 9:11). However, it is still the Almighty's prerogative to wipe humanity out via other means or to wipe a subsection of them out, including an individual. In any case, it is humans who look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). A similar thing may be said regarding saving Rahab when the Israelites went into the land. The point was not hatred of Rahab's race. The point was who wanted to obey YHWH.

Having said that, Faithful Answers, Informed Response (FAIR) (s.a.b) quotes Paul Copan (and Matthew Flannagan) extensively on this issue to argue that there was no literal genocide of the Canaanites

anyway.⁶⁴ Scholarly consensus calls this “hagiographic hyperbole”. Both the Bible as well as other ancient Near East sources demonstrate this point. Pankratz (2020:137) says that

taken literally, the biblical book of Joshua states that Israel conquered the whole of the land of Canaan, yet the book of Judges reports that much of the land was unconquered. Further, the text of Joshua mentions specific cities where he supposedly left no survivors (Josh. 10:38–40). However, Judges 1:9–11 reports that Canaanites remained in those same cities at the opening of the time of the Judges. Considerations such as these make it likely that these “extermination” texts should not be taken literally and that they are better seen as stylistic and hyperbolic.

Copan (2011:165, 173) concludes, “So we should put to rest this idea of divinely inspired racism or ethnocentrism. ...God was concerned with *sin*, not *ethnicity*. ...[D]estroying Canaanite religion was more important than destroying Canaanite people.”

3.2.2.4. Interracial marriage

In reference to the other nations the Lord would drive out before Israel, Deuteronomy 7:3 says, “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons”. Is this treating other nations (races) as too inferior to marry?

The ban against interracial marriage follows from what was previously said regarding alleged genocide. Israel was instructed to drive out the nations, and not to intermarry with them (Deut 7:1-3). Israel was warned that if they did intermarry, their hearts would be turned away from God (v. 4). FAIR (s.a.a) says,

The majority of the texts of the Bible for which racism is claimed have to do with interracial marriage. These passages are concerned not about different *races* but rather the worship of different *gods*. All idolatry and worshipping of other gods was strictly forbidden to all Israelites on the penalty of death (Exodus 20:5 [*sic*] 22:20). This is the focus of every passage dealing with intermarriage.

It is now easier to see how the Israelites understood what God commanded them. FAIR continues: “The prohibition was not because Israel was racist. Rather, it was that Israel had to have the Moabites and/or Ammonites accept Yahweh and be genuine worshippers of him.” Ruth is a prime example. She converts,

⁶⁴ For more on genocide and the Bible, see Copan and Flannagan (2014).

and says to Naomi, the mother of Ruth's late husband, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." (Ruth 1:16) Naomi is an Israelite, and Ruth is a Moabite who is welcomed into Jewish community.⁶⁵

3.2.2.5. Only Levites were to perform temple work

Numbers 1:48-50 says,

48 The Lord had said to Moses:

49 'You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites.

50 Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the covenant law—over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it.

The Lord excluded one group of people from other groups to receive this holy blessing. Is this not favoritism?

In response, Reeve (2023:116) says,

In the Old Testament, the tribe of Levi was given priesthood authority while members of other tribes were not. The reasoning then offered is that this was a divinely sanctioned pattern that God follows in withholding priesthood from people, first from the non-Levite tribes anciently and then people of African descent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

...Even if we confine ourselves to the tribe of Levi's role in the tabernacle, I still believe it is a poor analogy. None of the other tribes were prevented from partaking of the ordinances necessary for their salvation in the way that the temple and priesthood restrictions prevented people of Black African descent from so doing. ...As historian Ardis Parshall succinctly put it, 'Restricting priesthood to one narrow part of the faithful is not the same as restricting priesthood *from* one narrow part of the faithful.

⁶⁵ For more on Ruth's interracial marriage, see Copan (2011:164-5).

Discrimination is a fact of life and there is no getting away from it. To claim otherwise is, logically, discrimination. It would be discriminating against the view that there is discrimination which is unavoidable. Further, not just anyone is allowed to freely utilize a particular home, for example. Thus, God discriminating in favor of groups for a particular role does not entail racism (Levites and the rest of the tribes of Israel were the same race) and cursing for everyone else, especially when everyone else is blessed by those performing that role.

Another LDS historian, Jonathan Stapley (2021), apparently agrees when he says, “Within the isolated case of the Ancient Temple at Jerusalem, while a handful of priests were chosen and consecrated from a specific family, no believers were restricted from participating in temple worship or receiving the blessings of the temple.” God knows why he chose one tribe for their priestly roles. That does not entail that somehow the other tribes were inferior any more than God being the head of Christ (1 Cor 11:3) entails that Christ is inferior to God (cf. Jn 5:18-23; Phil 2:5-10). Only one high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies in the temple. Even though God discriminated against any other Levite performing this task, this does not entail that God was racist against all other Levites. Similarly, just because one tribe of Israel had a special function in the temple rituals does not entail that God was racist against all other tribes of Israel. They all participated to some extent in the temple, and result was for the atonement of all Israel.

3.2.2.6. Bypassing the Gentiles

Matthew 10:5-6 says, “These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.’” This seems to indicate that non-Jewish peoples were treated in an inferior way. These people were not to receive the gospel.

However, Reeve (2023:115) says,

Some people have suggested that the Lord spreads the gospel in stages according to a divine timeline: First to the Jews and then to the Gentiles as a parallel to first white people and then to Black people. This justification ignores the fact that Jesus did not confine His ministry to the Jews.

Just because Jesus did not want the Gentiles to be preached to at a particular time or extended times, for whatever reasons perhaps known only to him (e.g., Matt 10:5-6), does not entail that the Gentiles were

never to be preached to and that Jesus was actually a racist who never wanted them in his kingdom. Solomon says that God made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl 3:11). Paul tells the Church that everything must be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). Jesus also tells certain people not to tell anyone about who he is or what he has done, but in other situations, he tells them to tell everyone (e.g., Matt 8:1-4; 16:20; Mark 5:18-20).

Prior to his resurrection, Jesus's calling was to the house of Israel. Matthew 15:24 says that Jesus was sent *only* to the house of Israel. Whatever Jesus meant by this statement, it was obviously not meant that he could not minister to Gentiles on occasion. For example, in Matthew 8, he had already healed a centurion's servant. Stapley (2021) says, "During his ministry, Jesus goes out of his way to teach the Samaritans for multiple days, and even ministers [*sic*] to a gentile [*sic*]. It appears that he was not constrained by any particular restrictions."

3.2.2.7. Calling the Gentile woman a dog

Matthew 15:24-8 says,

24 He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.'

25 The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said.

26 He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

27 'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

28 Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Here Jesus indirectly refers to this woman and her daughter as "dogs." It appears that it was not due to anything they had done; it was simply a matter of their race. They were Gentiles.

However, recall the context of this statement. It comes just five chapters after Jesus tells the disciples to not preach to the Gentiles. The late Apostle Talmage (1961:355-6) nicely explained the situation:

The words, harsh as they may sound to us, were understood by her in the spirit of the Lord's intent. The original term here translated 'dogs' connoted, as the narrative shows, not the vagrant and despised curs elsewhere spoken of in the Bible as typical of a degraded state, or of positive badness, but literally the 'little dogs' or domestic pets, such as were allowed in the house and under the table. Certainly the woman took no offense at the comparison, and found therein no objectionable epithet. Instantly she adopted the analogy, and applied it in combined argument and supplication. 'Truth Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table'; or, in the words of Mark's version: 'Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.' Her prayer was immediately granted; for Jesus said unto her, 'O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.' Mark emphasizes the special recognition of her final plea, and adds: 'And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.' The woman's commendable persistency was based on the faith that overcomes apparent obstacles and endures even under discouragement. Her case reminds one of the lesson taught by the Lord on another occasion through the story of the importunate widow.

Many have queried as to why Jesus delayed the blessing. We may not be able to fathom His purposes; but we see that, by the course He adopted, the woman's faith was demonstrated and the disciples were instructed. Jesus impressed upon her that she was not of the chosen people, to whom He had been sent; but His words prefigured the giving of the gospel to all, both Jew and Gentile: 'Let the children *first* be filled' He had said. The resurrected Christ was to be made known to every nation; but His personal ministry as a mortal, as also that of the apostles while He was with them in the flesh, was directed to the house of Israel.

Jesus was obviously testing the faith of this woman by telling her that Israel was whom he came for and by utilizing the common understanding of Gentiles at the time. This 1st century culture was obviously not as easily offended as 21st century politically correct American culture is. Jesus never thought she was something less than the image of God. Jesus did not forget that he had previously helped a Gentile's servant, so there was no inherent reason for not helping another hurting Gentile. So, it is more likely that Jesus was not using the term "dogs" to insult the woman. Rather, he used the term to emphasize her place or order in receiving God's blessings and to see if that would deter her or not. Ogden and Skinner (2006:219) say Jesus's description was "a hyperbolic statement of the priority of gospel dissemination and of the care with which the mysteries of the kingdom should be reserved for the spiritually attuned. Figuratively, then, dogs represent unworthy persons, or as in a later case, persons who are not matured or prepared for sacred things" (cf. Matt 7:6).

3.2.2.8. Calling all Cretans degenerates

Paul said, “One of Crete's own prophets has said it: 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.’” (Titus 1:12) That is quite a stereotype. Were Cretans inherently inferior in Paul’s mind?

There is nothing inherently racist about calling a group of people out for a moral failing. It was not as if Paul thought these people were irredeemable. In fact, Paul told Titus to rebuke them sharply so that they would repent (Titus 1:13-6). It is precisely because they were in the image of God that Paul believed they could repent.

Further, it is difficult to call this racist when Paul is quoting one of their own. Epimenides himself was a Cretan prophet, poet, and religious reformer. Certainly, one of their own would be an authority on their own character. Hiebert (1978:433) says,

The quotation establishes the picture without exposing Paul to the charge of being anti-Cretan. It put the Cretans on the horns of a dilemma. They must either admit the truthfulness of his verdict concerning them or deny the charge and brand their own prophet a liar.

The triple charge—‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons’—is supported by other extrabiblical witnesses. The pagan moralists classified Cretans with Cilicians and Cappadocians as preeminent in wickedness.

Keep in mind that it was Paul who said, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). The famous British actor and comedian, John Cleese, said that “people should not be afraid to publicly state that some cultures are superior to others. ... ‘Race doesn’t matter, but culture does’” (Saavedra, 2024). So just because the Cretan culture was inferior does not entail that the Cretan race was. They were still made in the image of God just as much as every other human. James 3:9 affirms that men are still in that image even after the fall.

3.2.3. Problematic racial Book of Mormon passages

Despite the Jaredites who came from around the area and time of the Tower of Babel (Ether 1), the central peoples of the BOM are Israelites who came to inhabit the Americas around 600 BC. None of these people are of African ancestry. Nonetheless, these Israelites’ story still has implications for racism. Is the

story basically one of White supremacy? Fortunately, these days, the only Mormon groups which affirm White supremacy are fundamentalist, and they are a tiny minority of Mormons.

3.2.3.1. The curse of dark skin and blessing of white skin

In 2 Nephi 5, the prophet Nephi says concerning his brethren the Lamanites:

20 Wherefore, the word of the Lord was fulfilled which he spake unto me, saying that: Inasmuch as they will not hearken unto thy words they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord. And behold, they were cut off from his presence.

21 And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.

22 And thus saith the Lord God: I will cause that they shall be loathsome unto thy people, save they shall repent of their iniquities.

23 And cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing. And the Lord spake it, and it was done.

24 And because of their cursing which was upon them they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey.

25 And the Lord God said unto me: They shall be a scourge unto thy seed, to stir them up in remembrance of me; and inasmuch as they will not remember me, and hearken unto my words, they shall scourge them even unto destruction. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:66-7)

This passage indicates that the Lamanites became a people cursed with dark skin due to their iniquity. The point is that their skin color would repulse God's whiter-skinned people, the Nephites, so that they would not reproduce with them. Their bad character would not be sufficient for that end. Nonetheless, whoever engaged in reproducing with them would bring this same curse upon the offspring.

In 2 Nephi 30:6, the original 1830 version reads:

And then shall they rejoice: for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and a delightsome people. (Smith, Jr., 1830:117)

This passage indicates that at some point the people, Jews and Gentiles, will convert and become a white people. However, what the term “white” means here has been debated. Does “white” refer to skin pigmentation or to an inward quality of purity? Scales of darkness falling from their eyes would seem to indicate an internal matter.

In Jacob 3, Jacob, the brother of Nephi, scolds his fellow Nephites who have been behaving wickedly. He says,

5 Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, are more righteous than you; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.

6 And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, because of this observance, in keeping this commandment, the Lord God will not destroy them, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.

7 Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you is because of the iniquity of their fathers; wherefore, how much better are you than they, in the sight of your great Creator?

8 O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God.

9 Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, which is the word of God, that ye revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins; neither shall ye revile against them because of their filthiness; but ye shall remember your own filthiness, and remember that their filthiness came because of their fathers. (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:122-3)

Here the Nephites are told that if they do not repent, their skin will be darker than the Lamanites at the judgment. The former are told to stop reviling against the latter due to their skins. The more important matter here is that the latter are more righteous than the former because the latter are keeping the law of monogamy and the former are not. The Lamanites’s filthiness is a matter of their genes—“because of their fathers”—whereas the former’s filthiness is a matter of their own current disobedience. Here character takes priority over external appearance.

Alma was “the chief judge and the governor of the people of Nephi” (212), and he described the Lamanites as follows in Alma 3:

6 And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion against their brethren, who consisted of Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, and Sam, who were just and holy men.

7 And their brethren sought to destroy them, therefore they were cursed; and the Lord God set a mark upon them, yea, upon Laman and Lemuel, and also the sons of Ishmael, and Ishmaelitish women.

8 And this was done that their seed might be distinguished from the seed of their brethren, that thereby the Lord God might preserve his people, that they might not mix and believe in incorrect traditions which would prove their destruction.

9 And it came to pass that whosoever did mingle his seed with that of the Lamanites did bring the same curse upon his seed.

10 Therefore, whosoever suffered himself to be led away by the Lamanites was called under that head, and there was a mark set upon him.

11 And it came to pass that whosoever would not believe in the tradition of the Lamanites, but believed those records which were brought out of the land of Jerusalem, and also in the tradition of their fathers, which were correct, who believed in the commandments of God and kept them, were called the Nephites, or the people of Nephi, from that time forth—

12 And it is they who have kept the records which are true of their people, and also of the people of the Lamanites.

...15 I will set a mark upon him that mingleth his seed with thy brethren, that they may be cursed also. (214)

This passage indicates that the skin of darkness was considered a curse. As in the 2 Nephi passage above, this Alma passage also indicates that God cursed them with dark skin to segregate them and keep them from contaminating his chosen, white-skinned people with heresy. Anyone, including the Nephites, who rebelled and joined with the Lamanites, bore this mark placed. Further, those who reproduced with this dark-skinned tribe brought the curse upon their resultant seed as well as themselves. However, those who rejected the Lamanite tradition and followed the Nephites were called Nephites.

Verses 11-12 also indicates that the terms “Nephite” and “Lamanite” had more to do with beliefs than ancestry. One’s beliefs determined what camp one belonged to.

Nephi, the son of Helaman, says in 3 Nephi 2,

12 Therefore, all the Lamanites who had become converted unto the Lord did unite with their brethren, the Nephites...

14 And it came to pass that those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites;

15 And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites;

16 And their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair, and they were numbered among the Nephites, and were called Nephites. And thus ended the thirteenth year. (410)

This passage tells of an occurrence in which the Lamanites repented and united with the Nephites, and as in the above Alma 3 passage, the former became known as the latter. Furthermore, even the curse of dark skin was taken from them, and they became white-skinned. In this case, it was appropriate for them to forego their segregation, and now it was perfectly acceptable for them to marry their fellow Nephites.

One last passage to consider is 3 Nephi 19. After Jesus had risen, he ministered to the multitude in the New World and ascended into heaven. The Nephite disciples began praying fervently. Jesus appeared to them again and then went off by himself to pray. When he returned and found the disciples continuing to pray to him, he revealed himself to them in extreme whiteness. Verse 25 said that “the light of his countenance did shine upon them, and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus; and behold the whiteness thereof did exceed all the whiteness, yea, even there could be nothing upon earth so white as the whiteness thereof”. He went off by himself again to pray, and he thanked the Father for purifying the disciples (verse 28). He returned to the disciples and found them praying again and they had become white like he was (verse 30).

How have LDS attempted to make sense of these passages *sans* a divine endorsement of racism?⁶⁶ The first way has been to maintain a literal racial reading of these texts. Reeve (2015:55-6) says,

The Book of Mormon described the Lamanite fall from grace in ways that Mormons read and understood racially. ... These were verses that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latter-day Saints tended to read literally. Some Mormons believed that the conversion and uplift of Native American peoples would be marked by a transformation into ‘a white and a delightsome people,’ an actual change in skin color and progression toward whiteness.

⁶⁶ For a huge survey of options in defending the BOM *sans* divine racism, see Belnap (2021:195-370).

Most Mormons still fall into this category.⁶⁷

The darkness here is not to be understood as a reference to African Americans, but to Native Americans who were originally from Israel. Their skin pigmentation was often referred to as red—not black, but certainly “darker than white” (56). For a more literal “skin of blackness” that was used for African Blacks, “Mormons turned to the Bible, not the Book of Mormon” (56) to justify their views.⁶⁸ In addition, they also turned to the Book of Moses as will be seen shortly.

None other than Joseph Smith seemed to understand skin pigmentation literally in the BOM, and not merely an opinion but as a revelation “by the Spirit of the Almighty” (1978:2:79). This revelation given to Smith concerned some bones found along the Illinois river in 1834. These bones were of

a white Lamanite, a large, thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known from the Hill Cumorah, or eastern sea to the Rocky mountains. The curse was taken from Zelp, or at least in part—one of his thigh bones was broken by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle, years before his death. He was killed in battle by the arrow found among his ribs, during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and Nephites (2:79-80).⁶⁹

Zelph’s whiteness is in the immediate context of physical characteristics, and these distinctly precede his only evident spiritual characteristic, namely, being “a man of God.” If “white” merely meant righteous, there would be no need then to state, “and a man of God”, which would have been redundant. The statement, “The curse was taken from Zelp” is, in and of itself, ambiguous. However, the passage clarifies that this was part of other physical characteristics. That curse seems tied to Zelph’s whiteness; otherwise, what was the point in bringing it up? Lamanites were typically dark-skinned in the BOM, yet as in 3 Nephi 2:14-6, this one had his curse removed and became physically white. That is why it was interesting that he was a white Lamanite.

⁶⁷ LDS anthropologist Brant Gardner (s.a.) claims that “it is much easier to compile a list of writers who take the phrase [‘skin of blackness’] literally than of those who suggest an alternate reading.”

⁶⁸ The late BYU Religion professor Rodney Turner (1989:138) said, “The expression ‘skin of blackness’ does not necessarily, or even probably, mean a black skin, only a darker skin. ...I believe that ‘blackness’ and ‘black’ are not synonyms and that the Lamanite mark was only a relatively darker pigmentation, not a literally black skin. By the same token, a “white” skin is only relatively so (Jacob 3:8).”

⁶⁹ Note that this seems to indicate Smith held to the North America view of the BOM.

The late BYU Religion professor Rodney Turner (1989:133), historian Richard Bushman (2006:97-9), the late Mormon scholar and apologist John A. Tvedtnes (2003), LDS religious educator Jared Halverson (see Unshaken, 2020), Mormon scholars Stokes (2018:278-89),⁷⁰ Gerrit M. Steenblik (2021), Clifford P. Jones (2023), and Ethan Sproat (2015:139-40) are among those who have promoted a literal reading of skin in the BOM. Though they all take the term “skin” to be literal, there is no uniformity as to what type of skins is being referred to.

In the case of Sproat, though, the skin is animal skin or clothing—it was a loin cloth that was representative of a false religious system.

In response, there does not seem to be much evidence against the literal skin racial view. Sproat also fails to demonstrate how his view is “more internally coherent” (165). There is, though, a rather internally coherent story, though coherency alone is not sufficient for truth. A conman may have a coherent story, and any good defense attorney has an alternative theory, but what is needed is a story that best fits all the known facts.

Sproat is correct that the verse prior to Alma 3:6 speaks of the skins that served as loin cloths. This is really the crux of his whole argument. Is it more likely that verses 5 and 6 refer to the same skins or is it more likely that they refer to different skins? Given that Sproat has created a novel theory in contrast to the overwhelming majority, the onus seems to be on him to prove his case rather than suggesting a merely possible alternative. Is it *possible* that verse 5 and 6 refer to the same type of skin? Sproat does a great job in showing it is. He also agrees that the verses may refer to different skins. So, what evidence is there that they are the same skins, except that one verse follows the other? The evidence Sproat provides falls short of demanding they are the same.

Admittedly, there is nothing that *demand*s they are different even though some basic suggestions seem to lean that way. The Lamanites were naked minus this loin cloth and all the armory and weaponry covering them (Alma 3:5). The Lord set a mark of dark skin on the Lamanites (Alma 3:6-7 with 2 Nephi 5:21). How likely is it that the Lord set this cursed mark of symbolically dark animal skins around the Lamanites’ loins? Perhaps, as Nibley suggests with the Amlicites marking themselves, the Lord sovereignly marked them due to their rebellion. Thus, perhaps the Lord sovereignly placed this mark on

⁷⁰ At the time of his 2018 article, Stokes was a member of the COC, and in their BOM, 2 Nephi 4:35 was used in the title of his article. Unless otherwise noted, the more popular LDS BOM will be cited.

the Lamanites by allowing them to wear these marks around their waists. This is similar language to God sovereignly choosing his elect by the elect choosing him.

Verses 7-9 say that this mark was put on the Lamanites to keep the Nephites from wanting to reproduce with them—so, the Lamanites’ skin would keep the righteous tribe from believing “incorrect traditions” and interbreeding. How could this symbolically dark loin cloth keep the Nephites from wanting to reproduce with the Lamanites? How likely is it that this simple, symbolically dark loin cloth would be sufficient to keep the righteous tribe from reproducing with the unrighteous tribe? If the Nephite men ever came across a gorgeous Lamanite who was naked except for a dark loin cloth, would that work like a chastity belt? It seems highly unlikely. If not, would the cloth then serve as a simple reminder to the Nephites that these naked Lamanites were off limits? If so, then it seems rather unnecessary and not very practical in meeting the Lord’s stated goal. Throughout history, it seems as if a human’s natural, literal skin pigmentation has, in general, worked better to naturally attract as well as to deter.

Further, a symbolically dark loin cloth does not make much sense given 3 Nephi 2:14-6. When the Lamanites joined with the Nephites, the former lost their curse, and their skin became symbolically white. How did that work? Sproat posits that they lost one dark loin cloth and gained the proper white attire of the Nephites. If so, then verse 16 is out of place. It says that “their young men and their daughters became exceedingly fair”. The prior two verses talk of all the Lamanites who united with the Nephites but then verse 16 focuses on the young men and women. What do they have that everyone else does not? The straightforward answer seems to be youthful, external beauty. However, their garments are no more beautiful than everyone else’s. So, what specifically makes these young men and women fair when they converted? The passage seems more likely to be saying, in racial categories, that they go from a natural state of repulsive literal black skin to a natural state of pleasing literal white skin.

This point carries over to the 2 Nephi 5:21 passage where it says, “they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome” and became like “flint”. It does not say that they had fair and delightsome white skins or that their garments were white and beautiful. If it did, then it may have been construed as the socially acceptable color of their garments. The people themselves were the initial direct subjects, not what they were wearing. Unattractive people do not become “exceedingly fair and delightsome” simply when they wear beautiful or culturally prescribed clothing.

The last part of the verse declares, “God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” to make them unenticing. This last part taken by itself is admittedly ambiguous given Sproat’s concern with the Alma 3

passage. However, the first part of the verse makes it clear that the people were white and fair until they got this skin. They were not beautiful because they were wearing white; rather, God caused them to have a skin of blackness because, being white, they were beautiful. The inward conversion made a change in the outward appearance. Sproat agrees, but his explanation is even more external—namely, culturally appropriate clothing—and thus, an even more complicated theory which contravenes Occam’s Razor. Nonetheless, this explanation does not fit the context.

Clifford P. Jones (2023) offers a possibility that the dark mark was a tattoo prohibited by Leviticus 19:28. Jones (172) says, “It was a sacrilegious, permanent mark made by incision (an ancient tattoo) which, under the law of Moses, represented rebellion against God and his laws.”

In response, we can note that the Old Testament never decreed a punishment for an individual who got a tattoo. It was a sin, but like other sins, it could be forgiven. Nothing in the Old Testament states that this marking makes one an outcast.

Further, the BOM certainly talks about the Amlicites and Lamanites marking themselves, but again, that was a red mark on their foreheads (e.g., Alma 3:4). This is quite different from their skins being dark or as 2 Nephi 5:21’s “like unto flint” and “a skin of blackness” placed on them for their rebellion (Alma 3:6). There is an obvious difference between marks on one’s skin and one’s skin color. The curse of dark skin resulted from their disobedience, which includes tattooing their foreheads red.

Again, the Alma passage claims that this was done to distinguish one seed from another so that there would be segregation and no mixing of traditions (3:8). If any Nephite had sex with a Lamanite, the former would get a mark and so would the resultant seed (Alma 3:9, 15). Jones suggests that instead of receiving a natural dark skin color, the offender and the resultant seed would simply get a dark red tattoo on his forehead. That was sufficient for warning the Nephites to stay away. However, what has served better to keep people adhering to their own kind—tattoos or natural skin color? The latter seems the obvious choice. Nonetheless, this does not in and of itself prove the tattoo theory to be wrong.

However, the tattoo hypothesis does not fit with the Jacob passage. Why would Jacob have to scold the Nephites for looking down on the Lamanites for their filthy tattoos while arguing that “all flesh... is as precious in [God’s] sight as the other” (Jacob 2:21)? It seems Jacob would have scolded the Nephites simply because their sins were worse and would not have had to say that everyone is as precious as the other. Further, why would Jacob claim that the Lamanites will have whiter tattoos than the Nephites at the

judgment (3:8)? The former's filthiness was passed on by their fathers whereas the latter's filthiness was due to their own individual rebellion (3:9). It is as if Jacob is saying, "Give the Lamanites a break! They were born with that filthy dark skin." However, if tattoos were the context, then Jacob would have acknowledged that the Lamanites' filthiness also came from their own rebellion, and he would also be claiming that the Nephites would get a filthy tattoo at the judgment.

Finally, the context to Jacob is 2 Nephi 26:33 (the book prior to Jacob) that claims that God offers his goodness to both "black and white". Given these considerations, a better explanation is that the Nephites were looking down on the Lamanites because they had a God-given curse of natural black skin.

Jones (231-4) seems to understand the implications of the 2 Nephi 26:33 passage and revises that understanding further than almost all Mormons. He says that

these ancient words teach this essential message about God's perfect love from outside the modern social construct of race. The historical evidence indicates that these words were written, and should be read, from the cultural perspective of ancient Israel. This passage never mentions skin. Similar passages in the Bible use the word black to symbolically designate mournful, afflicted people and use the word white to symbolically designate the pure and joyful. These ancient meanings certainly don't pop into the minds of modern readers, but they fit perfectly in this ancient passage.

At various times in our lives, each of us might be white (pure and joyful due to repentance and righteousness) or black (afflicted and mournful due to sin). With these meanings, the words black and white jointly cover all of God's children (232).

Jones begs the question that the BOM applies to a particular ancient context to get away from the straightforward contextual reading that almost everyone else sees. This is classic modern revisionism. Jones has dug himself deeper in the hole, for he claims that 2 Nephi 26:33 is actually saying that even the pure, joyful, and righteous are invited to come unto God to experience his goodness. However, the call in this passage is for everyone to repent, and obviously the righteous have no reason to repent. The immediate context is that "all men" (vv. 24, 27, 30), "men" (v. 32) or "the children of men" (v. 33) should repent and find goodness in the Lord.

The passage is somewhat reminiscent of Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Notice that "black and white"

is absent from this passage. The “black and white” phraseology in reference to the races is absent from the whole Bible. Instead, it is a modern colloquialism. Nonetheless, this passage as well as the 2 Nephi passage are calling all peoples grouped by *external* appearance to perform an internal action, namely, to repent and find equality in God.

Steenblik (2021) offers another unique recent possibility to explain the “skin of blackness”. He claims that modern science has revealed “an ancient Maya body paint tradition, chiefly for warfare, hunting, and nocturnal raiding” (167). This Meso-American body paint was charcoal-based, and this certainly would entail marking the skin in the way the BOM describes in Alma 3:4-6 (172).

Yet the language of verse 6 indicates that this dark skin mark was not set upon the Lamanites by themselves. It was a punishment for sin. There is no indication that they punished themselves by marking themselves. However, as stated before, perhaps God sovereignly placed this body paint on them by allowing them to exercise their rebellion (cf. Alma 3:19). If that is the case, there is quite a difference between why the Mayans did this (i.e., warfare, raiding, hunting) and what the Lamanites applied to themselves as a punishment to keep God’s holy people from reproducing with them. Similarity does not prove identity.

Further, Mayan body paint is specific to males doing the things males would do. Nothing indicates that Mayan women would wear this. Yet Alma 3:7 makes clear that this mark was also applied to women.

Even if Mayans are somehow related to Lamanites (Mayans predated Lamanites by about 1,500 years and only Mormons think the latter existed anyway), it is difficult to see how body paint could repel God’s holy people from reproducing with these wicked people. Again, the idea seems petty and too externally focused. Their wickedness should have been a sufficient deterrent.

Stokes (2018) argues that the English term *skin* may have its origin in the Aramaic term ‘*ûr*, which *may* have simply meant *scales* or *husks*. Stokes’s alternative offered a “midrashic” interpretation of “skin of blackness” (2 Nephi 5:21). By “midrashic”, he means “not only of philologically explaining difficult passages in Scripture, but of also providing insights into any possible hidden or deeper meanings to the text” (280). This approach goes well beyond a grammatical-historical approach, but he still arrives at a different literal meaning. According to this midrashic reading, the term *skin* in these problematic BOM passages may be better understood as “scales of blackness”, which would fit with what Nephi later says of the Lamanites: “their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes” (2 Nephi 30:6). It also fits with

the Lamanites’ “skins” being changed in 3 Nephi 2:15. Given Stokes’s reading, the BOM turns out to be “a racially *unproblematic* text” (284).

In response, this midrashic reading seems to be based on an argument from silence. No non-Mormon scholars think that prior to Columbus any ancient Hebrew or Aramaic was spoken or written in the New World. And while the earliest *known* language of the BOM is English, which was published in 1830, Mormons simply aver that since the BOM has similarities to the Old Testament, the former must have been originally written in the same languages as the Bible even if finally put in Reformed Egyptian.

Besides, Stokes’ argument is anachronistic. Jews began using Aramaic only from the 3rd century BC (The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Also, when the BOM narrative opens, Nephi declares that his record is composed in the language of his father Lehi (and therefore, we deduce, in Hebrew), who was a Jew around the time of the first year of King Zedekiah in 600 BC, as well as the language of the Egyptians (1 Nephi 1:2-4).

It is also important to consider how the BOM was translated into English. According to David Whitmer (1887:12), who was one of the three witnesses to the BOM,

I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.

The characters I speak of are the engravings on the golden plates from which the book was translated. They were engraved thereon by the hand of a holy prophet of God whose name was Mormon, who lived upon this land four hundred years after Christ. Mormon’s son, Moroni, after witnessing the destruction of his brethren, the Nephites, who were a white race—they being destroyed by the Lamanites (Indians)—deposited the golden plates in the ground, according to a command of God. An angel of the Lord directed Brother Joseph to them. The language of the Nephites is called the reformed Egyptian language.

D&C 135:3 said that the BOM was “translated by the gift and power of God”. Smith could not understand any ancient language, and so one would think that God would use the correct word for *skin* rather than an Aramaic term that could mean *scales*. He did, after all, use both words to refer to two different things. Specifically, in the BOM, there is a causal relationship between the two terms, not an identity relationship. If A causes B, it does not follow that A is B. When fire causes smoke, it does not follow that fire is smoke. So, when scales of darkness fell from their eyes (A) causing their skins to become white (B), it does not at all follow that scales of darkness falling (A) is getting white skin (B).

Then again, Stokes’ thesis never explains how the Lamanites got white *skin* in 3 Nephi 2:14-6. Here the term certainly does not mean internal scales of understanding. White implies no scales. There is no term like *scales of whiteness*, otherwise why did the Lord translate the passage “their skin became white”? If Stokes is to be believed, the passage means that their scales became white. But that makes no sense; it should instead say that their understanding became white.

Finally, even if Stokes’ language is somehow accepted, how it is understood appears to depend on how one looks at it. Stokes imposes his scales of understanding on the text as a possibility. However, he admits that the temporal skin of the Lamanites interpretation also fits. If that is the case, if the context of dark skin is a curse and white skin a blessing that unites, and if the Lord himself translated the word with *skin* and not with *scales of understanding*, then it remains unclear how the possible Aramaic term ‘*ûr*’ gets the BOM out of its racial problems. If Stokes claims that ‘*ûr*—*skin*—’ is temporary but the skin on the muscles is permanent, then why think this? Scales of understanding are certainly temporary, but so was the BOM use of skins—both on earth (3 Nephi 2:14-6) and at the judgment (Jacob 3:8).

Despite all these creative interpretations on literal skin passages in the BOM, the predominant LDS understanding today continues to be racial—it refers to that which comprises the human body and thus has a natural coloring. Turner, Bushman, Halverson, and Tvedtnes take this view.

Although stating that “God is not a racist; he is no a respecter of persons” (Turner, 1989:133), Turner says,

Symbolic of the withdrawal of the Spirit from their lives, a “skin of blackness” came upon the rebellious Laman, Lemuel, their families, and those sons and daughters of Ishmael who chose to affiliate with them (2 Nephi 5:21). There can be no question but that their altered skin color was a miraculous act of God; it cannot be understood in purely metaphoric terms, nor as being nothing

more than the natural consequence of prolonged exposure to the sun. Nephi was explicit that “the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them” (2 Nephi 5:21...). The prophet Jacob later spoke of how the Nephites hated the Lamanites “because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins,” and warned the immoral Nephites that unless they repented, the Lamanites’ “skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God” (Jacob 3:5, 8). (138)

It is unclear how this is not racism even though Turner says it is not. Though he says the 2 Nephi 26:33 passage states that God treats all (“black and white”) alike in coming to him, it gives us no reason to think that this is not racist (133). Although Turner uses other Scriptures to show that God is really concerned about everyone’s righteousness, this never explains why a literal dark skin is *cursed* in the BOM.

Bushman (2006:97) admits that these problematic BOM “passages sound like the Jacksonian view of Indians common to most Americans in 1830.” However, Bushman (98) claims that in the BOM, though, “Lamanite degradation is not ingrained in their natures, ineluctably bonded to their dark skins. Their wickedness is wholly cultural and frequently reversed.” He argues that this was not “conventional American racism”. The Lamanites are often more virtuous, and they end up being the fruitful victors who destroy the Nephites. The point of the BOM is that these native Americans—both Nephites and Lamanites—are Jews and all the Gentiles are to serve them.

Bushman is correct that this is not a typical American racism. Technically, BOM “racism” seems to be an inappropriate term since the Lamanites are still Jews with simply a darker pigmentation. During the summer months, the researcher’s father always takes on a very dark complexion. That does not mean he becomes a new race every summer. Throughout the BOM, the Lamanites are continually referred to as the “brethren” of the Nephites (e.g., Alma 3:15).

Nonetheless, with reference to literal skin coloring, the BOM curses with darkness and treats whiteness as superior. Whiteness is divine whereas darkness is privation. Admittedly, those who have dark skin in the BOM are at times more righteous than those with white skin; Jacob 2-3 is a case in point. The righteous preacher/prophet to the Nephites, Samuel the Lamanite, is another case in point (cf. Helaman 13-15). This fits with what the BOM says about God wanting literally everyone to follow him. Jacob 2:21 says that God “created all flesh... one being is as precious in his sight as the other. And all flesh is of the dust; and for the selfsame end hath he created them, that they should keep his commandments and glorify him forever”.

Thus, even though God made everyone from the dust, he values each equally, and everyone may come unto him since “God is not a partial God” (Moroni 8:18). Nevertheless, this does not mean that one skin color is just as good as any other. The BOM teaches that one skin color reflects spiritual appropriateness and another inappropriateness. That inappropriateness (both “filthiness” and “curse” as Jacob 3:3, 5, 9 state) may be an individual’s doing by rebelling and/or by reproducing with those with dark skin (e.g., Alma 3:9-10, 15), or it may simply be a result of the rebellion of one’s fathers (e.g., Alma 3:6-9; Jacob 3:9). Either way, dark skin is not ideal; it is deemed negatively in the BOM.

Tvedtnes and Halverson’s main argument makes a distinction between the Lamanites’ curse and the Lamanites’ mark. Tvedtnes claims that in the BOM God never curses Lamanites with dark skin (186). The curse is distinguished from the mark in Alma 3:14. There the Lord says, “Behold, the Lamanites have I cursed, and I will set a mark on them that they and their seed may be separated from thee and thy seed.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013b:214) So the cursing happened prior to the mark of dark skin. The passage further speaks about others who intermarried with the Lamanites, as being both cursed and marked (Alma 3:15-7). The curse is being “cut off from the presence of the Lord” (2 Nephi 5:20) as well as being cut off from God’s people (i.e., the Nephites). The mark was set in place only after the curse, and the former was designed to uphold segregation so there would be no corruption in the beliefs of God’s people. Halverson (Unshaken, 2020) even says the reference in Alma 3:6, where it specifically calls the mark a curse was “perhaps out of carelessness” (14:52).

Because of this assumption that distinguishes the curse from the mark, Tvedtnes (187-8) goes on to claim that “some later Nephites considered being cut off from the presence of God as well as the mark upon the Lamanite skins to be a curse (Alma 3:6)”. Tvedtnes (188) also says, “While at least some of the Nephites disdained the Lamanites because of their skin color, the Lord was concerned about the sinful nature of the Lamanites and merely used their physical characteristics to deter the Nephites from accepting their wicked ways.” Thus, only “some later Nephites” (187) misunderstood the dark skin as a curse. Tvedtnes claims this was certainly not the Lord’s intent, since he clearly distinguished between the curse and the mark.

However, Tvedtnes and Halverson overlook the fact that Alma 3:6 clearly refers to the mark as a curse as well. That curse was not simply the way later Nephites described it. It was the way Alma, the prophet of God, described it. So yes, the curse entails segregation both from their brethren as well as, initially at least, from God, but the curse also entails having filthy dark skin. Tvedtnes, Halverson, as well as other

LDS merely beg the question that the curse must *only* be divine punishment prior to a mark. The passage never says that. This is why Tvedtnes assumes that Alma 3:6 refers to a later Nephite misunderstanding.

Alma 3:6 is either right or wrong. Alma was the one making the description. Perhaps LDS want to consider this one of the errors the BOM claims it makes in Mormon 8:12, 17, for example. If so, then they are leaning on their own understanding rather than the supposed word of God.

Further, Jacob calls the mark “their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins” (3:5) and that the darkness of their skins is “filthiness [that] came because of their fathers” (3:9). This is quite different from living a filthy lifestyle and being impure in heart. Sometimes the Lamanites lived that way, and sometimes not. In either case, they still had filthiness due to what their fathers had done. Obviously, it was passed on to them.

Even if this were not the case, the curse/mark distinction still has the mark resulting in something bad, namely, segregation. Tvedtnes and Halverson’s point is a distinction without a difference. The mark in the BOM is still something objectively undesirable. According to the BOM, the mark was a divine punishment upon the fathers that was carried out more than to the third and fourth generations (cf. Deut 5:9); it went on for many generations. How is that not a curse? Technically, yes, the mark is a symptom of a prior curse. The latter includes the former. However, neither is desirable. A cold is indistinguishable from its symptoms. A cold cannot be removed without removing its marks—fever, chills, congestion, cough, sore throat, etc. Both the cold and its symptoms are obviously afflictions, as are curses. The marks of a cold also act to segregate just as the mark of dark skin does in the BOM. There, God intended that the whole would reject the cursed, and so he gave the latter cursed marks.

Tvedtnes also argues that skin color was to be regarded as temporal and truly irrelevant in terms of God’s favor or curse. Some Nephites thought just the opposite, and Tvedtnes shows how Jacob, Nephi’s brother, chastised these Nephites for such beliefs (see Jacob 3:3-10).

However, saying that skin color is, ultimately, truly irrelevant for having God’s favor or curse, is different from saying it was temporarily a sign of cursing. Again, the message of the BOM is that dark skin is a temporary divine curse—and perhaps permanent if one does not repent (cf. Jacob 3:8). Jacob does chastise his fellow Nephites, but not merely because they think the Lamanites’ skin is a filthy curse. He chastises the former for their pride in thinking they are better than the Lamanites because they do not have their filthy skin mark *and* for thinking they do not have to obey God’s commands. Yes, the Lamanites are

“cursed with a sore cursing” (Jacob 3:3), a “filthiness and the cursing which had come upon their skins” (3:5), a filthy curse inherited from their fathers (3:9) and it still physically marked them, but in the end, it is following God’s commands that really matters. That is why the Lamanites are “not filthy like unto” the Nephites (3:3). The Nephites have the weightier filthiness. The Lamanites at that point are following more of God’s commandments and are not involved in the “grosser crimes” (2:23). Nonetheless, the BOM still seems to teach a unique version of divine racism.

Besides all the contextual problems with any literal approach to skin in the BOM, the basic problem (except for Stokes’ approach) is that God in the BOM uses an external appearance to keep his people away from the other people. This is directly contrary to what God has already declared in the Bible: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). Jesus declares that one should not judge by appearance; one must make righteous judgment (John 7:24). James 2 begins by commanding that in a church gathering no partiality is to be given to the rich, well-dressed man over the poor man. In the Bible, God never commands his people to segregate from those who wear a particular color of animal skins, even if those skins symbolize evil. That would be petty, and the focus would still be external. Biblically prescribed segregation is based on much deeper things like idolatry, witchcraft, sexual perversion, and other wickedness. This is the filthiness the God of the Bible continues to call out. In this regard, the literal BOM approaches go against what Dr Martin Luther King famously said about dreaming of a day when people would be judged by their character rather than by the color of their skin.

The second approach of the LDS to make sense of these passages is to avoid judging by appearance. This approach is through a non-racial, non-literal understanding of the term “skins”. The views of the late BYU anthropologist John L. Sorenson (1996), W. Paul Reeve (2023), the late sociologist Armand Mauss (2003), and anthropologist Brant Gardner (s.a.) will be briefly discussed and evaluated.

Sorenson (1996:90) argues that since the “skin shades of surviving peoples in Book of Mormon lands include a substantial range, from dark brown to virtual white”, the references to skin color are probably more based on their prejudicial perception than anything objective. This is like Near Easterners using the adjectives “dark” and “wild beast” of their neighbors. Sorenson says, “that this language probably should be considered a literary formula rather than an objective description”.

However, this is not a good reason to throw out the literal understanding. Sorenson confuses adjectives in reference to people with adjectives in reference to people's skin. Further, obviously today native American peoples vary in their skin color due to all the interbreeding that has transpired, but no meaning is assigned to any of these colors. In any case, there is no good reason to think that any of these natives are descendants of the supposed BOM people. That is, there is no reason to hold that Israelites were in the Western hemisphere well over a thousand years prior to Columbus. No non-Mormon anthropologist holds to that. Nonetheless, the BOM says the meaning given to skin color is not assigned by people; it is assigned by God. Thus, in the context of the BOM, no relative meaning is given to skin color.

Reeve is another who understands the human skin references in the BOM metaphorically. In reference to the Lamanites, Reeve (2023:51-2) claims,

Their relationship with God, in other words, was not based on the color of their skin, but on their devotion to Him and His commandments.

Light and dark are used metaphorically throughout scripture [*sic*] to indicate good and bad, righteousness and wickedness. It is a colorized binary that lent itself to a racialized understanding of scripture [*sic*] and a racialized understanding of who Black people are in God's family.

...Dark skin is not a curse. God does not afflict people with blackness as a consequence for sin. ...As the prophet Jacob warned in the Book of Mormon, such thinking can lead us to persecute others 'because ye suppose that ye are better than they' (Jacob 2:13). He reminded the Nephites that God 'created all flesh' and that 'one being is as precious in his sight as the other' (Jacob 2:21).

Jacob warned the Nephites that unless they repented of their pride and feelings of superiority that the Lamanites' 'skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God' (Jacob 3:8). It is a fitting metaphor designed to combat racism. God does not judge us based on skin color, but He does judge us based on how we treat each other according to the color of our skin. If we engage in racism, Jacob warns, those we 'revile' will be purer than we are on Judgment Day.

Mauss (2003:128) is another proponent of this view. He uses the example of referring to thick or thin skins. No one takes that literally; it is obviously a figure of speech.

However, thick or thin skins is one thing; cursed people that have a marker of dark skin to indicate they are a segregated people is another altogether. "Hearts" were "hardened" and darkened (2 Nephi 5:21).

That is easily understood as a metaphor. However, their skins became black, because of their hearts. Reeve correctly states that the BOM teaches that skin color does not keep one from a right relationship with God, yet he misses the point. The point of the skin color was segregation, to make the disobedient group “not enticing to my people” and “loathsome” (2 Nephi 5:21-2) to the righteous group, particularly with the mixing of their seed (2 Nephi 5:23). It was not as if God made the Nephites “loathsome” to the Lamanites and it was not as if God made the latter “loathsome” to the former simply by their wicked deeds. Instead, God used a skin color to keep the former from mixing their seed with the latter. Indeed, Lamanites who repented became known as Nephites (Alma 3:11), but unless their skin color was changed, as happened in 3 Nephi 2, any Nephite who reproduced with those of dark skin brought that same curse on the child (2 Nephi 5:23). How does the innocent child receive a metaphorical dark skin? None of this is spiritual language; it is physical or external language. Reeve clearly contradicts the plain meaning of the BOM that dark skin is a curse from God (Alma 3:6).

Further, to uphold his anti-racist view, Reeve must take the Jacob passage out of context. He is also inconsistent, since in this passage (as well as the 2 Nephi 26:33 passage) he takes the term “skin” literally. Yes, “all flesh” is precious to God, and he desires all to come unto him (Jacob 2:21; 2 Nephi 26:33). However, just because everyone is precious to God does not mean that he never punishes. The question is, did God ever punish individuals with a literal dark skin? Reeve claims God never did that, because “all flesh” (i.e., every color) is precious to him. However, the terms “all flesh” in Jacob 2 is better understood as all earthly humans who are made of the same “dust” and are created to “keep his commandments and glorify him forever” (Jacob 2:21).⁷¹ It is not skin pigmentation that is instructed to keep his commands; it is all humans. Mankind is the primary reference, not skin pigmentation. Reeve equates the “all flesh” reference here with skin pigmentation. However, given Reeve’s understanding, this same literal skin coloring is specifically mentioned in Jacob 3:5-9 and there it is identified with “the cursing” and “filthiness”.

Given the context of physical language, it is unwarranted for Reeve to assume that skin color at the judgment in Jacob 3:8 refers to relative purity. Certainly, treating others with dark skin badly here on earth is sin; treating anyone badly is sin. Thinking of oneself as better than those with dark skin is sin. Thinking of oneself as better than anyone is sin (cf. Phil 2:3). However, in the BOM, judging others *merely* based on their dark skin is judging by appearance and it is inappropriate. This is because dark-skinned people may be more righteous than those who are not (e.g., Samuel the Lamanite), but the former

⁷¹ Thus, the KJV of Jeremiah 32:27 refers to “the God of all flesh” whereas the NIV refers to “the God of all mankind”. The point does not emphasize skin colors or races, but simply all humans.

still have an inherited filthy and cursed dark skin as a marker to bar white-skinned people from wanting to mix their seed with these dark-skinned people. Some may argue that upholding this type of segregation is itself treating people badly, but that is not a consideration in the BOM.

Gardner (s.a.) gives a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that taking certain passages metaphorically makes the best sense for why visual distinctions between Nephites and Lamanites are sometimes absent when they should clearly be there due to a literal difference in skin color between the two groups. He gives an example from Alma 55:4-15, where the Nephite military commander Moroni comes up with a plan to free his captive people from the Lamanites. He searches for a descendant of Laman among his people. Gardner wonders why Moroni would have to *search* if Lamanite skin would be dark in contrast to everyone else being white. The individual would stick out like a sore thumb. Other features of the story are peculiar if skin is to be taken literally.

In response, there are a lot of unknown variables in this story. Nonetheless, there is surely nothing in this whole story that demands the Lamanites not have a literal dark skin. Other solutions may be offered.

Similarly, there are other stories in the BOM that do not add up. The story of Nephi getting plates of brass from Laban is one of those stories. The plates contained a record of Nephi's people, including the law of Moses (1 Nephi 3:12; 4:15-6). Why would the Lord command slaying a very drunk Laban to get the plates (1 Nephi 4:12)? Laban is so drunk, he falls to the ground in front of Nephi (1 Nephi 4:7). Laban is at fault for not obeying the commands of the Lord (1 Nephi 4:11), but why does the Spirit tell Nephi to contradict the commandment about not murdering?

After Nephi has cut off Laban's head, he puts on Laban's clothes and armor. Nephi goes to Laban's treasury and tells a guard in Laban's voice (note the acting skill) to come with him to get the plates and take them outside the walls of the city (1 Nephi 4:20ff.). The guard thinks Nephi is Laban but never asks him about all the blood that is all over what he is wearing. Outside the walls, they meet Nephi's brothers who at first think it is Laban coming to kill them. As with the preceding rescue story, this story takes place "by night" (1 Nephi 4:5). The cover of darkness allows for strange things in both cases.

Nonetheless, why would the Lord even bother with getting the plates when Joseph Smith never needed the gold plates to translate the BOM? Smith either required the Urim and Thummim or the stone in his hat to translate what was on the plates, so all that Nephi requires are the devices, not the plates themselves. The Church (2020) states,

Joseph Smith dictated the words of the translation to scribes, mostly Oliver Cowdery. Because Joseph was translating a completely unknown language, he needed to rely on the Lord. One way the Lord helped was to provide physical instruments to aid Joseph in translating. Witnesses said Joseph looked into the instruments and that words appeared to him in English. The translation instruments included the “interpreters” or “Urim and Thummim”—two clear stones fastened in a metal rim so that Joseph could look through them. These had been given to Joseph along with the plates. Another instrument Joseph used was a “seer stone” that he would look into, often by placing it in a hat. Joseph had found this stone earlier and had used it to find hidden or lost things. He used both the interpreters and the seer stone as he translated, always relying on the inspiration of heaven.

So, if Mormons can play the “Lord only knows” card here with this Nephi/Laban/Smith story, it can equally be played with the Laman rescue story.

Gardner goes on to cite Nephi’s prophecy in about 600 BC about his people dwindling in unbelief and then becoming “a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people” (1 Nephi 12:23). This is in reference to the Lamanites, who contended against Nephites and “did overpower” and “had overcome” them in “wars” that had “many generations pass away” (1 Nephi 12:19-21). That was not simply fulfilled in 2 Nephi 5:21, which was only around twenty years later, but also about a thousand years later when basically all the Nephites were wiped out. There is no discrepancy in time since this is what happened to everyone throughout that whole span of time—they metaphorically became dark skinned. Gardner said, “When that occurs, darkness falls—on their hearts and metaphorically on their skins. It is not a physical change and therefore does not have a specific point of inception. It is as accurate when described in 2 Nephi as it is prophetic at the end of Nephite culture.”

In response to this argument, admittedly the 1 Nephi 12 passage does not explicitly talk about external skin pigmentation. Perhaps it is implicit, but there is no way to ascertain that. However, there is no way to rule it out either. Perhaps the passage refers to both internal and external qualities. There is no problem with understanding the whole BOM talking about both internal depraved qualities and external dark skin pigmentation used as cursed markers for segregation. There is no discrepancy between the 1 Nephi 12 passage referring to the fifth century AD and the 2 Nephi 5 passage, since in both cases an internal and external darkness occurs. Yes, people go dark internally throughout the history of the BOM, but there are always relative remnants of light or righteousness. However, at the end of the BOM, when the Lamanites wipe out almost all the Nephites, the world becomes very dark—literally and metaphorically. Gardner, though, simply begs the question that it has nothing to do with literal skin darkening.

Gardner also points out that the terms “whiteness” and “blackness” have been used throughout the Bible, *even in the context of skins or faces*, and virtually no one takes these literally. Gardner offers the following examples: Lamentations 4:7-8, Joel 2:6, Nahum 2:10, Job 30:26-30, and Daniel 11:35. So since these are not taken literally, Gardner claims in a *tu quoque* that neither should it be the case in the BOM.

In response, of course those who hold to the literal racial view have room for “whiteness” as a symbol of purity and “blackness” as a symbol of impurity. Nonetheless, Gardner’s *tu quoque* is illegitimate since these biblical passages in their context do not require metaphors or figures of speech regarding skin pigmentation. The passages’ use of blackness simply conveys a withdrawal of the normal brightness or healthiness an individual, even hypothetically for a Black individual, has under certain devastating circumstances. For example, the Job 30 passage speaks of God temporarily testing Job, a righteous man, with skin sores to prove to Satan that Job would remain faithful (cf. Job 2:7-8). Further, the metaphor in Lamentations 4:7-8 is not dark skin. The metaphor is that the princes have been “exposed and burnt, *as if in a desert*” (emphasis added),⁷² *after* living in health and safety. Of course, under these conditions their skin would become literally black. However, and again, there is no divinely sanctioned racism in the Bible as there is in the BOM.

3.2.4. Problematic Pearl of Great Price passages

There are two books in the PGP that contain problematic *prima facie* racist passages, and these have been used to devalue people of Black African descent. The first is in the Book of Moses, and the second is in the Book of Abraham. In certain ways, the former seems like the BOM problematic passages, whereas the latter has had alleged implications for the priesthood ban.

3.2.4.1. The Book of Moses’ curse of the Canaanites

In Moses 7:8, 12, and 20-22, the prophet Enoch says,

8 For behold, the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people.

⁷² Dennis Monokroussous (2024a) suggested this idea.

9 And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: Look; and I looked, and I beheld the land of Sharon, and the land of Enoch, and the land of Omner, and the land of Heni, and the land of Shem, and the land of Haner, and the land of Hanannah, and all the inhabitants thereof;

10 And the Lord said unto me: Go to this people, and say unto them—Repent, lest I come out and smite them with a curse, and they die.

...12 And it came to pass that Enoch continued to call upon all the people, save it were the people of Canaan, to repent; ...

20 And it came to pass that Enoch talked with the Lord: Surely Zion shall dwell in safety forever. But the Lord said unto Enoch: Zion have I blessed, but the residue of the people have I cursed.

21 And it came to pass that the Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in process of time, was taken up into heaven. And the Lord said unto Enoch: Behold mine abode forever.

22 And Enoch also beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it was the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them.

The passage indicates that the Lord has cursed the Canaanites with black skin. The Lord also had Enoch preach to certain groups of people, but not the Canaanites. As a result, the Canaanites could not be a part of Zion. They were left on earth with the rest of the unbelievers who did not want anything to do with them.

Contrary to traditional interpretations of Moses 7 that claim the blackness of the Canaanites was a literal dark skin, LDS apologist Mike Parker (2012) says that there is no clear indication that this is the case. In a footnote, Parker harks back to Joseph Smith who in the 1840 edition changed the BOM term “white” to “pure.” Thus, the implication is that “dark” may refer to “impure” in not just other BOM passages, but also here in the Book of Moses. Another LDS apologist, Stephen Smoot (2022:38), argues that a spiritual or metaphorical understanding is to be “preferred” given the earlier context of Satan appearing as “blackness” *vis-à-vis* “the brilliant glory of God”.

Further, Parker notes that nothing is said in the Moses passage about where this blackness even came from. In verse 8, it just “came upon” the Canaanites, “that they were despised among all people”. Parker also notes that this means they were not black prior to this event. Verse 22 said that the residue of the people of Adam was segregated from “the seed of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black”. Though the people group earlier in the chapter (antediluvian Canaanites) may be related to the people group later in the chapter (seed of Cain), there is nonetheless no solid proof that blackness in both cases refer to a literal skin color.

Traditionally, it was assumed that the people of Canaan were the same people derived from Cain. However, Canaan is only known to have come from Noah’s son, Ham. Parker says, “The Hebrew words ‘Cain’ (qayin) and ‘Canaan’ (ke(na’an) are not related; it is a coincidence that they sound alike in English.” Draper *et al.* (2005:126) say, “The name Cain derives from a root that means ‘to acquire’ or ‘to create’... Canaan, on the other hand, probably goes back to a root that means *to bow the knee*.” Nonetheless, the Canaanites (at least post flood) were not Africans and were certainly not black Africans. This Moses text has nothing to do with modern Blacks. As such, Parker argues that racism against African Blacks (ancient or modern) cannot be justified from this passage.

In response, yes, skin is not mentioned specifically, but there are reasons that this passage has traditionally been understood to be referring to literal skin. There are physical properties that are associated with the blackness. By cursing the land, the Canaanites had a blackness come upon them. If blackness is simply a metaphor, then one would expect they would be labeled black prior to this event, since God cursed the whole earth, being angry with “all the sons of man whom he had made” (Moses 5:56). All humans should be black then. Yet blackness was only after the curse of the land the Canaanites took over in chapter 7. God also cursed others outside of Zion referred to as “the residue of the people” in verse 20, but there is no mention of blackness for them. Verse 22 specifically mentions that this “residue of the people” is “the seed of Adam” who were distinguished from the seed of Cain who “were black, and had not place among them”. If blackness is taken as some sort of figure of speech for wickedness, the other cursed seed of Adam would be labeled that way as well.

In addition, Moses 7 implies that God has had enough of racial hatred: God rebukes “all the creations which [He had] made” (v. 36) for hating “their own blood” (v. 33), and again, verse 8 says that the Canaanites had blackness come upon them “that they were despised among all people.” Is God merely rebuking the wicked for hating Canaanite wickedness? If that is the case, then again, why is there no

mention of this blackness for the wicked hating of the Canaanites? It seems better understood that blackness is indeed a literal skin pigmentation.

Finally, just because Smith replaced “pure” for “white” in the BOM and just because Smoot misquoted Moses 1:15 as “blackness” when the verse actually uses the term “darkness”—referring to Satan in contrast to God’s glory—does not mean that the blackness in Moses 7 should refer to something other than literal skin pigmentation. These are red herrings.

Stokes (2021:163, 175) correctly notes that the people of Canaan were technically never specifically mentioned as cursed in the text. The Lord cursed “the land with much heat” (v. 8), and as a result, the land became barren, and blackness came upon the people of Canaan.⁷³

Stokes (172-5) also claims that the modern racism that ties skin color to inferiority is lacking in Moses 7. Indeed, there certainly is hatred for other people groups in the text, but that is only because something besides skin color is the more fundamental object of hate. Stokes (172) says that blackness came upon a people only as an “after-effect” of God cursing the land due to their sin (cf. Moses 5:56). As previously mentioned in response to Gardner’s biblical *tu quoque*, a change in environmental factors obviously will engender certain biological mutations in a group of people. When others hate people because of this, it is evil. Nonetheless, there is nothing inherently inferior about a certain color of skin in this text. Again, the text never claims blackness is what is cursed. This is why the Canaanites are victims of the cursed land as well as victims of the people who hate them.

Stokes (163) claims that the only people cursed were the

‘residue of the people’ (vv. 20, 22, 28) which, as the text itself notes, does not include the ‘seed of Cain’ (7:20, 22). In contrast to the prevailing reading of Moses 7, the text implies condemnation not of the seed of Cain/people of Canaan but of this ‘residue of the people’ due to both their hatred of the people of Canaan and their general rejection of the gospel message preached by Enoch.

The implication seems to be that everyone but the seed of Cain/people of Canaan was outside of Zion, which was taken up to heaven (vv. 21 and 23). Stokes never states that, but if they were not cursed, then

⁷³ Though Stokes never acknowledges him, and contrary to Stokes’ subtitle of being “A New Reading of Moses 7”, Matthew Harris (2024:48) says that LDS apologist Hugh Nibley already affirmed in 1981 that it was the land that was cursed, not the people (for a further discussion of this point, see Harris’ interview with Rick Bennett on Gospel Tangents, 2024). However, the following in Stokes’ article does appear to be novel.

according to verse 20, they were part of Zion, the blessed. Everyone else was so full of hatred that God decided to start over again with the flood. Stokes (176), thus, identifies the Canaanites earlier in the chapter with the seed of Cain later in the chapter.

Why did Enoch never preach to the Canaanites? Upon closer look at verse 12, nothing says that God commanded Enoch not to preach to them. This suggests that Enoch had certain concerns in mind. Moses 7:8 says that after the Canaanites received blackness, they were despised by all. Moses 7:22 says that the seed of Cain was segregated from everyone else. Stokes (177) offers some possibilities why Enoch would not preach to the Canaanites, but in the end, there is nothing definitively stated, and one may only speculate. Stokes notes that Enoch knew the deep compassion God had for his creation, and also how hateful his creation had become (Moses 7:32-4). Perhaps that hate became so intense that it interfered with Enoch's preaching in one way or another. Perhaps preaching to the Canaanites would have likely hindered the other sons of Adam from accepting the gospel message (179).

Regardless of the reason why these Canaanites were never preached to, they were not under the same condemnation as every other child of Adam and thus were not held culpable (177, 180). The antediluvian Canaanites had a similar story to the Lamanites in the BOM (179-80). Neither were as bad as most people have made them out to be. Quite to the contrary, they are held up as role models to a certain extent.

In response, Stokes' commentary on this Moses passage is much more complicated than Parker's and Smoot's. It is true that the passage never specifically claims that blackness is cursed. However, Stokes (175) treats the Canaanites as "victims of the negative effects of this curse". "Victims" is inappropriate, though. They attacked and plundered the people of Shum and took over their land (Moses 7:7). The obvious result of this was a punishment of barrenness of the land, which, as an "after-effect", affected the conquerors' skin color. Victims would not deserve this. Stokes treats these people as righteous, but God "was angry with the wicked, with *all* the sons of men whom he had made" (Moses 5:56, emphasis added). These antediluvian Canaanites had it coming to them; they were not victims.

This is further understood since the passage goes on to explain how the offer of preaching unto repentance was never extended to them. Stokes assumes Enoch went rogue since God never explicitly commanded this. However, the implication in the passage is clear. God gave Enoch his marching orders. He was shown the various people and was told to preach to them. He was not shown the Canaanites to preach to, and they were therefore excluded. Stokes suggests that the hatred of others was so great, it may have restrained Enoch. That is inconsistent with the passage portraying Enoch as a mighty warrior of such

faith that he made his enemies scatter before him (Moses 7:13-17). Further, it seems Enoch still hated the Canaanites while showing partiality to everyone else—not because Enoch was taking matters in his own hands, but because the Lord was directing him in the furtherance of his curse upon Canaan.

Stokes assumes that since the Canaanites never heard the message of repentance, they were not culpable. He disparages these Blacks like Mormons regard children prior to their age of accountability or as former BYU Religion Professor Bott did with Blacks being banned from the priesthood. However, the Bible teaches that there is a clear revelation of God and what he requires is wired into nature so that humans with their faculties functioning properly are without excuse (e.g., Ps 19; Rom 1:18-32).

Moses 7:20-2 implies that the seed of Cain was cursed as well as everyone else. Enoch was shown all the inhabitants of earth. He beheld the residue of the people who were the seed of Adam minus the seed of Cain. The latter were not among them. Stokes assumes that this must entail that the seed of Cain was not cursed. Admittedly, this is a very confusing verse. Verse 20 already distinguishes between two groups: Zion who is blessed and the residue of the people who are cursed. If there are reasons to think the seed of Cain was cursed, then why did not Enoch behold them in verse 22? Perhaps the seed of Cain was not *perceived* to be among the rest of the seed of Adam even though the former was still perceived to be on earth, and thus by implication from verse 20, was still cursed. Why deduce this? Because verse 22 underscores that the seed of Cain was black and hated by everyone else. This is why Cain's descendants were segregated while on earth. This is why they "had not place among them" (7:22). Again, it does not say that the seed of Cain's descendants were not perceived to be among the seed of Adam since the former were righteous and blessed to be part of Zion as verse 20 says.

Having said all this, if indeed the seed of Cain is to be understood as cursed as well in this passage, there is nothing here claiming that Cain's descendants were cursed with an objectively inferior skin pigmentation. Stokes' point is well taken. At this point, the passage at most demonstrates that others were racist towards these Black people. That was the former's problem, and nothing implies a divine sanction of it. Of course, it may be that there was such a divine sanction, but nothing in the text specifically reveals the divine intention on this matter.

As for the reason the Lord did not send Enoch to the Canaanites, that is an interesting problem, particularly since the Moses 7 passage later tells of the Lord's "indignation" on Enoch's brethren for their hatred for their own blood (vv. 33-4). Moses 7:36 also says that out of all creation, "there has not been so great wickedness as among thy brethren". The problem is compounded when 2 Nephi 26:33 in the BOM

is added to the equation: “he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white” ... “and all are alike unto God”. The Blacks in Moses 7 were not invited. Whatever the answer to this problem, there is nothing in the passage that *directly* claims that the seed of Cain was inherently inferior to all other races by being divinely cursed with dark skin. However, there certainly is a strong implication that is the case.

3.2.4.2. The Book of Abraham priesthood ban

Abraham 1:20-27 says,

20 Behold, Potiphar’s Hill was in the land of Ur, of Chaldea. And the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh; which Pharaoh signifies king by royal blood.

21 Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth.

22 From this descent sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land.

23 The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden;

24 When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land.

25 Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal.

26 Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood.

27 Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry[.]

Traditionally, the Book of Moses has been taken together with the Book of Abraham to give the only scriptural references that support a priesthood ban of Blacks of African ancestry. The Book of Moses has been assumed to demonstrate that the Canaanites' black skin is indicative of divine disfavor. The Book of Abraham has been assumed to demonstrate that the Canaanites mentioned in the Book of Moses were of a lineage that prevented them from having the priesthood. Many also assumed that Blacks of African ancestry are of the lineage of the Canaanites. Thus, Blacks of African ancestry were of a lineage that was prevented from having the priesthood.

Bush (1973:16) claims that even though Joseph Smith probably held that Blacks were of the lineage of Ham, there is no evidence that Smith taught this as Church doctrine. It was, nonetheless, a commonly held belief at the time... and not just among Mormons. The belief has a long history—going back to early Jewish writings and Church fathers (Jerome and Augustine⁷⁴ are given as a couple examples).⁷⁵ In fact, Bush claims this was a universal belief in the Church. Even biblical abolitionists still held the theory. Given the influence of the Church upon western thinking, the theory was common knowledge.

According to Abraham 1:21, Pharaoh was descended through Ham and his son Canaan. The passage went on to explain that the Canaanites were the ones who populated Egypt, which was named after a female descendant of Ham named Egyptus. Her firstborn was Pharaoh, who was blessed in much, just not with the right of the priesthood due to his lineage (vv. 26-7).

So how have LDS attempted to reconcile this? The clearest and most concise statement comes from Reeve (2023:47-8), who says,

⁷⁴ It is a little difficult to attribute this belief to Augustine when he was more than likely a Black African (Pratt, 2023).

⁷⁵ Muswubi (2025b) said, “[T]he[se] roots of racism can be traced back to the early decades of the second century when early Graco-Roman Christianity broke away from Second Temple Judaism (Den Heyer 1996:80-82; Flusser 1988:614-677; Harlow 2010:257-259). Later-on [*sic*] such separation gave birth to the conviction that [the] [W]estern [W]orld and their version of Christianity superseded [the] [E]astern [W]orld, their religions and culture like Judaism, Islam and other related religions (like African Traditional Religions) based on the color of the skin (Horsley 2003:55-78; Le Donne 2011:72-93; Luttikhuisen 2006:11-22; Tatum 2009:xiv-xviii; Vermes 2013:1-60). In that regard, that development became a foundation of [W]estern colonization, whereby the practice of slavery and the ranking of the people according to skin color. The association of white with purity, virtue, and Christ, and black with impurity, evil, and the devil, pervades the Christian liturgy and popular belief. (Jablonski 2012:158).”

Even though there is no contemporary evidence that Smith interpreted the verses in Abraham to validate a racial priesthood restriction, Church leaders after him did draw on it for justification.

...The pharaoh was 'righteous' in that he established his kingdom based on wise and just principles, but he participated in idol worship and human sacrifice (see Abraham 1:5-11). He tried to 'imitate' priesthood with idol worship. He was also not the firstborn son of a presiding patriarch, but was the son of Egyptus, a matriarch (see Abraham 1:21-27).

Joseph Smith established patriarchal descent for the position of presiding patriarch as the Restoration began and seemed to have an Old Testament model in mind when he did so. He used the language of 'the right of Priesthood' when he ordained his father to that position, and following his father's death he ordained his oldest surviving brother, Hyrum Smith to the same office.

In the book of Abraham example, however, the pharaoh violates patriarchal descent. As the book of Abraham explains, pharaoh was 'of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood' even though he attempted to claim it through Noah. He was thus 'cursed...as pertaining to the Priesthood' (Abraham 1:21-27). The book of Abraham portrays the problem in part as matriarchal descent but suggests that the real issue was the pharaoh's idol worship. Patriarchal descent on its own would not have guaranteed the pharaoh the priesthood, but repentance might have. Abraham abandoned the idol worship of his fathers and desired to 'keep the commandments of God,' which made him 'a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers' (Abraham 1:2). Repentance made Abraham eligible for the priesthood, not lineage.

Just because there is no indication that Smith used this passage to support a racist priesthood ban is no indication that Smith argued in the way Reeve wants to invalidate. The issue should be determined by what the text says in plain language.

Reeve claims the only priesthood ban in the Book of Abraham is one against a pseudo-priesthood, based on a matriarchal line and, more fundamentally, on idolatry. So, since there is no racial priesthood ban here, there should have never been justification for a priesthood ban against Blacks—particularly African Blacks who were probably not even direct descendants of Canaanites anyway.

Why does Reeve claim that Pharaoh violated patriarchal descent? The text says that Pharaoh was a descendant of Ham and that lineage was passed on through his mother Egyptus (Abraham 1:21-3). The

text also claims that Pharaoh readily acknowledged his lineage through Ham (1:27). However, the text also claims that Noah cursed Ham's lineage in not being able to have the priesthood (1:26-7).

How is this not a racial priesthood ban? It is unclear how a pseudo-priesthood based on a matriarchal line does not entail a racial restriction. If that line went via Egyptus back to Canaan, and if the line via Pharaoh's father was irrelevant, then there is still an obvious racial restriction on the priesthood, especially given the background beliefs in the Book of Moses concerning Canaan's race being cursed with dark skin and not even being worthy of the gospel being preached to them. Reeve's point seems to be a distinction without a difference.

Further, Reeve obviously thinks that Pharaoh should have gone through his father's line, but also according to Reeve, this was not an option for Pharaoh since he was not the firstborn son of a presiding patriarch. How does Reeve know that? Pharaoh's father is never mentioned in the text. The only information that suggests Pharaoh's father was not a presiding patriarch seems based on who Egyptus was. She was a daughter of Ham via the blood of the Canaanites. What sort of priesthood holder would be married to such a person? The implication seems purely racist.

Could Pharaoh have overlooked the unworthiness of his mother's line and gone back to claim his priesthood via his father's line to a righteous patriarchal holder going back to Noah? Joseph Smith, Jr claimed to do that with his priesthood and ended up ordaining his father, Joseph Smith Sr. Smith Jr was also not an eldest son as Pharaoh was (1:25). So, the requirement of being a firstborn son of a presiding patriarch seems irrelevant. In addition to repentance, the only relevant condition is to not be of the cursed lineage going back to Ham via Canaan. Of course, LDS may claim that Smith was in a completely different situation since the priesthood needed a whole restoration in his time whereas in Pharaoh's time the priesthood needed no restoration. Nonetheless, being the oldest child of a presiding patriarch still seems irrelevant. Even Reeve seems to know this, since he uses the example of Abraham's repentance as a basis for what could have happened with Pharaoh. In addition, a male today who is not "born in the covenant" and is not a firstborn son may still enter the priesthood regardless of whether his father is a current priesthood holder. Thus, Pharaoh could have also claimed a righteous line through his father, but he did not. He claimed it via his mother's lineage (1:27). More importantly, though, the text is clear that he could not rightly claim it, given that his mother's lineage was cursed. The text never claims he could not claim it because he was not the firstborn son of a presiding patriarch. LDS trivialize this whole matter with a red herring—they focus on some irrelevant chain of custody issue in Pharaoh's time.

Regardless of Pharaoh's mistake in supporting his right to priesthood via his mother's ancestry, the problem Reeve overlooks is still the matter of Pharaoh's lineage (i.e., race) via his mother going back to Canaan, the son of Ham and his lineage who was cursed from having the priesthood according to the Book of Abraham.⁷⁶ Further, according to the Book of Moses, Canaan was cursed in what happened to his and his descendants' land and subsequently what happened to his and his descendants' skin. Abraham 1:21-7 says he cannot have the priesthood because of this lineage through Pharaoh's mother. Even if Pharaoh's father were around, he was cursed from having the priesthood since he married someone whose lineage was cursed.

Of course, the Pharaohs used the priesthood for their own power and authority. They handled the priesthood their way, not the Lord's way. All this resulted in idolatry. Indeed, idolatry invalidates any right to the priesthood, but his Canaanite lineage invalidated his right in any case. Abraham 1:24 says it was through Egyptus, and further back through Ham, that "sprang that *race* which preserved the curse in the land" (emphasis added). Via Pharaoh's mother, an obvious cursed lineage led back to Canaan and Ham. The next mention of "cursed" is a couple verses later, where Pharaoh was blessed "with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed... as pertaining to the Priesthood".

Further, contrary to what Stokes claims for the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham does not treat the Canaanites as a blessed, privileged, non-culpable victim group, rather, the Book of Abraham directly labels them as "that race which preserved the curse in the land" (1:24) and as a result, "cursed [them] as pertaining to the Priesthood" (1:26). Therefore, Reeve's belief that Pharaoh could have had the priesthood if he had repented is also unwarranted. The text rules out that supposition. So, contrary to Reeve's claim, these Scriptures along with the Book of Moses support the thesis that more than an improper chain of custody claim is going on; they support a racial priesthood ban *even if the traditional Mormon understanding misapplies it to modern Blacks of African ancestry*.

Given the traditional misapplication by most LDS, there is still nothing specifically stated in LDS Scripture to support the *LDS* priesthood ban of Blacks of African ancestry. It is a stretch to assume they are the descendants of Canaanites who populated the land when Israel crossed the Jordan. The other sons of Ham populated Africa. Egypt was populated by Ham (Ps 78:51; 105:23; 106:22), most likely through his son Mizraim, since Mizraim is the Hebrew and Aramaic term for "Egypt". Egypt ruled over the land of Canaan until Israel took it over. The Israelites were known to be descendants of Noah's son Shem because Shem was the great grandfather of Eber (Gen 10:21-4), and the name "Eber" is thought to be

⁷⁶ Genesis 9 also claims Canaan was cursed, but there is no indication that priesthood authority is the reference.

related to the name “Hebrew”. According to Genesis 11, his son Peleg begot Reu, who begot Serug, who begot Nahor, who begot Terah, who begot Abram. Abram (later called Abraham) was the father of the Ishmaelites and Israelites. Thus, Noah’s prophecy of Ham’s son Canaan being ruled over by his brothers was fulfilled (cf. Gen 9:24-7; 1 Kings 9:20-1).

Even if the preceding interpretation is somehow wrong and Blacks do turn out to be of Canaan’s lineage, in the Book of Abraham the priesthood being denied to the lineage of the Canaanites was prior to Aaron and the Levites. The priesthood of Levites was quite different since it was restricted to only to them. Subsequently, LDS think that in the New Testament the priesthood changed again to include every tribe and lineage, until Brigham Young kept it only from Blacks of African ancestry. Thus, just because supposed Black Canaanites were denied the right of priesthood prior to Aaron and the Levities, there is no reason to assume that the former would be denied it again under Brigham Young. The justification for this ban in the Church, of course, is never mentioned in LDS Scripture.

Nevertheless, it is still the Lord’s prerogative to limit priesthood authority. The Old Testament is clear that the priesthood is limited to Levites (e.g., Ex 29). However, the Old Testament never invalidates a whole tribe from priesthood as some type of punishment as the Book of Abraham states. Giving a gift to one child does not mean that the other children are cursed.

Joseph F. Smith and the later commission of the Twelve under David O. McKay were correct. LDS Scripture does not specifically support the priesthood ban in the LDS Church. However, the Church argued, at least under the McKay committee, that there was no divine racism going on in the Book of Abraham. According to Church educator Lowell Bennion (cousin to Apostle Adam Bennion who chaired the special committee under McKay) who drafted the private report, the Abraham passage is not a theological belief, but simply an historical story explaining why Blacks were thought to be cursed (Harris, 2024:58-9).

If it is the case that, as the Bennion report states, there is no divine racism here, then Reeve’s explanation is irrelevant, and a pseudo-priesthood based on a matriarchal lineage does not matter. Whatever the justification, there is no theological warrant for claiming that Blacks should not have the priesthood. In fact, Bennion claims that none of the disputed racial texts of Scripture deal with the theology of the ban.

If Bennion states the claims of the committee correctly, the claims seem to be a rather ad hoc explanation of all we know of the disputed scriptural passages. There is no good reason to assume that the Books of

Moses and Abraham are simply relaying some false explanation of why Pharaoh and his lineage were cursed from having the priesthood. Instead, Moses and Abraham, the prophets of the Lord in these latter-day revelations, are clarifying the theology of the curse. These prophets are not simply relaying some concocted history as the explanation for this curse. Rather, these prophets are giving God's explanation for it. After all, these books are considered Scripture—sanctioned, divinely inspired history. In the Book of Moses as well as the Book of Abraham, the basis of the curse is punishment due to sin. Because of the sin, God cursed an entire race as well as their offspring to be an inferior people group, forever banned from the blessings everyone else can receive. God did not merely punish the individuals who committed the transgression.

The assumption is that the Almighty may do whatever he pleases. However, this assumption is only true if voluntarism is true. Voluntarism claims that whatever God wills is good. In contrast, essentialism claims that whatever God wills finds its basis in his eternally good nature. As such, God's nature does not allow him to lie (Heb 6:18) or be a racist (Rom 2:11; Gal 3:28). These things are naturally against who God is and "he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim 2:13).

3.3. Concluding thoughts

Again, this chapter surveys and analyzes the LDS Scriptures, teachings, and testimonies regarding perennial racism. LDS continue to affirm their Scriptures via their testimonies, but they are only supposed to affirm what the Brethren are currently teaching. Past teachings from the Brethren that do not line up with what the Brethren are currently teaching are disregarded. At least these days, most LDS are unaware how their Scriptures have been and are still used today, primarily through fundamentalist Mormons, to justify perennial racism. The careful examination of new Mormon interpretations of their Scriptures and their prophets is demonstrably inadequate and improper. It is clear from LDS testimonies that the LDS Church naively accepts the LDS Scriptures and their prophets even though they turn out to be racially wrong. Even the LDS Church now admits their past revelators were wrong on racism.

The question which this chapter attempts to answer is: Is the LDS affirmation of their Scriptures as God's word proper if it turns out to actually teach a divine sanction of racism? Given the findings of this chapter, it does not seem reasonable to continue affirming these Scriptures are literally God's word. God's word, by definition, does not error. Yet, here is a demonstrable error in them.

The next chapter will look at some practical results of Mormonism's troubled racist teachings. These results continue to be manifested in the day-to-day beliefs and practices of LDS.

CHAPTER 4

THE ANALYSIS OF LDS CULTURAL FEATURES REGARDING PERENNIAL RACISM WITHIN MORMONISM

4.1. Introduction

This chapter analyzes the social-cultural features regarding perennial racism within Mormonism. The basic question for this chapter is: Does racism persist in the lives of individual Mormons even after the 1978 revelation? This chapter will demonstrate, through a social-historical and social-scientific approach, that because of approximately 130 years of Mormon institutional racism, racism is still present in the lives, thoughts, and workings of a typical individual LDS. Anthropological, cultural, and behavioral racist patterns continue to be deeply engrained in LDS membership.

4.2. Understanding the LDS mindset

As the last chapter demonstrated, the issue of racism is indeed perennial for the LDS Church. Even though the BOM teaches God accepts everyone who repents since all are alike unto him (2 Nephi 26:33;

Alma 19:36), he still cursed the Lamanites with their dark skin. Further, the PGP teaches that God cursed the Canaanites with being in land that turned their skins black, that the Canaanites were denied the preaching of the gospel and being part of Zion, and were denied the priesthood. This seems inconsistent with the BOM message.

Of course, the Church no longer interprets its standard works to support racism and their priesthood ban. LDS have always affirmed that God spoke to each individual bearing witness to these Scriptures being the word of God. In 1978 common racist interpretations of the Scriptures began to change for many LDS. What began in confidence prior to 1978 led to agnosticism after 1978. LDS subsequently had no idea how to interpret their Scriptures racially even though they still held to the Scriptures as being from God. Eventually, many who continued in the LDS faith moved on to new interpretations.

Yet these new, modern interpretations seem like *ad hoc* modern revisions. They bend over backwards to fit with the 1978 revelation and modern enlightened understandings of racial equality. Why the gymnastics to fit these Scriptures to modern sensitivities? Because LDS revisionists know that God cannot be a racist; they now claim that these passages do not promote a divine racism after all. As a result, dubious revisionist interpretations of Latter-day Scriptures are offered. “Dark skin really is not what it seems to be”; “God never meant a literal skin pigmentation”; “Even if he did, he never intended it to be a curse”; “The Lamanites and Canaanites were actually role models”; “Pharaoh really was denied the priesthood due to his matriarchal line as well as his idolatry; it had nothing to do with being of the lineage of the black Canaanites”; “2 Nephi 26:33 absolves all these apparent racial problems.”

Instead of such dubious revisionist interpretations, it seems much easier to accept that the prophets who gave the Latter-day Scriptures were advancing racist beliefs. Occam’s razor claims that the simplest interpretation is probably the correct one, which would suggest the literal interpretations of Latter-day Scriptures are correct in treating “Blacks” (whether Lamanites or Canaanites) as cursed or inferior races.

If that is the case, given that the Church has, inconsistently, declared that prophets are fallible even in their revelations (and this is what their apologists earnestly proclaim), then why do the LDS not simply accept that their prophets got it wrong with their racist Scriptures? If the truth is not to be found in discursive reasoning attempts but in going to God directly for answers spoken through one’s feelings, then why bother defending the prophets at all? Of course, the problem with this scenario is that Mormon prophets then, objectively speaking, become completely irrelevant. Many Mormons reach this conclusion

and end up leaving the Church. The prophets were wrong and proven untrustworthy. What better reason is there to leave the Church?

Many of these who leave end up denying God's existence and become their own gods. Life becomes about them and their feelings without the need to submit to others to order their lives.

Those who end up staying may not even believe in God anymore, but they stay simply because they get personal satisfaction from it. They are there because it simply *feels* best to them. Others stay and continue to believe in God but no longer believe their Church. They remain convinced that God speaks to them through their feelings. This is all that matters to such disaffected Mormons. They become their own prophets in a sense, and when more conflicts with their church arise, many leave and start their own break-off Mormon religion.⁷⁷

These newly anointed prophets end up thinking of themselves as trustworthy prophets. They think they can certainly do better... at least initially. They hold that God is certainly speaking through their own feelings. They cannot deny their testimony. Yet, the *why* questions persist. Why hold to their testimony now outside the LDS Church rather than hold to the testimonies of all those within the LDS Church, including the testimony they used to have? Why do they think they are now right? If they are not infallible and they may now give fallible revelations, then why bother with their new group? Why not stick with their original Church? Once they see that all these Mormon prophets and their revelations are fallible, including themselves, then many are resolved in agnosticism.

Krakauer (2003:272) gives a brilliant example of the inherent problem Mormons have with this issue of thinking their feelings are God's revelations to them. According to Krakauer,

Utah has been called the 'fraud capital of the world' by the *Wall Street Journal*, and within the state, no place has more white-collar crime than Utah County. According to FBI agent Jim Malpede, at any given moment the FBI is investigating scams totaling \$50 million to \$100 million perpetrated by con artists, like Kenyon Blackmore, based in the county. The uncommonly high incidence of fraud is a direct consequence of the uncommonly high percentage of Utah County residents who are Mormons. When Saints are invited to invest in dubious schemes by other Saints, they tend to be overly trusting. Michael Hines, director of enforcement for the Utah Securities Division, told the *Deseret News* that in Utah County it is common for scammers to ensnare their victims by asking

⁷⁷ For how dangerous this has been in Mormon history, see Krakauer (2003).

them to evaluate the proposed investment through prayer. ‘People need to realize,’ Hines warned, ‘that God is not a good investment adviser.’

Consequently, is it really the true God speaking through their feelings or is it the false god of self? If the latter, perhaps their god really turns out to be nothing more than culture speaking through their feelings? There can be no doubt that culture is comprised of corrupt, fallen sinners bent on disobeying God and doing their own thing (Rom 3:23). There can also be no doubt that culture informs individual feelings. It does not feel good to stand against the culture that one is a part of. It is much easier to take the path of least resistance. Why do otherwise? So, if culture demands ending all racial discrimination, then Mormons bow down and dismiss problematic racist passages. Mormons do this either by 1) pleading agnosticism concerning how to answer these passages, 2) adopting radically new interpretations of these passages, or 3) simply claiming that prophets are all fallible anyway, and they were obviously wrong in their racist revelations.

4.3. Understanding the resultant cultural features

In 2016, almost 40 years after the 1978 revelation, Alice Faulkner Burch (the first African American ordinance worker in the Salt Lake Temple in 1989) told a group of the Mormon History Association,

‘Racism still exists and still has a tight grip within the LDS Church.’

Many black Mormons ‘still need support to remain in the church — not for doctrinal reasons but for cultural reasons,’ Burch said. ‘Women are derided about our hair ... referred to in demeaning terms, our children mistreated, and callings withheld.’

...The Utah-based LDS Church has come a long way since 1978, Burch said, but there is much left to do. (Stack, 2016)

Harris (2024:308) recalls a conference he attended the next year, in which “Catherine Stokes, a well-respected Black Latter-day Saint, stood up after a presenter concluded their remarks and said, ‘I have been in this church for nearly four decades and racism in the church is stronger today than it was when I joined’”.

Smith *et al.* (2020:145) state:

Blacks in the Mormon faith incessantly endure passive-aggressive white rage while pledging fealty to white male ecclesiastic authority. That rage manifests through automatic or implicit assumptions of black inferiority and deficiency, which then triggers acts of violence upon the black psyche and body within a house of worship and elsewhere. Some of the more common interactions involve hair touching, second-guessing someone's ability to perform a task or role at church, or invoking narratives about the cursing of blacks as descendants of Noah's errant son, Ham.

These are some descriptive features of Mormonism that are not easily remedied by the 1978 revelation or a scholarly, hard-to-find 2013 article buried on their Church website. Reeve (2023:113) says that

even though the Church lifted its racial restrictions in 1978, it has not actively untaught the falsehoods that sustained the restrictions. They continue to exist among us as Latter-day Saints and are being passed on to the next generation. This is a prime example of the ways in which the sin of racism is multigenerational and became embedded in Latter-day Saint theology, culture, and practice.

Though the Church itself has officially, according to the 2013 GTE, dismissed all racism from its past leadership as errant theories, the Church continues to call its membership to root out all racism (Weaver, 2020b). Why would the Church need to do this if 1978 and 2013 were jointly sufficient and racism were no longer an issue in the Church? Obviously human nature needs continual correction. However, some cultural groups struggle with certain things while others generally do not. Given the long racist history of Mormonism, it is not difficult to see why racist tendencies persist in the LDS Church... particularly when Church leadership has not done a good job in calling out what exactly counts as racism.

Nonetheless, there are those like Burch among the LDS Black laity who are calling out the "generations-old myth-based paradigm" (Stack, 2016) by means of hard, uncomfortable conversations. Darius Gray, the past president of the Genesis Group, made a similar statement at a 2015 University of Utah conference entitled "Black, White, and Mormon: Race at Brigham Young University". He said,

We tend to think, if we don't think of it, it will go away, or it's not an issue, or all of that is behind us. And such is not the case. We need to be forthright. We need to be honest with ourselves at all of those levels. Whether it's from a national level, socially, the church level, internationally, at the university level; we need to speak to it. We need to stop playing games. I think you here know that I am a committed Latter-day Saint. I am also a supporter of BYU, so I'm not bashing. I'm speaking truth. We are not where we need to be. We aren't speaking about race. We aren't speaking of any of those issues in any degree of intricacy, because it's too uncomfortable, painful, brings up issues

that we don't wish to speak to. But we have to, otherwise we as a nation, as a church, as a university will never achieve that which we should. (Tanner Humanities Center, 2015)

Indeed, there still is racism within the Church, and this racism is obviously a result of a long history of prophetic statements—Scripture or otherwise. LDS racism exhibits itself in various ways today. These ways are slowly being corrected, but old habits die hard. They would probably die faster if the Church were more public about more specifics. However, it is understandable why this has been such a sensitive issue for the Church. The more upfront they are about specifics, the more they risk undermining their own prophets. If their past prophets are undermined, then sooner or later the membership must wonder about the current status of their prophetic leadership, even when they turn out to be right in general on the racism issue. Perhaps they are currently wrong about other areas, including other specific racial issues, and that creates distrust of the whole institution.

The following are a handful of more specific ways indicative of ongoing anthropological, cultural, or behavioral racism in the LDS Church. These ways are by no means exhaustive, nor are they to be thought of in absolute terms, for obviously not all LDS think in these terms. However, a significant number of LDS do in fact think in these terms, and they are worthy of consideration. As such, social-historical and social-scientific methods will be employed to demonstrate the perennial racism within Mormonism.

4.4. Cultural features

4.4.1. A lack of representation among top general authorities

Though there have been people with Black African ancestry within the leadership of the LDS Church, there has never been a Black individual called to its highest leadership positions. According to Smith *et al.* (2020:142), “The LDS Church is an authoritarian organization of top-down leadership consisting entirely of men, more than 90 percent white and less than 2.5 percent black. Authoritarianism is expressly anti-black. The expectations are that blacks subscribe to norms and beliefs of the Church that certainly marginalize.” Blacks have never been called to the level of apostles, from which one is called to be a member of the First Presidency. A small handful of Blacks have served in the lower leadership, namely, the Quorums of the Seventies. Only the first two quorums there are considered part of the general authorities. The first Black called to serve there was Helvécio Martins (from Brazil) in 1990.⁷⁸ The next Black called to be a general authority was Joseph Sitaki in 2009. He was from Kenya; the first African

⁷⁸ Elijah Abel was in the Third Quorum of Seventy and was thus an Area Seventy.

Black called to the position. The first Black African American called there was Peter M. Johnson in 2019. However, no Black individual has ever been called to the Presidency of the Seventy.

After almost a half century now since the 1978 revelation, surely by now it would seem some Black individual would be called to the top leadership roles of the Church. This is a worldwide church after all. It is not a particular denomination serving the needs of a particular community. Though it is encouraging to see Blacks in various leadership positions in the LDS Church, it is suspicious that not one has been called to be an apostle or one of the general authority presidencies in its almost 200-year history. If each calling is ultimately from God (cf. Heb 5:4), then it seems God is being racially prejudiced or partial. Of course, LDS would claim that is not the case. So, what is the best explanation? Perhaps the problem is again the leadership's inappropriate use of their agency.

Regardless, the resultant message conveyed to the Saints indicates that their leadership still finds Blacks to be aptly ruled to some extent. In the Church, women are also ruled, but they are not regarded as inferior; they merely have a different role. Likewise, Black men, though not regarded as inferior, are still treated differently than other men and are still being ruled by other men, and this is apparently only because of their race. Some members are uncomfortable with this, but they all sustain their leaders.

4.4.2. Placating both older and younger generations

Obviously, the younger LDS generations are not as familiar with past racist teachings as the older generations are. Many of the older generations, though, do not realize that several of their beliefs are racist and no LDS these days wants to be a racist. For example, the researcher (Sivulka, 2024a) talked to his older LDS neighbor lady in February 2024 about this thesis, and she said she believed that God is an exalted man who is white, and we are all going to be white like him after this life. She did not see how this was a White supremacist belief since God invites all his various colored earthly children to be together with him. According to Smith *et al.* (2020:148), “One common assumption from white members is that melanin is only a temporary ‘condition’ that will be rectified in the afterlife, the presumption being that after death black skin will miraculously transform into white skin, the way it supposedly was before a Divine cursing fell upon the so-called ‘black race.’” However, Reeve (2023:114), a middle-aged White LDS member, states, “Black, brown, or any other color will not be white in the Resurrection.” So, a “common assumption” needs qualification. It seems that a belief of God being White and all his children will be White is more common to the older generation.

The Church should publicly call out specific untrue and racist beliefs like these that older LDS people hold. The Church issued a 2013 GTE to call out racist beliefs “past and present, in any form”. However, this statement was obviously not specific enough and not obvious to all. Further, the 2013 GTE is difficult to find, especially for older people who are still not savvy with the internet.

Perhaps the underrepresentation of Blacks among the General Authorities may be relevant to this current point, for the Church may point to token Blacks in their leadership to pacify the modern generation, while it also points out to pacify the older generation that Blacks have never been in any of the presidencies of the General Authorities.

As another example, in 2020, the Church printed a new manual called “Come, Follow Me”, which discusses the dark skin of the Lamanites as a sign of the curse to distinguish them from their righteous white brethren and keep the two from intermarrying. It also indicates that the dark skin is no longer considered to be a sign of the curse. However, the digital or online version was quickly redacted to remove any reference to skin color being the curse. Instead, the online version claims that the curse was simply being cut off from God’s presence due to sin. The online version claims that dark skin came upon the Lamanites after segregating from their Nephite brethren, but also says, ““The nature and appearance of this mark are not fully understood. ... Later, as both the Nephites and Lamanites each went through periods of wickedness and righteousness, the mark became irrelevant as an indicator of the Lamanites’ standing before God.”” (Stack, 2020)

So, this still indicates that dark skin (though “dark skin” is vague) *was* an indicator of these people’s standing before God. As discussed earlier in this chapter, that may mean all sorts of things to Mormon revisionists. Further, Apostle Gary E. Stevenson claims, ““Our position as a Church is clear. We do condemn all racism, past or present, in any form, and we disavow any theory that black or dark skin is a sign of a curse. We are brothers and sisters, and I consider you friends.”” (Weaver, 2020a) Notice how Stevenson’s claim about condemning all racism in any form is technically true. Formally speaking, the Church does condemn all racism past or present, but some material instances are questionable. For example, the Church still stands by the BOM, which presents a view that some sort of dark skin *was* a sign of a curse. That may or may not refer to a literal dark skin pigmentation. If “dark skin” in the BOM does refer to this, then it *was* the case in the past and therefore no longer applies to what the case *is* today. Further, if literal dark skin pigmentation used to be a sign of a curse, then that view was somehow not racist back in BOM times or LDS may simply disregard it as an error since even prophets make mistakes.

As such, the Church's position is clear only in terms of a formal principle but obviously not clear in specific areas.

Stack (2020) goes on to report that

Marvin Perkins, who with [Darius] Gray produced a [LDS] DVD called 'Blacks in the Scriptures,' said the print manual 'plays to the old pioneer stock that wants to still believe these things, while they change it online.'

If the church were 'truly interested in fixing it, it would go through books, magazines and statements — clean it up everywhere,' he said[.] 'I am convinced that the church does not want to clear up this problem.'

Stack also cites Patrick Mason, head of Mormon Studies at Utah State University (USU), saying that

'It's a big church and not everybody is on the same page on these issues,'... 'The people writing curriculum for the church were socialized at a different time in a different church, when [conservatives] Joseph Fielding Smith and [apostle] Bruce R. McConkie were authoritative voices.'

The inclusion of an old quote from Smith 'disappoints but doesn't surprise me... given what we know about entrenched conservatism of curriculum writers within the church.'

A USU professor may disparage a certain block of Church members, but the Church itself would not do it on this specific issue. What is the result? Racism is not rooted out after all.

4.4.3. Most US LDS still think the ban was God's will

In 2016, three years after the GTE on Race and the Priesthood, The Next Mormons Survey (<https://thenextmormons.org/>) indicated that most US LDS still think that the priesthood ban was God's will (Riess, 2018). Riess says that

nearly two-thirds of self-identified Latter-day Saints say they either know (37 percent) or believe (25.5 percent) that the ban was God's will.

Another 17 percent think it might be true, and 22 percent say they know or believe it is false. Overall, then, a majority of Mormons still support the idea that the priesthood/temple ban was inspired by God. Only about one in five say they know or believe the ban to have been wrong.

...One major surprise in the data was that Mormons of color were actually more likely to say they knew or believed the ban was God's will than white Mormons were. 70 percent of non-whites affirmed this, compared to 61 percent of whites.

This is a racist belief supported by the majority of LDS... including non-Whites. This survey is from eight years ago, and it would be interesting to see if the numbers have changed. Nonetheless, the survey clearly demonstrates that the Church's message of their past leaders propagating errant theories was certainly having a difficult time filtering through to the average Mormon... at least in the US.

4.1.5. Testimonies

Many times, those with a knowledge of LDS Church racism are asked to pray about it and get an answer from the Lord. Testimonies are not essentially racist, but when the individual receives a revelation from the Lord as to the truthfulness of Mormonism, then a testimony may promote LDS racism or at least sustain untrustworthy, ever-changing LDS prophets. Again, for LDS, a feeling takes priority over facts. LDS assume that their feelings are from God while reasons contrary to Mormonism are not. As such, for LDS, good feelings cover a multitude of sins.

Myers (2015:36-42) had a good feeling about Mormonism prior to finding out about their racist past and apparent racist Scripture. He prayed for hours about this issue. Based on his feelings, he could not deny that God had already revealed to him that Joseph Smith really was a prophet who was visited by the Father and the Son, so he had to trust that God would work the racism problems out in his time. Myers (42) says,

I knew it was true. I had felt it, and my Father had confirmed it to me.

...God's words were good enough for me. I'm not saying I totally embraced what I perceived to be racism, but I trusted that the Lord would keep His word and eventually teach me to understand.

Earlier, Myers shared his girlfriend's experience of coming to faith in Mormonism. She found out about Mormonism through the LDS missionaries. She prayed about the truthfulness of Mormonism, and the

“Spirit spoke to her clearly, testifying that what the young men taught her was true. She recognized the feeling of warmth and love she felt during that prayer” (32). She later discovered the 2 Nephi 5:21 passage where God cursed people with a skin of blackness and she also learned about the past priesthood ban (33). Immediately, she recalled Proverbs 3:5, which says to trust in the Lord with all her heart and not to lean on her own understanding. Myers says, “She didn’t understand why the priesthood had been withheld from black men, but she was willing to put all of her trust in the feelings of the Spirit that had touched her so strongly.”

Myers’ experience is typical with LDS. From modern assumptions, they *understand* the Proverbs 3:5 passage to speak of one’s heart. For moderns, the heart is simply the place of feeling. For the ancients and from a grammatical-historical context, the heart encompassed all the human faculties of the inner self, and that included thinking or understanding. Brandon (1989:499) says that in the Old Testament,

[i]n a general sense, heart means the midst, the innermost or hidden part of anything.

...In the physiological sense, heart is the central bodily organ, the seat of physical life.

...[I]n a psychological sense, as the center or focus of man’s inner personal life. The heart is the source, or spring, of motives; the seat of the passions; the center of the thought processes; the spring of conscience.

Further, the term “understanding” ought not to be understood as excluding feelings. Wise or understanding individuals simply perceive the truth and know how to enact it in their lives. One’s understanding is informed both by feelings as well as rational processes. Thus, when the Proverbs passage speaks of trusting the Lord with all one’s heart and leaning not on one’s understanding, it is not claiming that one should exclude reasoning and instead simply feel the Lord. Rather, it simply means that one must not rest on one’s own understanding but instead trust the Lord with all one’s faculties. This is why the whole book of Proverbs advocates pursuing wisdom, instruction, and understanding starting with the fear of the Lord (see 1:1-7). He is life. If one neglects him, relying simply on one’s seeming states, then the result is a crooked path (3:6) which ends in death (14:12; 16:25). Those seeming states include all the various faculties one uses to understand. It is not that feelings are sacrosanct and all the other faculties are corrupt; all of one’s faculties are fallen. The Bible warns of one’s heart—Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

So, may God communicate via one's feelings? Of course. May he communicate via one's rational judgments? Yes. God may use both means to arrive at truth. However, neither of these means must be considered infallible. Both means are fallen, and therefore both means ought to employ much humility before the Lord. He is the truth (Jn 14:6), and he alone is infallible.

Thus, contrary to Brooks' (2020:111) claim, it is not the doctrine of infallibility held by conservatives in and outside the LDS Church that entails "white supremacy". She states:

Marginalizing or repressing anti-racist dissent is necessary to maintaining a hold on the story that anti-Black racism is how it has always been and how God intends for it to be or, at least, is content enough with it not to intervene. The attribution of intentionality and inevitability to the systems of white supremacy that hurt Black people takes shape in more conservative white American Christian contexts as belief in infallibility—whether in the text of the Bible, the pope, or the leaders of the LDS Church. Infallibility kills: it kills the bodies of those marked expendable, it kills relationships with those who dissent, and it kills the souls who suffocate on their own ignorance and privilege. It kills courage, it kills hope, it kills faith, and it kills the kind of historical memory that helps a religious community understand itself and find its next steps toward holiness.

However, this understanding of infallibility is overkill. Rather, the actual issue that kills and needs killing is simply being incorrigible in assuming *one's judgments* are infallible. This issue is not limited to conservatives. Many leftists are extremely narrow-minded and assume their judgments are infallible. On the other hand, many conservatives who hold to infallibility may do so without being incorrigible. Why? Because they realize that only God and his word are infallible, not their interpretations of God and his word. The late University of Southern California philosophy professor and popular Baptist spiritual formation authority, Dallas Willard (1993:31), has made a worthy fundamental hermeneutic statement in this regard: "The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception. Humility is always in order." Individuals are simply not being honest when they assume their means of understanding the infallible word of God are infallible. Thus, though there still are White supremacists who hold to the infallible word of God, there are also those who hold to the infallible word of God who are not White supremacists. Whether one holds to the doctrine of the infallible word of God is beside the point.

Furthermore, when certain Mormons ignore intellectual problems like racism in their church and simply trust that their feelings will steer them to the truth, they are engaging in a very dangerous activity which cuts themselves off from other means God may be using to communicate with them. A wise person does

not put all their eggs in one epistemic basket. A wise person yields all their faculties to the Lord in an attempt keep one's paths straight (Prov 3:6).

Understanding how LDS think about this passage of Scripture explains how their Church operates when intellectual problems arise. If the Church cannot make sense of an issue, it is always its prerogative to claim at least one of two things. First, they may simply claim agnosticism while remaining committed to the Lord and his ways. For example, Oaks (2020) does this by listing several biblically apparent racist problems. He does not even attempt to deal with them except to say, "The safest course is not to reject or supplement the divine plan by human reasoning." Second, the Church may claim that prophets are not infallible and that all its past prophets were wrong on certain issues like racism. This was the 2013 GTE message. Either way, the Church need not bother to defend their past prophets on this issue intellectually. The Church has given that role over to its apologists whom it need not ever officially endorse, and if these apologists ever step out of line (e.g., BYU Professor Bott), the Church may always issue a disclaimer. Nonetheless, LDS know their Church is still true despite the work of their apologists. LDS know this because they have prayed about it, and God has personally revealed the truthfulness of that proposition to them. So, for LDS, their Church being true does not mean that their prophets were correct on certain issues like racism.

4.4.5. *"Love means never having to say you're sorry"*⁷⁹

LDS sociologist Armand Mauss (2004:107) called out his own church for its institutional post-1978 approach to anti-Black racism as "benign and selective forgetfulness". The idea is to leave the past in the past "even if they originated as divine revelations... [e]specially if an event in the past is embarrassing". This course of action just

confuses the matter. Such negative thinking has no place in the Lord's kingdom. If harm has resulted from earlier ways of thinking, then everyone involved should forgive everyone else and get on with constructing a better future. Apologies or ringing declarations of disavowal should not be necessary, since few peoples or individuals have histories free of offense against others, and thus few are in a position to demand apologies. With time, memories of these offenses will fade automatically, and we will all be better for it. Meanwhile, if we have not made the requisite changes, let's not stir up useless and uncomfortable old memories.

⁷⁹ This is a famous line from the 1970 movie *Love Story*.

The result is Black LDS become isolated and are made the target of more racism.

Brooks (2020:164) disagrees with calling all this “benign”, for a couple reasons. First, history is selectively erased while the Church continues “key practices of white supremacy in Mormonism by excluding Black testimony, insisting on prophetic infallibility, repressing dissent, and fostering silent agreements among Mormons and between Mormons and the public to co-construct and preserve white innocence”. Second, this approach

signals to members that ‘selective’ ‘forgetting’ of past wrongs is enough to resolve them; that repentance need not involve the assumption of responsibility and reconciliation... that the discomfort that comes with individual and collective soul searching is ‘useless’ and potentially harmful. It fosters a limited morality that prioritizes the comfort of the majority and institutional gains over truthfulness and humility (164-5).

Brooks (165) says that this push in the Church to prioritize and sustain the comfort of the majority who are not Black is demonstrated in a rhetorical pattern that goes back to its national conflict over polygamy. She refers to this practice as “undergrounding”. The idea is to protect the faithful against outsiders who seek to destroy the beliefs and practices of the former. In the days when polygamy was practiced, a system of social networks developed to evade “prosecution or persecution for polygamy or unlawful co-habitation”. An insider/outsider language or narratives of beliefs and practice developed among the Saints

even after the abandonment of open polygamy. ...An ethos privileging opacity, institutional loyalty, hierarchy, and guardedness developed in LDS Church institutions (including Deseret Book and Brigham Young University) as Mormons attempted to preserve a residue of theocracy and difference even as they were assimilated into broader US society. The private-public split resulted in a form of self-consciousness described by one Mormon studies scholar as a ‘divided sense of self’ and related habits of double-coding in public speech, especially in situations where LDS people perceive a threat to their way of thinking. Mormons sometimes joke about this practice as ‘lying for the Lord’.

The initial issue was about how to define a wife and about what is considered a family, and it all began with Joseph Smith. On May 8, 1838, he stated,

‘Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?’

'No, not at the same time. But they believe that if their companion dies, they have a right to marry again. But we do disapprove of the custom, which has gained in the world, and has been practiced among us, to our great mortification, in marrying in five or six weeks, or even in two or three months, after the death of their companion. We believe that due respect ought to be had to the memory of the dead, and the feelings of both friends and children.' (Smith, 1978:3:28)

At this point, Smith had at least one plural wife: Fanny Alger (Compton, 1997:4). He may have had two plural wives then depending on when that year he married Lucinda Morgan Harris (49).

On May 26, 1844, Smith (right after he made his infamous boast that only he, not even Jesus, was able to keep the whole Church together) said again that he only had one wife (1978, 6:408-11). At this time, the Church admits he actually was married to around 30 to 40 wives (cf. footnote 24, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, s.a.g) and had polyandrous marriages with 12 to 14 women (cf. footnote 29). About a year before this statement that he only had one wife, his own infamous Scripture D&C 132:52-5 manipulated his first wife Emma to receive these other wives that God supposedly gave him.⁸⁰

With this as an understanding, Elder Stevenson's statement above, for example, may have been an instance of undergrounding. Yes, formally the Church is clear that it condemns all racism in any form. However, 1) they are yet to clear up if specific areas count as a form of racism or not, and 2) Stevenson's use of the present tense does not cover a condemnation of a specific area in the past. Transparency was still lacking in a case where there was an obvious goal of winning the outsiders over.

As for another example, when Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* famously interviewed LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley in 1996, Wallace brought up the priesthood ban and the mark of Cain. Hinckley never apologized. He simply said that the past Church leaders "interpreted doctrine that way" (*60 Minutes*, 2008). Indeed, he implied they were wrong, but that was not an apology. He never owned responsibility as a Church or expressed sorrow for the colossal failure and harm they had inflicted on Blacks... and on non-Blacks who were also bothered by their racism.⁸¹ He went on to say these things were behind them and were "little flicks of history" that should not be worried about. He downplayed the significance of this issue. He also did not worry about the facts of individual Blacks being priests and holding the office from almost the beginning of the Church and throughout the nineteenth century. Brooks (2020:168) says that

⁸⁰ This passage was added to the D&C in 1876 when D&C 101 was deleted. The latter section had a very strong statement supporting monogamy.

⁸¹ According to Black Pastor Cecil Murray (First African American Episcopal Church, Los Angeles, CA), Hinckley did issue a personal apology to him (Young, 2012).

“the focus was on establishing a new tone, a new public presence for the LDS Church. His priorities were institutional preservation and growth”. The basic message conveyed that this was still the Lord’s Church via a nontransparent historical strategy, one that carefully employed the insider/outsider narratives. Brooks goes on to say,

Nothing in his remarks unsettled the possessive investment in rightness that institutionalized Mormonism’s possessive investment in whiteness. It left the entire infrastructure of anti-Black Mormon racism intact, maintaining rhetorical strategies of containment and deflection that had been used continuously by LDS Church leaders to maintain resistance to outside pressure for change. While his style of presentation may have differed from his predecessors’, in his strategic deflection and evasion Hinckley worked deep in the tradition of LDS Church institutional rhetoric and thus communicated a sense of continuity and conservatism to LDS Church members. (169)

Much later, in a general conference talk, Hinckley (2006) did berate Church members for racial strife. He said,

I remind you that no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church of Christ. How can any man holding the Melchizedek Priesthood arrogantly assume that he is eligible for the priesthood whereas another who lives a righteous life but whose skin is of a different color is ineligible?

Still, this was not a problem that the Church as an institution felt the need to repent of. It was an “individual moral problem. It did nothing to repudiate the Church’s own collective historical practice of anti-Black discrimination, nor the system of ideas, beliefs, and practices that had sustained it for so long” (Brooks, 2020:171).

Unlike other churches, the Church has never formally apologized for the institutional racism it propagated to its members. According to Smith *et al.* (2020:142-3),

While the white Catholic Church, and Protestant-based faiths—Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church, Southern Baptist, Lutheran—have since acknowledged their racist past and issued public regrets for their role in black African slavery, Jim Crow racism, and their participation in the mistreatment of African Americans, no apology has been issued from the Mormon faith.

The 2013 GTE certainly disavowed past racist theories, as did Hinckley seventeen years earlier on *60 Minutes*, but neither was an apology. Seven years after the 2013 GTE, Brooks (186) said that “the Mormon practice of continuing revelation, the infallibility of LDS Church leaders, the ‘rightness’ of the LDS Church, and what collective repentance might look like have scarcely been considered”.

4.4.6. *Art*

The artwork in the Church not only conveys the beliefs of individual members, but from the perspective of the Church also teaches what one should think about the nature of God. Images of the Father and the Son are consistently portrayed as Whites. According to LDS art editor Hemming (2022:33), “Mormon art has for many decades depicted God the Father and Jesus as white, tall, physically fit, and bearded, with Heavenly Father slightly older or close to the same age as Jesus.” The Church (s.a.a) itself publishes the work of different artists depicting the Father and Son, but there is no depiction of them as Black; every depiction of them seems consistent with being ethnically White. Hemming went on to contrast this from depictions of the Heavenly Mother. Hemming says that these depictions “differed greatly from this norm” (33). She is concerned about uniform depictions of not just the Heavenly Mother, but of God. This rigidity excludes other versions. Hemming concludes:

The more images of deity that emerge in all different kinds of roles and types, the more we can collectively broaden our ideas of who God is and who has the divine within them. It is my personal hope that artists will even more enthusiastically reimagine deity in all kinds of forms, embracing the expansive God Mormonism deserves.

This amounts to creating God in the image of a specific group of humans. For Hemming, truth seems beside the point.

4.5. Concluding thoughts

Perennial racism is not simply found in LDS Scriptures; it is also found to be deeply embedded in the lives of typical LDS people. The 1978 revelation was a good start, but it was inadequate to root out all the racism within the Mormon Church. Old ways of thinking and acting are not easily remedied. However, after 47 years, one would rightly assume that the Church would have done a better job at rooting out these racist tendencies.

These tendencies are the natural result of Mormonism's perennial racism, but this result need not be the end result. The next chapter will provide an alternative that has been there all along, long before Mormonism came on the scene.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROPOSED REFORMED APOLOGETIC SOLUTIONS FOR PERENNIAL RACISM WITHIN MORMONISM

5.1. Introduction

The chapter proposes the Reformed apologetic solutions for perennial racism within the LDS Church. This chapter does this by using grammatical-historical methods. It is an apologetic study that applies certain skills (techniques) in examining how the LDS Church presents its position on the one hand and defends it on the other hand. It is within this Reformed apologetic framework that the solutions for perennial racism within the LDS Church are properly understood. Specifically, this chapter discusses how Mormonism *implicitly* promotes White supremacy in their worship and how they have made prophetic racist claims that did not come to pass or were provably false. The chapter argues that both these racist features of Mormonism invalidate it as truly being of divine origin.

This research views the missional apologetic framework in basically two integrated studies: 1) an apologetic study as the core focus, and 2) a missional study as the scope. The former defends the Christian faith against the attacks of a Mormon worldview (cf. 1 Pet 3:15; Jude 3), and the latter connects the apologetic study with the *missio Dei* perspective—the eternally omnipotent Triune Creator of all space and time is actively engaged in drawing all to himself as new creatures in the man Christ Jesus (cf. John 12:32). Within this missional framework, the multicultural dialogue of racism and slavery is properly understood.

5.2. Understanding the proposed Reformed apologetic solutions

Instead of getting lost in the world of one's unreliable feelings, the Bible is instead put forth as "a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet 1:19, KJV) and it has at least two basic objective tests for anyone who claims to be a prophet of God. Objective tests are not dependent on how one or one's culture feels nor are they dependent on one's personal beliefs. These tests are true despite one's inner life. These tests will be discussed and applied to the perennial racism of Mormonism. The result of these tests will demonstrate that, despite how one may feel, Mormonism cannot be of God. The chapter will demonstrate that these biblical tests have zero tolerance for false prophets, and that those who follow the Bible should have the same zero tolerance. The LDS excuse for their prophets' fallible agency is irrelevant if they do not pass these tests. Put simply, failed prophets are to be rejected as prophets of God.

Many Mormons have realized the perennial racism in their own Church and have unfortunately become resigned to agnosticism or even atheism. However, just because Mormonism continues to have fundamental racism because of their own prophets and Scripture is no good reason to give up on the historic Christian faith, which is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). Individuals and other churches that pretend to be Christian may indeed have *perennial* racism problems, but not the historic Christian faith. The God of the Bible does not discriminate based on race. For him, there is no partiality (Deut 10:17; 2 Chon 19:7; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Gal 3:28) and there is to be no partiality with his followers (Lev 19:15; Prov 28:21; 1 Tim 5:21; Jas 2:1-4). Consequently, whether they stay or leave their Church, the disaffected LDS have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. They have intellectually checked out.

Other Mormons may be convinced that their church does indeed have perennial racism, but they are still convinced that the LDS Church is the only true Church. They accept that their prophets and their revelations are fallible and particularly egregious in this racism matter, but they stay in their church because they take their feelings or their private testimony to be the word of God for them, and that word tells them they are in the truth. These LDS think it is not sound to throw the baby of the LDS Church out with the bathwater of perennial racism.

Nonetheless, all disaffected Mormons may have confidence in the Christian faith as exhibited by the Reformed apologetic solutions.

5.3. Understanding the Mormon doctrine of God

5.3.1. *Does the doctrine of God even matter?*

Joseph Smith (1977:344-5) recognized how important the doctrine of God is. He taught that it is the very first principle of the gospel to know for certainty the character of God, and if he failed to do this, then he was to be regarded as a false prophet or teacher. Today, though, the Church may seem to follow more of the advice of President Woodruff rather than Smith on what is important when it comes to believing in God. Woodruff clearly downplayed the knowledge of God. According to him (1895:355-6),

Cease troubling yourselves about who God is; who Adam is, who Christ is, who Jehovah is. For heaven's sake, let these things alone. Why trouble yourselves about these things? God has revealed Himself, and when the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants is fulfilled, whether there be one God or many gods they will be revealed to the children of men, as well as all thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Then why trouble yourselves about these things? God is God. Christ is Christ. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Ghost. That should be enough for you to know. If we want to know any more, wait till we get to where God is in person. ...God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, are the same yesterday, to-day [*sic*], and forever. That should be sufficient for us to know.

In Mormonism, there is no clear authorized understanding of what constitutes doctrine anyway. There is no systematic treatment of necessary and sufficient conditions for what would constitute doctrine. LDS philosopher Carmack (2023:136) says, "...[N]o writer, thinker, or prophet (to my knowledge) in the LDS Church has explicated to an acceptable level what *makes* x doctrine, *a* doctrine, and y concept a non-doctrine." Another LDS philosopher, Ericson (2007:74), says,

...a formalized framework of understanding and ruling upon Church doctrine has never been established. While there exists a codified framework of policies and procedures under Church government, a framework for defining 'easily identifiable core cases' of Church doctrine does not seem to exist; especially one that is universally accepted and understood by members of the Church.

With all this in mind, it is easier to see what Woodruff meant when he said that the Church would never be led astray by the president of the Church in Official Declaration 1. The Church simply treats other versions of God as nothing to worry about or at least secondary as to whether one holds Smith and subsequent prophets of the LDS Church to be prophets of the Lord. Most doctrines may easily be deemed non-essential.

5.3.2. The result of Mormonism's denial of traditional theism

Woodruff's statement, though, is quite an over-simplification. Basic Mormonism clearly goes beyond Woodruff's advice when the former stands against the theism held by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.⁸² Mormons certainly know about Joseph Smith's *first vision* which condemned all other churches (Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians are specifically mentioned in this context) and have trashed all their creeds as "an abomination" in God's sight (Joseph Smith—History 1:19, PGP). The LDS Church (s.a.d) has also stated:

Scholars have long acknowledged that the view of God held by the earliest Christians changed dramatically over the course of centuries. Early Christian views of God were more personal, more anthropomorphic, and less abstract than those that emerged later during Christianity's creedal stage. The key ideological shift that began in the second century, after the loss of apostolic authority, resulted from a conceptual merger of Christian doctrine with Greek philosophy.

Latter-day Saints believe the melding of early Christian theology with Greek philosophy was a grave error. Chief among the doctrines lost in this process was the nature of the Godhead. Latter-day Saints hold that God the Father is an embodied being with the attributes ascribed by the earliest Christians. That belief is consistent with the early Christian views of God, yet it differs from the later creeds.

⁸² General western, traditional, or classical theism holds that there is only one creator of everything outside himself, and he freely interacts with his creation. The view also holds to creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), and since this Creator is the creator and sustainer of the entire material universe, he is therefore outside of matter and it is therefore impossible for him to be a man in his nature.

We are all literally children of God, spiritually begotten in the premortal life. As His children, we can be assured that we have divine, eternal potential and that He will help us in our sincere efforts to reach that potential.

Mormonism has replaced traditional theism with a very literal anthropomorphism. Mormonism holds that God is a certain exalted man and that evidently implies he is of a particular race or ethnicity. That is, he has external features that are in keeping with a certain class of people. The God whom Jews, Christians, and Muslims have worshiped as the infinite, omnipotent, eternal, omnipresent Spirit in His nature, the only Creator of literally everything else outside his being has been condemned in Mormonism as not just a “grave error”, but as “impossible” and incomprehensible. According to the late President Joseph F. Smith (1977:55-6),

I do not believe in the doctrine held by some that God is only a Spirit and that he is of such a nature that he fills the immensity of space, and is everywhere present in person, or without person, for I can not [*sic*] conceive it possible that God could be a person, if he filled the immensity of space and was everywhere present at the same time. It is unreasonable, a physical, a theological inconsistency, to imagine that even God the eternal Father would be in two places, as an individual, at the same moment. It is impossible. But his power extends throughout the immensity of space. His power extends to all his creations, and his knowledge comprehends them all, and he governs them all and he knows all.

It is only impossible for LDS to conceive since, for them, everything, including all spirits, is matter. D&C 131:7-8 says, “There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter.” Further, Mormons flatly deny *creatio ex nihilo*. For them, the universe of intelligence, matter, and its laws are eternal. Material spirits have always existed as intelligences. D&C 93:29-35 says,

Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. ...For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element are inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy... The elements are the tabernacle of God; yea, man

is the tabernacle of God, even temples; and whatsoever temple is defiled, God shall destroy that temple.

Since God is more intelligent than the rest of the intelligences, he rules over them all, but they are all eternally existent (Abraham 3:18-22). The God of this world or set of worlds, according to Joseph Smith, is only relative to those worlds he rules over. As God, he begets eternal intelligences or other humans as spirit children in a pre-earth life (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:9). The Lord for this world or set of worlds organized the intelligences “before the world was” (Abraham 3:22). For LDS, God is an artificer or organizer within the spatiotemporal system of the universe; he is not a literal creator of the universe or all things outside his being as classical theists hold. LDS philosopher Peter Carmack (2023:105) states:

...it is possible that reality could be disordered with simple entities that have no bearing or relation to anything else. Nevertheless, happily, reality at its foundation is not like this at all. Indeed, there must be some kind of underlying structure to it (even though there is no explanation or reason for this structure) [.]

Reality is just a brute given for LDS. Miraculously, there was no Logos for it. McMurrin (1965:28) put it this way:

Mormonism has much in common with the naturalistic position of the Greeks. It holds, in the first place, that although the structure and configurations of the world are the product of God’s creative act, that anything at all should exist is not due to God but is simply a given fact. Just as it is the case that God exists, there are other realities as well. God is not the totality of original being and he is not the ultimate source or the creator of all being. This is a radical departure from the position of traditional theism, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, and the failure to recognize the far-reaching implications of this idea is a failure to come to grips with the somewhat distinctive quality of Mormon theology, its essentially non-absolutistic character.

Draper *et al.* (2005:275) describe God as “the supreme intelligence in the universe [who] is also more intelligent than the sum of all other intelligences.” The Church has also called God “the supreme

Governor of the universe” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013d[appendix]:652) and the BOM refers to him as “a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). Since LDS conceive of God as human in nature, then this entails that his race or ethnicity is supreme. Everything about him is supreme. The gospel would be in part that God is an exalted man of a particular race. Then again, perhaps God is interracial. Mormons tend to assume God is white, but generally, when asked, will not commit to what race he is. It is conspicuous by its absence that there is no authoritative statement that specifically claims what race or ethnicity God is. Given that he is human by nature, then he must have some ethnicity or at least some sort of skin pigmentation by definition. His skin cannot be all white and all black at the same time. Perhaps his skin is a mixture of different colors, and he is interracial. Nonetheless, however he chooses to appear at a particular time, his *natural* skin state must have some color to it.

The term “God” in LDS categories is further understood as a natural stage of development that any human may obtain, including our Heavenly Father who has already obtained it. That is the LDS view of exaltation. It is the end goal of every human even though most may probably never obtain it. Having said that, there is no room in LDS thought for God being God *by nature*. Why? Because, simply, an individual may *obtain* Godhood through God’s grace as well as a proper exercise of one’s agency. Mormonism holds their God to be a human in his nature and that he used an eternal universe of matter and its laws to become personally worthy enough to be exalted or become a God. His humanness is ontologically prior to advancing to any so-called divine nature. LDS Scripture in D&C 130:22 says, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013c:265). Worthy humans are the ones who are naturally advancing to the end stage of their development. That is what the so-called divine nature amounts to in Mormonism. It is not a divine *nature* as such; it is a divine or exalted *stage of development* that those with a human nature may enter. So, at least according to the popular B.H. Roberts’ Mormon understanding,⁸³ an eternal human intelligence is *somehow* begotten to Heavenly Parents as a zygote, which then naturally progresses to an embryo, fetus, newborn, toddler, child, teen, young adult, middle-aged adult, elderly adult in a pre-earth life (although it is not clear at what stage of development God sends his spirit children to earth). Once the human arrives on earth, he or she may begin all these stages of development again until, if they are worthy, they become a God just like their Heavenly Parents have done.⁸⁴

⁸³ For a breakdown of different LDS views on the relation between eternal intelligence and spirit children, see Shafovaloff (2024). Whether spirit begetting in a pre-earth life is the case or not is irrelevant to the point that God’s spirit children are human by nature and must develop into godhood.

⁸⁴ The LDS *Bible Dictionary* describes the term “damnation” as “the opposite of salvation, and [it] exists in varying

5.3.3. LDS defenses of an apparently white supremacist God

The Church (s.a.b) argues that God the Father must be physical, an exalted man, since the Scripture teaches that humans are made in his image (Gen 1:26; Jas 3:9) and are referred to as his children, his offspring (Ps 82:6; Acts 17:28-9). This is taken quite literally. Since he is an exalted man, then again, this implies he is of a certain race or ethnicity.

If humans are literally God's offspring and God is an exalted man with a certain ethnicity, then what is his ethnicity? Given all the various ethnicities produced, it should be obvious that God is not a man with all the various colors. Perhaps it may be inferred that God has multiple wives of various races. Or perhaps God has within his DNA the ability to somehow reproduce various ethnicities. Then again, God could have children all of one race or ethnicity in heaven, but when they are sent to earth, they take on the racial identities of all those who came from Adam and Eve. These identities have general external features depending on where on the earth they end up. So darker skin people naturally originate closer to the equator while whiter skin people naturally originate further from it.

We must recall that the Church does portray God's color as white via its artwork on the Church's official website (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, s.a.a). This suggests White supremacy—the Church is teaching that God is an exalted White man, and he is supreme.

LDS Rodney Meldrum, the founder and director of FIRM (Foundation for Indigenous Research and Mormonism), recognizes this problem. In his interview with the founder and director of Mormon Stories Podcast, John Dehlin, Meldrum claimed,

Were we different colors in the preexistence [than we are now]? And my understanding is probably not. I think we were all the same color [as we are now]. And when we are resurrected with perfect bodies, are we going to have the same color, you know, the coloration that we have now, and I think

degrees. All who do not obtain the fulness of celestial exaltation will to some degree be limited in their progress and privileges, and hence be damned to that extent.” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013d[appendix]:624) Given that there are many who are not exalted in the celestial kingdom, the highest of the three degrees of glory, then counterintuitively, damnation, by definition, occurs there as well.

the answer to that basically is, well, what color is God? You know, is God Black? Is he Asian? What physical features does God have?”

Dehlin asked, “What do you think?”

Meldrum said,

And my personal feeling is that he is light. He has all the colors. His children are every color. I mean, obviously not like green and purple, but basically all the natural colors that human beings come in are all part of his seed. All part of his group. And I think when everything is said and done, we’re going to be basically the same light. When I say light, meaning it has every color in it. From a scientific standpoint light has all the different hues, and all the colors.

Dehlin asked, “What about facial features? Will people who were of African descent here have the same type of hair?”

Meldrum responded,

I would think they would have the same kind of hair, the same kind of skull structure, probably the same kind of bone structure, teeth structure... because each of those things over the course of time have evolved, ok, into. I mean my descendants are not going to look like the same as somebody else’s descendants who are Asian, for example.

Dehlin asked, “What about height? Will height persist in the afterlife?”

Meldrum replied, “I hope so. ...If you didn’t have the Caucasian features that you have, your facial features and so forth, you wouldn’t look like you.” (Mormon Stories Podcast, 2022:1:01:00)

In addition to this claim about God being light, it seems inevitable that Mormons will offer a *tu quoque* argument. If historic Christians hold that Jesus is a man who is Jehovah, the Lord Almighty, then are not these Christians racists too? LDS use this argument to demonstrate that God is an exalted man. The late BYU theologian, Stephen Robinson (1991:82), gives an example of this when he says, “If God the Son can be fully divine and yet possess flesh and bones, there is no *a priori* reason why God the Father could not have a body also—unless, of course, one insists on strictly Platonic definitions of God.”

5.3.4. *Why prima facie?*

Finally, why merely on *first appearance* does Mormonism promote White supremacy? The first reason would be an agnostic option offered by LDS. In other words, perhaps God chooses to appear in a certain skin coloration, but that does not entail that is what he is in his nature. His natural coloration simply has not been revealed.⁸⁵ That may be, but whatever it turns out to be, that color would seem to be supreme.

The second reason seems to come at quite a cost—the LDS would have to qualify the term “supreme”. Again, it is supreme only relatively speaking. It is like referring to the *Supreme* Court of the US. The court of heaven of course trumps any earthly supreme court. The Supreme Court of the US is “supreme” only relative to the legal system within the US. Similarly, for LDS, God is supreme, but not in the traditional sense assumed by classical theism and specifically, *perfect being theology*.⁸⁶

For classical theism, God is supreme over nature in the sense that nature or the universe exists only because of him. He is ontologically prior to the universe. His being exists prior to the being of anything else. However, for Mormonism, God is simply supreme for this world or whatever number of worlds he organized and rules over. That includes what Moses 1:33 says: “And worlds without number have I created.” In Mormonism, “worlds without number” still is not literally *all worlds*. Classical theism, on the other hand, claims God is supreme for any conceivable world since all worlds would be because of his very nature. That is not an option for Mormonism because their God is an exalted man whose Godhood is ontologically after the universe. God is not truly supreme over matter and its laws since they are eternal, and he must *submit* to these *external* items to get anything done. For example, he utilizes the law of gravity and the physical laws that hold the ground together to walk into the temple. Mormonism elevates the universe as supreme whereas traditional theism devalues the universe as dependent on God who truly is supreme. This is why, technically speaking, Mormonism is a form of naturalism while traditional theism is quite literally *super-naturalism*.

Further, Mormonism’s God is not supreme over other Gods who became Gods prior to him or simply other Gods who rule over other worlds. The God of this world does not rule over or have anything to do with these worlds. His jurisdiction applies only to the worlds he made. This is not a theoretical possibility

⁸⁵ The late Utah State Institute of Religion professor Heber Snell once said that “God may be either white or black” (Harris, 2024:51). His local leaders threatened to excommunicate him for this. LDS intellectuals have a contentious history with the Church over this issue.

⁸⁶ Perfect being theology assumes an Anselmian understanding that God is that which none greater can be conceived.

within Mormonism; this is what Joseph Smith taught.⁸⁷ A couple months prior to his assassination, Smith (1977:345-6) said in a general conference,⁸⁸

I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. ...[H]e was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.

Notice that it is not merely that the Father went through an exaltation process as the Son did in growing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man (cf. Luke 2:52). Smith went on to claim that the Father came to live, die, and rise again just as the Son did,⁸⁹ and then Smith (346) said, “Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, *the same as all Gods have done before you.*” (emphasis added)

Given the awareness that humans have of their own finitude, fallibility, and sinfulness, humans know they are not Gods now even if they hope to become Gods according to Mormonism. As such, there must have been a point when God also was aware that he was not God even though he was intending to become a God. He perfected himself by reliance on his God, and thus, at one point, became a God just like all humans can become a God. Smith developed this teaching from the famous 1840 Lorenzo Snow couplet: “‘As man now is, God once was:’ ‘As God now is, man may be.’” (Lund, 1982) Further, two years prior to Smith’s King Follett discourse, then Apostle Wilford Woodruff also pointed out that Smith taught God became a God. Woodruff (1842) said,

Joseph the Seer taught the following principles that the God & father of our Lord Jesus Christ was once the same as the Son or Holy Ghost but having redeemed a world became the eternal God of that world he had a son Jesus Christ who redeemed this earth the same as his father had a world which made them equal & the Holy Ghost would do the same in turn & so would all the Saints who inherited a Celestial glory so their would be Gods many & Lords many.

⁸⁷ For a recent defense of Smith teaching this contrary to LDS philosopher Blake Ostler’s modern revisionism, see Pankratz (2022). For an introductory critique of Ostler’s *monarchotheism*, see Parrish (2002).

⁸⁸ This controversial conference talk was famously known as the King Follett discourse. For an overview that answers relevant questions, see Shafovaloff (2025a).

⁸⁹ Smith (346) did this by distorting John 5:19 to say that Jesus *saw* everything the Father did to become exalted. Christians have never understood this verse that way. Instead, they have simply taken it to be an indication that Jesus “sees” (present tense) the Father working through him to accomplish the Father’s purposes.

In addition, just eleven days prior to his death, Smith (1977:373) taught,

‘Intelligences exist one above another, so that there is no end to them.’

If Abraham reasoned thus—If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly, Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that *He* had a Father also?

...I want you to pay particular attention to what I am saying. Jesus said that the Father wrought precisely in the same way as His Father had done before Him. As the Father had done before? He laid down His life, and took it up the same as His Father had done before.

Fielding Smith (1955:47) taught the same:

Evidently his Father passed through a period of mortality even as he passed through mortality, and as we all are doing. Our Father in heaven, according to the Prophet, had a Father, and since there has been a condition of this kind through all eternity, each Father had a Father, until we come to a stop where we cannot go further, because of our limited capacity to understand.

For the vast majority of LDS throughout their history, there never was a time when there were not Gods organizing an eternal universe and becoming Gods.⁹⁰ An individual intelligence still had to become a God at a particular point in time. Nonetheless and again, in the LDS worldview, the universe is logically prior to the eternality of Gods.

Yet logical priority is not temporal priority. Suppose God created a bowling ball on a couch all at once. There are at least two things created—the bowling ball and the couch. However, there is also at least one other thing created at this event—the indentation on the couch. The indentation owes its existence to God

⁹⁰ For LDS quotes affirming this view as well as alternative LDS views, see Shafovaloff (2025b).

of course, but also to the bowling ball he created. However, this does not occur one right after the other since they were made at the same time. Nonetheless, the bowling ball is logically prior to the indentation.⁹¹ Thus, there never was a time when there was no God even though the universe was still logically prior to Gods and temporally prior to the God of this world, namely, our Heavenly Father.

The upshot of all this is that the God of Mormonism is the *supreme* God, but only in a relative sense of that term, and hence, there is no genuine or absolute ethnic supremacy. Anyone who must become supreme is really not supreme. He is only supreme “for us” as LDS like to say.⁹² Yes, there may be White supremacy within the LDS doctrine of the Heavenly Father. However, the Gods prior to him may have all sorts of various colors to them, “one above the other, so that there is no end to them” (Smith, 1977:373). Many LDS do not like to acknowledge this conclusion because it forces their hand on polytheism. Nonetheless, it does get them off the *absolute* White supremacy charge. Unfortunately for LDS at this point, their God has been outed for who he really is, namely, neither absolute nor supreme.

5.4. Testing the prophets

5.4.1. First test: Is another god being taught?

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 is the first test the Bible gives for being a prophet of God. It states:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, “Let us follow other gods” (gods you have not known) “and let us worship them,” you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death for inciting rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. That prophet or dreamer tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.

⁹¹ This example originates from Professor J.P. Moreland.

⁹² This follows Joseph Smith’s henotheistic interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 KJV, which says there are “gods many, and lords many... But to us there is but one God”. Smith (1977:370) said “that is *pertaining to us*”. He went on to say that “we are to be in subjection to that one” and he had “it from God...a witness of the Holy Ghost, and a testimony that Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods in the text” (371).

A prophet's judgments about God, particularly when they are serving in their capacity as prophets of the Lord, may be fatal—physically and spiritually. Notice that the so-called prophet need not claim the Lord is speaking through him or her. Even Second Counselor of the First Presidency, J. Reuben Clark, Jr. (1979:76), admitted:

There are those who insist that unless the Prophet of the Lord declares, 'Thus saith the Lord,' the message may not be taken as a revelation. This is a false testing standard. For while many of our modern revelations as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants do contain these words, there are many that do not.

However, this does not contradict the view that prophets have a right to personal judgments that may end up being wrong. The point of the Deuteronomy passage is the test of a so-called prophet who incites rebellion to lead others away from what the Lord has already commanded and revealed about himself. That is not necessarily the same as a so-called prophet being asked what he or she thinks on some matter, even concerning some non-essential point of doctrine on the nature of God.

Further, whether the Church validates this prophet and the message is irrelevant. If a prophet simply teaches other gods that have not been previously known, then that prophet is to be considered a false prophet, not sent from the Lord.

5.4.1.1. What counts as teaching another god?

Not all false doctrine is created equal. For example, the biblical doctrine of speaking in tongues for today is not as weighty as the doctrine of God. One's doctrine on the former is either true or false. If false, one may still be right with God and part of the Body of Christ. The doctrine of tongues is what may be called peripheral or non-essential. It has brought about certain denominations, so it is important, but not as important as other matters. Many other examples may be offered of non-essential issues. The late Bible Answer Man and author of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin, states:

Now, I am not going to argue about the pretribulation, midtribulation, or posttribulation positions... We've been so busy fighting among ourselves. ...Premillennial, aumillennial, postmillennial. Sprinkle them, pour 'em, immerse 'em. Give 'em wine, grape juice, or Coca-cola at the communion service; leavened bread, unleavened bread. Bishops, ruling elders, deacons; no bishops, no ruling elders, no deacons.

... We *must* get our minds off peripheral theology and get down to the main business of the church—which happens to be how to penetrate the world. (Martin & Rische, 1999:72-3)

Only the most narrow-minded of fundamentalists think that every biblical issue is an essential issue of the Faith. People of this sort think only their completely uniform group are the real Christians. However, charity and grace require humility concerning one's beliefs and learning from others who do not see things the same. The Apostle Paul says that “now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). The 16th–17th century Lutheran theologian Rupertus Meldenius' famously stated: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity” (Ross, 2009).

Though the doctrine of God is weightier than the doctrine of tongues, many areas of the doctrine on God are more essential than others. In other words, some theories that attempt to make sense of God are more essential than other theories. For example, the Great Schism of 1054 divided the West from the East primarily over the issue of the *Filioque* (Latin for “and of / from the Son”). The East taught the Spirit proceeded from only the Father, but the West claimed the Spirit proceeded from the Father *and the Son*, and the West added this to the original Nicene Creed (Jones, 2009:69-71). Again, these are important teachings, but East and West still regard one another as genuine Christians and thus recognize that some matters are even more important. The point is that Christian denominations do in fact differ on various areas on the doctrine of God but still regard differing denominations as part of the Body of Christ.

Individuals who make up the Church need discernment of course, but they also need the humility to allow for genuine opinions on God to be expressed within the Church. The Church must not immediately assume that a differing opinion on God necessarily means that one is outside the Church, even on some

beliefs that others in the Church find, through a discursive reasoning process, to be a denial of some essential doctrine. Grace needs to be offered since all members of the Church are at different stages of development in their knowledge of God and no one is perfect in all their beliefs. If perfect theology is a requirement for salvation, no one would be saved. Children may have never thought about essential doctrines of the faith, and yet they may be saved (Matt 19:14). Many adults have the minds of children when they come to faith in Christ. The thief on the cross who trusted Christ was probably not a Trinitarian. The first few centuries of the Church were still attempting to work out a coherent systematic doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God. Of course, hindsight is 20/20, but mistakes were still made. It is incorrect to assume the Church had it all together on day one. Just as one imperfectly grows in knowledge of one's spouse, even today the Church is still imperfectly growing in its knowledge of her Husband. Even regarding these who deny one or more essential doctrines of the faith, we can reason that perhaps these deniers were taught by dubious individuals or the teaching was delivered very unreasonably. That would seem to justify the denial at least to a certain extent. As Dennis Monokroussos (2024c) states:

It's pretty hard to give a set of airtight necessary and sufficient conditions for guilt and innocence.

... I wouldn't at all say that it doesn't matter what we believe. What we believe about God, and not just in our creedal formulations, matters a great deal. We should believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, and in the Incarnation, and that Christ died for our sins, and that we are saved by grace through faith, and so on. Someone who teaches against those doctrines is badly mistaken and should be corrected. Whether their error and their level of culpability damns them, I'll leave to God. But their position is unstable and unsafe at best, and they and their hearers should be corrected. (To give another analogy from the world of sin and vice: Not every alcoholic who enters a bar will fall, but it's incredibly unwise for an alcoholic to go there.)

Monokroussos (2024e) continues in another email:

...[These are] not cases where the error is obvious, but on complicated matters where Christians still disagree and/or took a long time to work out a difficult formula. Galatians [1:6-9] isn't like that at all. Their error isn't complicated and its significance is obvious. The Judaizers claimed that salvation comes through obedience to the works of the Law. That's not a "oops, just missed!"

situation like the Oriental Orthodox objection to Chalcedonian Christology; the Judaizers miss pretty much the whole point of Christ's passion.

...But I'll grant that on clear cases pertaining to essentials I could have drawn a stronger line in the sand. My primary concern in replying to you was to block arguments of the form 'X is an error, and X implies Y, which implies Z...which is heretical. Therefore, someone who holds X is a heretic and thus damned.'

Considering another to be damned should only occur when there are obvious disagreements about the most obvious essential doctrines of the faith. So, there are still boundaries, and holding certain doctrines on God could jeopardize one's standing within the Body of Christ. The Spirit is the one who ultimately secures individuals into the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). It is in Christ that individuals are declared to be the children of God regardless of ethnicity, work status, or sex (Gal 3:26-8). In Christ there is no longer any condemnation (Rom 8:1). The Bible affirms that knowing "the only true God and Jesus" is eternal life (John 17:3). Following a false god is idolatry, and those who do so without repenting will not have eternal life (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Contrary to Woodruff's dismissive attitude, doctrine matters. Since the demons believe in one God (Jas 2:19), doctrine is not sufficient, but it certainly is necessary. Paul tells Timothy to watch both his life and doctrine carefully to save himself as well as his hearers (1 Tim 4:16). This is why Jesus's identification was of the utmost importance to him (Matt. 16:13-20; John 8:24). This is why Jesus and his apostles warn of false Christs, prophets, and spirits (Matt 24:24; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Cor 11:3-4, 13-5; 1 John 4:1). The Bible also affirms that salvation is a matter of declaring Jesus is Lord and believing he rose from the dead (Rom 10:9). His Lordship is "over all" as the previous Romans chapter affirmed (9:5). He is the Great I Am, and without affirming this, one is dead in sin (John 8:24, 56-9). The Bible also affirms that it is of anti-Christ to deny that Jesus came in the flesh (2 John 1:7), for he promises to raise his *body* from death (John 2:19-21). Therefore, Jesus' death and resurrection were physical, not a mere spiritual metaphor. Jesus teaches that it is the one who hears his words and believes in the Father who sent him that has passed from death to eternal life (John 5:24).

Since Jesus declares eternal life to be knowing the one true God (Jn 17:3), one must not believe the Father to be a separate God united with other Gods merely in purpose or in a human nature that is shared eternally. That would be bad fruit from a corrupt tree, and this is indicative of the false prophets (cf. Matt. 7:15-23). That would be breaking the very first commandment (Ex 20:3). The Father and the Son are both the one true God, and this nature they share is not human, but divine or that of the Holy Creator (Num. 23:19; Hos 11:9; Rom 3:4; Gal 4:8; Heb 6:18). If Jesus is not the one true God, then he is a false god. However, he taught that he is equal to God and that all are to honor him just as they do the Father (John 5:18-23). There is only one Master who is to receive this worship (Matt 4:10; 6:24). Further, since the Holy Spirit is revealed as God (Isa 44:24; Gen 1:2; 2 Sam 23:2-3; Acts 5:3-4), he too must be the only true God. However, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not refer to different names used by one person. The person of the Father is not the person of the Son, and the person of the Son is not the person of the Holy Spirit, and the person of the Holy Spirit is not the person of the Father (Luke 3:21-2; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:24; 17:1-5). Scripture affirms there is only one God who alone created everything outside himself and all other gods are idols, false gods, or simply no gods by nature (Deut 10:14; Ps 96:4-5; 135:5-6; Isa 43:10; 44:6, 8, 24; 1 Cor 8:1-6; Gal 4:8). Therefore, the basic doctrine of the Trinity is affirmed in the Bible. There are three Persons who are eternally, inseparably, but distinctly the only Creator of everything else.

Even though there are still disputes within the Church on different models of the Trinity, both the prominent Eastern and Western traditions agree with these scriptural propositions of the doctrine. In these essential areas of belief, the Church affirms agreement through its creeds on who God is. Those who affirm and those who deny this doctrine of God cannot both be right. Either the doctrine of the Trinity is true, or it is false. If true, then the so-called prophets who in their official capacity promote a denial on this fundamental issue would fail the test of Deuteronomy 13:1-5. If the doctrine of the Trinity is what the Lord has already commanded in his word (implicitly through progressive revelation in the Bible), then prophetic deniers of this doctrine are devaluing at least one of the members of the Godhead and promoting another god or no god at all. They would be the ones, as Deuteronomy 13:5 says, who are leading others away from what the Lord has commanded.

The larger point is that one does not determine what God to believe merely based on one's feelings as the final word. No god that merely feels good will do. Humans tend to create a god that looks a lot like themselves. Voltaire famously said that God created man in the beginning, and man has been attempting

to return the favor ever since. Instead, one must submit to the word of God, and test so-called prophets by the word of God. The Son of God is now the final Word (Heb 1:1-2). May honest mistakes happen even when consulting the word of God? Certainly. However, God has still given his word as a light to make one's paths straight. It must be honored and correctly handled (2 Tim 2:15) or one will be judged for it, and it is teachers will incur the weightier judgment (Jas 3:1). Judgment ultimately belongs to the Lord, but those who follow him are instructed to judge not by appearance, but righteously (John 7:24).

5.4.1.2. A critique of the God of Mormonism

God has already revealed his word, and those who bring another gospel from it are to be damned (Gal 1:6-9). Given this as well as what Deuteronomy 13:1-5 says, it seems that if an individual claiming to be a prophet gives a teaching of God that contradicts what God has already revealed about his own character and nature, then that prophet cannot be a prophet of God.

Since that is the case, then Young's Adam-God doctrine (or "theory", as the Church describes it), for example, clearly goes against the knowledge of God. As such, what President Woodruff promises in Official Declaration 1—that a president of the LDS Church would never lead the Church astray—is also clearly false. That is, Young was clearly leading the Church astray for quite a while by following another god. That god had a character that was evidently a sinner. The biblical God's character of absolute inherent holiness should count as an essential doctrine, but the LDS Church does not see it that way. On this basis alone, Brigham Young should be regarded as a false prophet since he was speaking in his official role as a prophet and since not even the LDS Church today agrees with his teaching.⁹³ Even though the LDS Church has taught the Adam-God teaching was "false doctrine" and "not according to the scriptures [*sic*]" (Kimball, 1976), LDS still regard Young as a prophet of the Lord.⁹⁴ Kimball never acknowledges Young as teaching this doctrine, but says it was "alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations." According to McKeever (2007),

⁹³ This is another area of doctrine that separates the LDS from fundamentalist Mormon churches today.

⁹⁴ It is possible that some small minority may not be as accepting (the LDS term is "sustaining") and may go so far to claim that at least he was the president of the Church yet remain agnostic or critical of his prophetic status, given this and other issues like his racism.

For years Mormon authorities have attempted to downplay the severity of Young's statements. It is not uncommon to hear Latter-day Saints excuse Young's conclusions by saying he was either misunderstood or even misquoted. This thought has been echoed by numerous Latter-day Saints who feel uncomfortable admitting their prophet may have really believed such teachings.

However, with the 2013 GTE, these downplay attempts concerning the Adam-God theory are no longer needed. If Young's and other Church leader's racism were simply an errant past theory no longer accepted by the Church, then the same applies to Young's well-documented Adam-God theory that he continued to teach in his official capacity for over twenty years.

Furthermore, if some prophets in their official capacity say God showed partiality and cursed certain people with dark skin, discriminated or punished them from a priesthood that is required to enter the highest degree in the afterlife, and regarded them as an inferior race, then that would be a fundamentally abominable revelation—"false doctrine" and "not according to the scriptures [*sic*]". It would not be a revelation at all. Instead, it would be an opinion or theory that attempts to pass as a revelation. It would be indicative of someone not led of God—a false prophet that has no clue about God's character. It would also be advancing a theory of a god who is a sinner and not perfect love in his nature (1 John 4:7-8). It would be fundamentally opposed to the good news or the gospel, since the actual good news is about God so loving the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and whoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

The LDS Church teaches that eternal life is exaltation; it is being able to "live in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom of heaven" with the Heavenly Father (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009:275). However, the Bible teaches that eternal life is not just offered in the future (Jude 21), but *prior* to one's death as a Christian (John 5:24 and 1 John 5:10-3). One may have the promise of eternal life now. Further, there was a time for most of the history of the LDS Church that Blacks of African ancestry were not offered LDS eternal life in any stage. That is an indictment on God which assails his perfect and loving character by most of the leaders in the history of the LDS Church. The same is true of any racist prophet (e.g., Elijah Muhammad's teaching of the White devil).

As for God's nature, classical theists do not agree at all with LDS that spirits are material in their nature. Classical theists assume the One who created matter should not be conceived of in such physical terms. For them, God does not fill the universe like water fills a glass. God created the glass and thus he is not spatially contained or limited within the glass.

Mormons obviously use very physical language in their descriptions of God. Again, for them, God is an exalted man. However, in Meldrum's description of God, his language is confused. When Dehlin attempts to tie Meldrum down as to whether God is one color, Meldrum claims God is light, which scientists speak of as containing all different hues in it. What exactly does that mean? How does a physical object have all the colors? Is God multicolored like a rainbow? Or does he have the capacity to produce various colored offspring? If so, then God must have a color to his skin. So, what skin color does he have?

The problem is that Meldrum confuses the statement "God is light" with an idea that God is physical light—photons of some sort—and still does not answer the question about the shade of God's skin. Yes, in Psalm 27:1 God is described by the Psalmist as the light of his life, and in John 8:12 Jesus is described as the light of the world, but here light is a metaphor for the source of all goodness and truth. Jesus is one's salvation. The John passage does not mean that Jesus is using the word "light" as a scientist would.

Jesus was a Jew who had one skin pigmentation. He also had facial features common to Jewish men of his time. If God is an exalted man who retains his same physical features so that he continues to look like himself, then it follows that after his exaltation he retained his skin pigmentation and facial features. He retained his ethnicity. Meldrum wants to have his ethnicity cake retained so everyone will look like themselves in the afterlife, but he also wants to eat this cake with a category fallacy so that he does not come off looking like a White supremacist or racial supremacist. He cannot have it both ways. Turning God into some sort of photon is like assuming the thought of lunch is closer to one's right ear than one's left ear. Thoughts are not physical, and God is not physical light.

Further, if God is light in Meldrum's very physical terms, then God is not human in his nature,⁹⁵ and then Meldrum's theology is no longer Mormon theology. Humans, as God's literal offspring in a pre-earth life, are no longer humans spending their lives attempting to become exalted men just as their Heavenly Father did. Instead, the nature of humans turns out to be a façade, and humans are merely different configurations of photons. Of course, Meldrum would never claim that for humans, because he knows

⁹⁵ This is a point Dennis Monokroussos (2024b) made to the researcher.

that Mormon theology is clear that there is nothing *intrinsically* different from humans and the Gods. The LDS Church (s.a.b) states:

Latter-day Saints see all people as children of God in a full and complete sense; they consider every person divine in origin, nature, and potential. Each has an eternal core and is “a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.” Each possesses seeds of divinity and must choose whether to live in harmony or tension with that divinity. Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all people may “progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny.” Just as a child can develop the attributes of his or her parents over time, the divine nature that humans inherit can be developed to become like their Heavenly Father’s.

It should be clear that humans are not particles or waves in a scientific sense, and therefore from a *reductio ad absurdum*, neither is their Heavenly Father.

The problem with the *tu quoque* argument is that it demonstrates a confusion about the two natures of Christ. Even more fundamentally, there is a confusion about what a nature is. A nature is something’s whatness. It is the most fundamental statement about a thing. A nature grounds something’s existence through each of its stages of development, if development is part of its nature. Galatians 4:8, which was originally written in Greek to a Greek audience with Greek categories of thinking, means that God is God by nature. He is the opposite of all other gods who are not gods by nature. According to Cole (1999:163-4),

The use of *physei, by nature*, is interesting. Just as Paul had pointed out to Peter at Antioch that they too were Jews ‘by birth’, or ‘naturally’ ([Gal] 2:15), so here he points out that, by their very nature, these ‘elements’, whatever they are, could not be gods. Had he enlarged on this theme, it would doubtless have involved the Hebrew doctrine of creation. To Paul, the great sin of idolatry is to worship the created thing rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25); and whether it be the ‘elements’ or the ‘heavenly bodies’, all are alike the work of God’s hand.

A tree, for example, is also the work of God’s hand. A tree has a particular nature that may begin with a seed, a cutting, a branch, or a tissue culture. The tree has treeness that grounds its existence as it grows and develops. One may be so in love with a particular tree that it in effect *becomes* a god to the

individual.⁹⁶ “Trees are the answer”, so the bumper sticker says. It is still a tree even though it has gained *supreme* status for the individual worshipper. Nonetheless, the tree is not God by nature.

Similarly, in Mormonism, God is technically not God by nature. He is human by nature who became exalted; he reached a certain supreme status. His divinity was not externally assigned to him; but was developed internally. However, that only demonstrates that he naturally developed into a God; it does not demonstrate that his nature is divine. Nonetheless, his nature is not God, but human and this is contrary to what Deuteronomy 10:14, Numbers 23:19, 1 Kings 8:27, Hosea 11:9, Rom 3:4, 11:33-6, Acts 17:24-8, Galatians 4:8, and Hebrews 6:18 say.⁹⁷ Further, if God is not a human in his nature, then he cannot be of a certain human race. He is not a human of any sort.

Contrary to Robinson’s claim, Christians do not merely insist on Platonic definitions; they primarily insist on the plain meaning of Scripture in its Hebrew and Greek contexts while also finding meaning through a beneficial Church tradition that has thought deeply about these matters for a couple of millennia.⁹⁸ On the one hand, the Bible clearly teaches the deity of Christ. Jesus is “Immanuel”, “God with us” (Matt 1:23) or God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16) since he is our great God and savior (Tit 2:13). God purchased his church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). He was the creator of all things from the beginning and thus was never created (John 1:1-3, 14; Rom 9:5; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:13-8). On the other hand, Jesus was born to Mary, he “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). He did have blood (Acts 20:28). He did not know everything (Matt 24:36). He became poor (2 Cor 8:9). The Bible refers to Jesus even now as a man— “there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:5). Christ’s attributes are not contradictory since they are in reference to two different natures—one human and one divine—in one person. The second person of God in his divine

⁹⁶ This is the sense of 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. Even though an idol “is nothing” in itself, it may still be “called” a god. Yet, for the Church, there is only one God who created all things. That is a God who is God by nature.

⁹⁷ LDS who claim humans are “god[s] in embryo” (cf. Kimball, S.W., 1982:28) are confused. Humans by nature are creations dependent on God for their very existence. To God belongs the heavens even the highest of heavens (Deut 10:14). Thus, God in his nature is not dependent on anyone. Further, the nature of God makes it *impossible* for him to lie (Heb 6:18). However, the nature of humans as well as angels, who are created a little higher than humans (Ps 8:5), entails the capacity to lie. Nonetheless, humans still mirror or image the invisible God even after the fall (Gen 1:26-7; Col 1:15; Jas 3:9). LDS hold that humans are not simply in God’s physical image, but also in his nature. Regardless of whether that shared nature is human or divine, the LDS view requires too low a view of God and too high a view of humans.

⁹⁸ It may be asserted that Mormonism, too, insists on other Greek philosophical definitions—e.g., a literal anthropomorphism, polytheism, naturalism, preexistence of the soul, a beginningless universe, etc. However, claiming that the origins of a belief invalidate it is a classic genetic fallacy. Just because one learns that 2+2=4 from a terrorist, for example, is no reason to conclude that one is holding a false and unjustified belief.

nature was not a man, as Hosea 11:9 says. However, it is the prerogative of the Almighty to fashion a human nature to function as a human on earth. That human nature began to exist 2,000 years ago. However, the second person of God has always existed as God, since God in his nature is God by nature (Gal 4:8). This is what Philippians 2:5-10 teaches. God humbled himself in a nature of a servant. Jesus was a human attachment that expressed the divine hard drive. The attachment was not the hard drive. The former merely, but perfectly, expressed the latter without sin.

Most Christians hold to the distinct natures of Christ as a means of making sense of these apparently contradictory properties in the person of Christ.⁹⁹ The formal statement on the two natures in one divine person originated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Jones (2009:57) quotes from it: “‘Christ [is] ... recognized in two natures, without confusion, division, or separation ... but not as if Christ were parted into two persons.’” Then Jones says, “This understanding of Christ became known as the ‘Two-Nature’ view or ‘Dyophysitism.’” These terms are not biblical terms, but that by itself does not invalidate the view. The terms “missionary” or “moral objectivism” are also not biblical terms, but that is no reason to disregard them and their intended meanings. Syntax has many ways of expressing the same semantics.

As a result of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, Christians do not claim that the weak human nature of Christ is what is supreme. There is no supreme human race since they are all equally human by nature and all created in the *Imago Dei*. What is truly supreme is the divine nature of Christ. In that nature, God has no human race or ethnicity that is superior to all other human ethnicities for the simple reason that he is not human at all. He reigns supreme over all humanity, since he is “God, not man—the Holy One” (Hos 11:9). There is no qualification as to what type of man, for he is not a man of any sort—mere, exalted, Black, White, or otherwise. As God, he stands in contrast to all the idols or false gods who did not create all things (Gen 1:1, Ps 96:4-5, Isa 44:6, 8, and 24, John 1:1-3, and 1 Cor 8:1-6). He is an omnipresent spirit who has no spatial dimensions (John 4:21-4) since he created space from an absolute beginning a finite number of years ago. As 1 Kings 8:27 and 2 Chronicles 6:18 both say, even the highest of heavens cannot contain him, let alone can a temple be built for him. These verses indicate through a

⁹⁹ Not all Christians supported this solution. According to Jones (2009:57), “After the Council of Chalcedon, some Christians in Egypt and Syria still supported One-Nature theology. These groups eventually pulled away from the Roman and Eastern churches. Today, these churches are known as Coptic Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox Churches; hundreds of years later, they remain committed to One-Nature theology.” This still preserves and does not mix divine properties with human properties in one new nature. They worried about two natures of Christ entailing two persons (Nestorianism). The difference, though, between this and what the Chalcedonian adherents affirm simply seems to turn on how many natures there are in the incarnate Son. Both views affirm the same things otherwise. Regardless, Scripture is not clear on the importance of this syntax regarding one’s salvation (Monokroussos, 2024c).

rhetorical question that God does not live on earth with humans. However, and again, God did dwell on earth with humans by taking on a spatial nature, which in and of itself, is not God.

Think of it by way of the example of the Holy Spirit being present at the baptism of Jesus. The text of Luke 3:21-2 indicates that the Holy Spirit descended in the bodily form of a dove. Just because that is the way the Holy Spirit chose to be present does not mean that the Holy Spirit is a dove. He himself is God, so he also must be an omnipresent spirit, not limited to a particular locale. He is the creator of the whole material and spiritual universe. Similarly, just because God shows up as Jesus of Nazareth does not entail that God in his nature is a man, another type of containable being.

When God appears at other times in the Old Testament, these theophanies do not justify the conclusion that God is a containable being in his nature.¹⁰⁰ Since he is almighty, it is his prerogative to show up in any sort of way he wants to. Again, an appearance is not the reality of the thing being perceived. Just because a stick appears bent in water does not mean the stick becomes bent. Jesus commanded not to judge by appearance, but righteously (John 7:24).

In addition, when the Bible refers to God's "eyes" (2 Chron 16:9), "hand" (Acts 13:11), "fingers" (Ps 8:3), "nostrils" (Isa 65:5), "feathers" (Ps 91:4), etc., these should not be understood literally. God is not some birdman. These terms are poetic or metaphorical language used to describe something true of God. The same goes for references to humans being the children or offspring of God.

The context of Acts 17:28-9 underscores this. Paul states that God made the world and everything in it and does not live in a temple made by humans (17:24). He is not dependent; he does not need anything but is the one everything else needs to exist (17:25). Verse 28 reiterates this by quoting Epimenides—"For in him we live and move and have our being." According to Jamieson *et al.* (1961:1115), "This means, not merely, 'Without Him we have no *life*, nor that *motion* which every inanimate nature displays, nor even *existence* itself' . . . , but that God is the living, immanent Principle of all these in men." Because of these facts, Paul goes on to say that God is not the type of being who resembles the idols made through Greek art (Acts 17:29). It is in this context that Paul says humans are God's "offspring".

¹⁰⁰ For more on theophanies, see Moyer (1989:1087).

Furthermore, Jesus is described in the Bible as the “only begotten God” (John 1:18, Berean Literal Bible) or “only begotten Son” (John 3:16). The Greek term for “begotten” is “monogenes,” which literally means one (“mono”) of a kind or genus (“genes”). God the Son has the very nature of God and humans do not. The Son *qua* the Word existed with God and was God from the beginning, and everything else was created by him (Jn 1:1-3). Humans are made in the image or likeness of God (Gen 1:26; Jas 3:9), not in his nature. This is why the Nicene Creed refers to the Son of God as “begotten not made” (Bettenson & Maunder, 1999:27-8). C.S. Lewis (1960:122) says,

What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same *kind*. They are more like statues or pictures of God. (emphasis added)

It is humans that are made or created. They are not literally God’s begotten and offspring for all these reasons. Paul simply uses the term “offspring” in a symbolic, poetic way to affirm that humans originated from God. That is quite different from the only begotten God who uniquely has all the essential properties of his Father—eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, creator of all things, etc.—since like begets like. These properties are what theologians have referred to as the “incommunicable attributes of God”. Since humans are in the image of God and not his nature, they have certain “communicable attributes of God”. So, even if humans may someday become what are *called* “gods”, they still retain their human nature which will forever be inferior to the nature of the one-of-a-kind Creator of all things outside himself.¹⁰¹ The Ostlings (1999:311) quote Eastern Orthodox Bishop Timothy Ware who said, “The human being does not become God *by nature*, but is merely a ‘created god,’ a god *by grace* or *by status*. . . .The distinction between the Uncreated and the created still remains.”

As a corollary, this also applies to other non-human creatures who may be called “gods”. Again, just because *x* is *called* “god”, it does not mean that there are multiple true gods by nature. The creator/creation distinction still applies. Some LDS have attempted to make use of the late evangelical theologian Michael Heiser’s theory of the divine council. Heiser saw many *elohim* in the Old Testament. Some references referred to idols, some to the true God, and yet some to a divine council of godly beings. Heiser was still a monotheist since he maintained the creator/creature distinction, and he criticized LDS distorting his theory to score points for LDS polytheism (MormonInfoDotOrg, 2018b).

¹⁰¹ For more on what has been called Christian divinization or deification, see Bowman Jr. (s.a.).

But what did the early Church hold regarding literal anthropomorphism? Is it true as LDS claim that the earliest Christians thought of God as “an embodied being” and it was only later that they changed their minds after being corrupted by godless philosophy?

This is a genetic fallacy. Just because one’s beliefs may have derived from a disputed source, it does not entail that the beliefs are necessarily untrue. C.S. Lewis (2001:131-4) claims anthropomorphism was rightly condemned once the Church understood the issue. He says,

What did the early Christians believe? Did they believe that God really has a material palace in the sky and that He received His Son in a decorated state chair placed a little to the right of His own?— or did they not? The answer is that the alternative we are offering them was probably never present to their minds at all. As soon as it was present, we know quite well which side of the fence they came down. As soon as the issue of Anthropomorphism was explicitly before the Church in, I think, the second century, Anthropomorphism was condemned. The Church knew the answer (that God has no body and therefore couldn't sit in a chair) as soon as it knew the question. But till the question was raised of course, people believed neither the one answer nor the other. There is no more tiresome error in the history of thought than to try to sort our ancestors on to this or that side of a distinction which was not in their minds at all. You are asking a question to which no answer exists. It is very probable that most (almost certainly not all) of the first generation of Christians never thought of their faith without anthropomorphic imagery, and that they were not explicitly conscious, as a modern would be, that it *was* mere imagery. But this does not in the least mean that the essence of their belief was concerned with details about a celestial throne room. That was not what they valued, or what they were prepared to die for. Any one of them who went to Alexandria and got a philosophical education would have recognized the imagery at once for what it was, and would not have felt that his belief had been altered in any way that mattered. ...What you think is one thing; what you imagine while you are thinking is another.

The earliest Christians were not so much like a man who mistakes the shell for the kernel as like a man carrying a nut which he hasn't yet cracked. The moment it is cracked, he knows which part to throw away. Till then he holds on to the nut, not because he is a fool but because he isn't.

...In other words, all language about things other than physical objects is necessarily metaphorical.

Mormonism appears to reject these reasons when challenged with this question, and in so doing, via a *reductio ad absurdum*, they are left with a weak, finite, exalted man of a particular race. Of course, Lewis and the rest of the Christian Church will rightly continue to imagine in their thinking. However, it is unreasonable to be locked into one's imaginings and conclude that they accurately reflect reality. Again, it is just as unreasonable as continuing to assume that sticks really become bent when stuck in water. Similarly, it is just as unreasonable to assume that pain entails that God does not exist or is indifferent about his children. Surely, one may also apply the same hermeneutic to scriptural passages that *prima facie* indicate a flat Earth. For example, there are a few times the Bible speaks of "the four corners of the earth". This forms a square, so the argument goes that the Earth must be flat. The same may be said of the Bible teaching geocentricity, since after all, the sun rises and sets in the Bible. Such descriptions should be taken in non-realist terms. They are not about the world as it is, but our way of speaking about the world. This all again recalls what Jesus teaches when he tells his enemies that they should not judge by appearance, but by righteousness (John 7:24). Once all the evidence is considered and understood, one never reads the Bible in those simplistic categories again.¹⁰²

Having said that, not all the evidence is biblical. That is, there is also knowledge from God's natural revelation. By simply observing the things that are made, it should be plainly understood that God cannot be an exalted man in His nature (Rom 1:18-25), a member of things dependent upon an eternal universe.¹⁰³ If at least part of that knowledge is inferential, what may that look like? How may that be articulated?

One example may be the *kalam* cosmological argument. The premises are:

- 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.

¹⁰² For a good introduction to the evidence for God's existence and how these arguments point to traditional theism over Mormon theology, as well as making sense of God's properties, see Moreland and Craig's *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2003:463-614) and Copan and Craig's chapter "Craftsman or Creator? An Examination of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation and a Defense of *Creatio ex nihilo*" in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (2002:95-152).

¹⁰³ Plantinga (2000:xi) distinguishes between the evidence, arguments, justification, or rationality of a belief and the warrant of a belief. Warrant has to do with proper function. This is a cognitive process that favorably produces true beliefs according to a design plan. For Plantinga, belief in God is properly basic. That may be what is going on in Romans 1. Nonetheless, the following assumes an additional natural inferential process where evidence may be used to arrive at true beliefs concerning the nature of God.

- 2) The universe began to exist.

The conclusion is:

- 3) The universe had a cause.

As for the first premise, note that it is not that everything has a cause. It is that nothing comes into being without a cause. If something is eternal, by definition, it has no need for a cause. The traditional theist claims that God does not have a cause. If the premise is that everything has a cause, then any concept of God is going to require a cause and that would lead to an infinite regress. Some theists (e.g., Leibniz) have attempted to make God the cause of himself, but that seems incoherent. Perhaps it works somehow, but it certainly is not more easily understood. Further, many naturalists assume an eternal universe, and thus, on their view, no cause is needed for its existence. Thus, this first premise in the *kalam* argument is merely claiming that whatever begins to exist has a cause.

In support of that premise, it seems obvious to almost everyone. Craig (Craig & Smith, 1995:57) says concerning this premise that it “is so intuitively obvious, especially when applied to the universe, that probably no one in his right mind *really* believes it to be false”. Events are the type of things that simply do not happen without any explanation. This thesis, for example, did not simply pop into existence without any explanation. This first premise in the *kalam* has become so typically assumed, it is known as the law of causality.

The primary counterargument to the law of causality is usually on the micro, quantum level. Theoretical physicist Alexander Vilenkin agrees that the universe had an absolute beginning. However, on Vilenkin’s view, he takes issue with the first premise of the *kalam* cosmological argument by claiming that on the quantum level, events happen without causes. He says,

What causes the universe to pop out of nothing? No cause is needed. If you have a radioactive atom, it will decay, and quantum mechanics gives the decay probability in a given interval of time, say, a minute. There is no reason why the atom decayed at this particular moment and not another. The process is completely random. No cause is needed for the quantum creation of the universe.

Nonetheless, he goes on to acknowledge that “[t]he theory of quantum creation is no more than a speculative hypothesis. It is unclear how, or whether, it can be tested observationally. It is nonetheless the

first attempt to formulate the problem of cosmic origin and to address it in a quantitative way.” A speculative hypothesis is sheer possibility without any evidence.

Having said that, though, scientists, and particularly philosophers of science, are divided on quantum theory. Collins (2007) answers the question as to what its correct interpretation is by saying, “About 80 years after the original flowering of quantum theory, physicists still don’t agree on an answer.” Moreland (1987:38-9) claims that most, including those of the Copenhagen school, think of these events in nonrealist terms. That is, talk of events on the subatomic level is not about a mind-independent world. Rather, it is about information or the way language is used, like for pragmatic scientific purposes. Thus, such events are merely indeterminate or nondeterminate. They cannot be determined to any degree of certainty and that is all that may be said about them. That leaves open the question as to whether there are actual causes to these events. On the other hand, theoretical physicists Louis de-Broglie and David Bohm have stated the exact opposite. They postulate a deterministic configuration of quantum fluctuations. Subatomic particles are always configured, even when unobserved.

Further, Moreland (38-9) claims that even if microevents have no causes, it does not follow that macroevents do not. The former are granular and individual and may be components or aggregations of the latter. The individual event of a light photon coming to be is quite different from an event of an apple falling from a tree, let alone the universe coming to be. If there were a literal first event of the universe, it is typically not considered a microevent. Should a non-causal microevent be asserted as the absolute first moment of the universe, then again, given the disarray in the interpretation of quantum mechanics, the assertion would turn out to be a mere statement by one school of thought without any evidence to be proffered. The onus is on the one who makes this assertion to overturn the well-accepted law of causality. Quantum theory that upholds this law seems to be a much more reasonable option.

As for the second premise—why suppose the universe began to exist? Moreland and Craig (2003:470-81) offer both philosophical and scientific arguments to substantiate the premise. One philosophical argument argues that a beginningless universe would be made up of an actual infinite series of preceding moments each formed by successive addition, but such a series could never be formed that way. It would be like counting down through all the negative numbers to reach zero (Moreland, 1987:31). Each negative number would correspond to a past event of a beginningless universe. To put the matter more concretely, and without presupposing the Thomistic argument from causal efficacy,¹⁰⁴ take an event like starting a car

¹⁰⁴ The *kalam* argument does not require a causal efficacy for each event. The dependency of each event upon a prior cause, which is also dependent upon a preceding event *ad infinitum* would allow for a beginningless universe

as an example. If before one starts a car at this present moment, an actually infinite amount of things have to occur (e.g., locate the key, find the car, purchase or rent the car, have the car and key made, have the tools and materials to make these things, have the people to make these things, but these people also need to be made... *ad infinitum*), how is the car ever going to be started at this present moment? The assumption is always that any event in time must be preceded by a finite temporal set of events. Such events may be continually added to infinity, but at any point in the counting, they will always remain at a certain event—a finite amount. At no point in the counting may one claim they have arrived at an actual infinite number of events. If this is not case, it is like someone attempting to jump out of a bottomless pit to reach any event (31).

Ostler (s.a.) attempts to answer this problem by claiming that the way this argument is set up merely begs the question against those who hold to an actual infinite series of past events. He says Craig claims that

‘it is in the nature of’ an infinite past that it must be formed as a series of events by successive addition if it is a temporal collection. But he merely asserts this without any further proof or argument. In fact, as Bertrand Russell stated, this last assertion is false. It is in the very nature of the infinite past that it is always already infinite at any point it is added to. Thus, it is the very nature of the infinite past that it is not formed as an infinite temporal collection by successive addition.

So, what may Craig claim?¹⁰⁵ He may simply claim that it should be plain that the past is a series of moments which form and pass one at a time. If then the past is an actual infinite in terms of a definite duration of time, then the past must be formed one event at a time. Nothing here begs the question in favor of a first moment.

Having said that, Monokroussos (2024d) offers the following thought experiment:

Suppose God has existed through an actually infinite series of past moments, and has brought a recording device in which he records some of his thoughts at a rate of one per moment. If God and the recorder have made it to the present time, they have successfully traversed an actual infinite, so it can be done. Now God decides to play the recorder in reverse, but we all agree that God will never

in Thomistic categories. There, Aquinas argues for a necessary Cause of the whole dependent chain without reference to a beginning. On his view, reason would not rule out a beginningless universe, but faith based in Scripture did. The point of the *kalam* argument is not concerned about the causal efficacy of the series. Rather, its point is to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite series being formed by successive addition.

¹⁰⁵ The following rejoinders to Ostler come from Dennis Monokroussos (2024d).

get to the end—there is no end. (Or rather, no beginning.) But this makes no sense: if God can complete the series in one direction, he should be able to complete the exact same series in the opposite direction.

...Alternatively, let's say God tries to replay the recorder from past to future. Again, this is clearly impossible—not least because there's no first moment of the recording, as Paulsen and other objectors will note. But, according to our hypothetical, God already did it in reality! (I don't mean that he started from a first moment and worked forward, but he did get through all the moments, which somehow can't be done again—at least not one moment at a time.) It is odd that God lived through this infinite series of moments, each one of which comes after another, but he cannot relive the full set of events in the order in which he lived them. This at least seems absurd.¹⁰⁶

As for scientific arguments for a literal beginning to the universe, the standard Big Bang model says that the universe came into being a finite time ago (Moreland & Craig, 2003:476-8). Moreland and Craig (478) even quote Stephen Hawking admitting that almost everyone believes the universe and time itself began at the Big Bang.¹⁰⁷

Further, the second law of thermodynamics claims the universe is winding down into some sort of heat death. In a closed system, everything always tends toward equilibrium. Wound up clocks all wind down. Naturalists hold the universe is a closed system. Nothing is being fed into it from the outside. So, if the universe had no beginning, then it would have wound down already given this law. How much more time is needed than an actual infinite amount of time? (478-9) The implication is that since the universe has not reached its heat death yet, just like the wind-up clock, it must have had a beginning or a point of winding up. Even factoring in cycles of expansions and contractions to the universe, “[t]he second law requires that entropy should increase in each cycle of cosmic evolution” (Vilenkin, 2015). Vilenkin goes on to say,

¹⁰⁶ Stratton (2020:277-8) uses a similar thought experiment with a pedestrian walking up to a home door and telling the homeowner that he had just completed an infinite number of steps. The visitor invites the homeowner to retrace his steps to prove it. Obviously, if they go on this journey, they will never get back to the home. Thus, the visitor needed a first step.

¹⁰⁷ Though Hawking admitted this, he went on to argue against the predominant Big Bang view. For Hawking, the unified theory (the theory of everything) brought about the universe. Similarly, Paul Davies says that the universe was brought about by “a set of mathematical laws” (Cookson, 1995:20). If this is the case, what sense does it make to attribute causal powers to theories or laws, particularly those that utilize imaginary numbers? John Lennox (2007:63) responds: “[T]he laws that we find cannot themselves cause anything. Newton’s laws can describe the motion of billiard ball, but it is the cue wielded by the billiard player that sets the ball moving, not the laws. The laws help us map the trajectory of the ball’s movement in the future (provided nothing external interferes), but they are powerless to move the ball, let alone bring it into existence.”

If the universe had already completed an infinite number of cycles, it would have reached a state of thermal equilibrium, and so a state of maximum entropy. All the energy of ordered motion would have turned into heat, a uniform temperature prevailing throughout.

We do not find ourselves in such a state.

Vilenkin (2015) is one of the physicists who is named for the BGV (Borde-Guth-Vilenkin) theorem, which basically states that on classical spacetime models with a net positive expansion of the universe, it must have a beginning. He says, “We have no viable models of an eternal universe. The BGV theorem gives us reason to believe that such models simply cannot be constructed.”

A multiverse theory will also not save the day here, for it assumes a potentially infinite amount of unseen parallel universes in which any possible world is or will be actualized. If this present universe were wound up by some supposed unseen prior universe, then this just pushes the problem back further and it still does not answer how an actual series of past events is ever crossed, one event at a time, to reach the present moment. The multiverse theory continues to move the goal post, and this theory runs counter to the well-established BGV theorem. A multiverse theory must have a “mother of all beginnings” as Guth affirms (DrCraigVideos, 2011).

Further, according to the English theoretical physicist, John Polkinghorne (1986:80), a multiverse theory is “not physics, but in the strictest sense, metaphysics. There is no purely scientific reason to believe in an ensemble of universes”.

LDS hold to some version of the multiverse which answers why this universe has the specified complexity (i.e., fine-tuning) that allows for life. Their answer is that an Intelligence of sorts oversaw the construction of this world out of eternal matter and principles. Again, Joseph Smith taught that God the Father had a Father which he learned from to become a God himself. Smith (1977:345-6, 373) clearly teaches that all humans on this Earth have to become Gods the same as all Gods have done before, that the Heavenly Father was once a son himself, and that the intelligences have existed “one above another, so that there is no end to them” (373). D&C also teaches that man was in the beginning with God and intelligence was never created (93:29). The Book of Abraham speaks of certain spirits being more intelligent than other spirits, but all of them “have no beginning” and are “eternal” (3:18). Then the passage speaks of the rest of the “intelligences that were organized before the world was” (3:22). They are referred to as “souls” or “spirits” and that Abraham was one of them (3:23). Thus, every human has

existed from eternity, including those of other worlds (universes) prior to God becoming God. Even the elements that comprise bodies are eternal (D&C 93:33-5), and it turns out that spirit itself is a special sort of refined matter (D&C 131:7-8). Thus, Mormonism is religious naturalism with no room for literal *super*-naturalism.

As such, and as previously noted, Mormonism cannot answer the question of why there is eternal matter, eternal principles, and the specified complexity or fine-tuning of intelligences in the first place. These are just brute givens.

In addition, the evidence from the *kalam* cosmological argument contradicts the LDS view of a beginningless universe. However, that is not all the evidence contradicts. It also contradicts the LDS view that God is an exalted man locked in time and in the physical universe. There was no physical time before physical time.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, there was no physical universe before the physical universe. This points to a Cause of the literal first moment of time who was eternal (not in time) and who was outside of space (immaterial). In other words, this strongly suggests that God is not a man with a certain height, weight, and race. He provides the basis for why there is matter, eternal principles, as well as other intelligences who may utilize fine-tuning. In other words, anything else exists because of him, and he is not dependent on anything outside of himself for being God. He alone has aseity. He is God, and truly, there is none else (Isa 45:5). From the beginning the Father has existed along with his Word and his Spirit, by whom he created everything else that exists (Gen 1:2; Isa 44:24; Jn 1:1-3).

Despite all this biblical and extra-biblical evidence, the LDS Church admits there certainly are different ways to understand the biblical passages they use to support their doctrine that God is an exalted man by whom humans are made in his image and are referred to as his offspring. The Church (s.a.b) states:

These passages can be interpreted in different ways. Yet by viewing them through the clarifying lens of revelations received by Joseph Smith, Latter-day Saints see these scriptures [*sic*] as straightforward expressions of humanity's divine nature and potential. Many other Christians read the same passages far more metaphorically because they experience the Bible through the lens of doctrinal interpretations that developed over time after the period described in the New Testament.

¹⁰⁸ However, metaphysical or dynamic time (an event happens before and after another) may have existed prior to physical time. For example, angels may have done things prior to the literal first moment of physical time.

What is more important to Mormons is the latter-day revelation card. The doctrinal interpretations of historic Christianity throughout the years that are found particularly in their creeds are considered “an abomination” and merely “the commandments of men” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013e:49). After evaluating the history and doctrinal interpretations of the LDS Church on the racism issue, the revelation card should not mean anything other than a *false* revelation, particularly when it contradicts God’s “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet 1:19, KJV). A latter-day revelation that backs the interpretation that God is an exalted man who became a God from an infinite series of prior Gods is something to be rejected given the objective evidence.

5.4.2. Second test: Is something spoken or foretold in the name of God that he never commanded?

Even if the LDS Church does not *directly* teach a White supremacist God, the Church still has a history of prophets and apostles who gave racist statements. The Church admits this. The previous chapter demonstrates that a traditional understanding of Latter-day standard works makes much more sense for how to interpret these Scriptures than modern revisions that bend over backwards to expunge divine racist intent. In addition to these Scriptures, the Brethren have made many racist statements that seem to be clearly prophetic ones.

In Deuteronomy 18:18-22, the Lord says:

‘I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.’

You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.

The second test of a prophet expands on the first test by considering the content of the prophecies. Anyone who claims to speak for the Lord is not only evaluated on whether the prophet is speaking in the name of other gods, but on what is commanded. If the prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord that

something will happen and it does not, then obviously the prophet is not speaking for the Lord. This means that the Lord will override any fallibility of the tool he uses. Since he is truly omnipotent as well as omnibenevolent, he can ensure that his word will be faithfully communicated. The test for a prophet also entails God's omniscience. Since he knows all true propositions, he knows what will happen in the future. Thus, a prophet of the true God will faithfully communicate prophecies—what God commands and foretells. The Bible is filled with examples of God's foretelling.

5.4.2.1. LDS prophets' racist statements outside of standard works

Whereas LDS apologists are quick to defend their Latter-day standard works from racist charges, the following statements from their General Authorities are indefensible as to their racist content. The LDS Church now officially admits through its 2013 GTE that their past leaders were errant and racist, yet LDS still give them a pass for being the Lord's mouthpieces in these Latter-days. LDS simply acknowledge their past leaders' mistakes in exercising their agency inappropriately and ask that others overlook their leaders' fallibility just as other churches have done with their own leaders.

However, there is an important disanalogy between prophets and pastors. Here, Bowman (2014) makes a worthwhile point. He says,

Mormons claimed to be led by a prophet of God, someone who had direct access to God and frequently received revelations from him. A religion that is led by a genuine prophet of God ought to be ahead of the culture, speaking against its social norms where they violate God's standards of love and justice. The point here is not that the LDS Church should have been perfect, but that it should have been markedly more enlightened on racial issues than other religions, if indeed it was the only true church on the earth and was led by a prophet of God.

Prima facie, that seems to be the case. A prophetic status would at least set an example and call out the culture and not the other way around. However, LDS still claim that their prophets are men who at times exercise their agency as inappropriately as anyone else. Indeed, it is understandable how fallible pastors can be fallible interpreters of the prophets. However, if God uses prophets today, their primary function is to directly bring God's word outside of the Bible, and this word is still light brought into darkness. That

is, they are the ones God uses to bring about revelation, which they do not necessarily interpret. This also applies to certain pastors who claim to be prophets.

About prophets and prophecies, the Apostle Peter clearly says, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-1). LDS, though, want to treat their prophets as fallible interpreters as well as the channels of revelation. Again, the same may be said of certain pastors. Yet if any of these prophets fail in what God has already stated for the tests of prophets, then there is no good reason to think that their revelations come from God. In fact, the revelations should be disregarded altogether as being of divine origin regardless of what church they represent.

LDS philosopher Ericson (2007:84) recognizes this problem for his own church:

...this also reveals harder issues of why a Latter-day Saint should accept the teachings of a modern leader as a true doctrine when it apparently contradicts the doctrines of other leaders of the past. If a Church leader of the past could be wrong about X, why should a Church leader of the present be trusted in being right about Y? Such problems cannot simply be dismissed as being unrelated to salvation, many of these doctrines that are no longer taught today (such as the sin of birth control, the requirements of polygamy, and the condemnation of evolution) were once taught as being essential for salvation.

Mauss (2020) also explains the problem for the 2013 GTE:

The essay’s competent and realistic recognition of the origins of the traditional race policy in the fully human historical process leaves the Church obviously vulnerable to the charge that its doctrine and policy were the products more of worldly influence than of divine revelation. That vulnerability, furthermore, can logically be extended to many other issues: What other doctrines and policies, the critics might ask, could be explained in the same way? If our modern prophets were wrong on this issue for so long, what else might they have been wrong about—polygamy, for example? The racial policy and doctrines, after all, were not merely the products of a residual drift from American history

that became ensconced in Mormon church life through cultural inertia. These had, in fact, been officially and stridently reiterated in a 1949 official letter from the First Presidency, and similarly again as late as 1969, even if in somewhat truncated form. Furthermore, the folklore usually used to justify the policy had been taught as truth by LDS prophets and apostles for generations, even though the policy and supporting doctrinal justifications had never had their origins in revelation.

Of course, LDS now claim none of these policies and doctrines were the result of divine revelation. In the past, some may have made much of the distinction between policies and doctrine and claim that the former, not the latter, is what the priesthood ban was all about. However, when the Associated Press (AP) asked whether the ban was “a matter of policy or doctrine”, then-Apostle Oaks said,

I don't know that it's possible to distinguish between policy and doctrine in a church that believes in continuing revelation and sustains its leader as a prophet.... I'm not sure I could justify the difference in doctrine and policy in the fact that before 1978 a person could not hold the priesthood and after 1978 they could hold the priesthood.

...I decided a long time ago, 1961 or 2, that there is no way to talk about it in terms of doctrine, or policy, practice, procedure. All those words just led you to reaffirm your prejudice, whichever it was. The only fair, just way to think about it is to reaffirm your faith in the prophet, and he says you don't do it now, so you don't do it now. And if he says tomorrow that you do do it, then you do it.

...If you read the scriptures [*sic*] with this question in mind, ‘Why did the Lord command this or why did he command that, you find that in less than one in a hundred commands was any reason given. It is not the pattern of the Lord to give reasons. We can put reason to revelation. We can put reasons to commandments. When we do we're on our own. Some people put reasons to the one we are talking about here, and they turned out to be spectacularly wrong. There is a lesson in that. The lesson I've drawn from that, I decided a long time ago that I had faith in the command and I had no faith in the reasons that had been suggested for it. I decided that 25 years ago, so it was very easy for me when it was changed.

...I'm referring to reasons given by general authorities [*sic*] and reasons elaborated upon that reason by others. The whole set of reasons seemed to me to be unnecessary risk taking. My experience

with this was to say, I don't know whether this was commanded in the Pearl of Great Price. I'm not positive about that commandment in relation to this. I put my faith on the president of the church whom I sustain as the prophet. When he tells me this is what the church does, then I'll go with that.... Let's don't make the mistake that's been made in the past, here and in other areas, trying to put reasons to revelation. The reasons turn out to be made—made to a great extent. The revelations are what we sustain as the will of the Lord and that's where safety lies (AP, 1988:21).

The Church today acknowledges that all these racist policies and doctrines were “folklore”. The problems now should be obvious. How did these past Latter-day prophets present their claims? Did they ever state that their claims were indeed given by God? If so, is not the current Church wrong in condemning the word of God as “folklore”? If the current Church is correct, then how may they continue sustaining their past revelators as revelators of God? Just because an LDS prophet makes a claim does not entail that claim is from God. Oaks' advice is to never question a prophet. Oaks has already made up his mind that the LDS Church is the Lord's one true Church and theoretically, even if a prophet turns out to be wrong, it is irrelevant, since he is to be followed anyway. That decision is never made based on reason; it is simply based on a feeling that LDS all take to be coming straight from God. So, why trust the feeling is pointing in the right direction? Perhaps what is “man-made” are these so-called revelations. The why question may be ignored, but it never goes away.

The following contain a handful of LDS prophets' racist statements outside their standard works. Some statements were purportedly spoken in the name of the Lord, and some were not. Both are utilized to clarify the difference.

5.4.2.2. Joseph Smith

Smith taught that Blacks of African Ancestry were divinely cursed through Noah's prophecy of Canaan being a slave to his brothers. As discussed in a previous chapter, the Book of Abraham seems to rule out Black Canaanites from a priesthood, but Smith still never applied that to Blacks whom he considered the seed of Cain (Smith, 1978:4:501), Ham (Smith, 1978:1:191), and Canaan (Smith, 1836:290), since Smith ordained them or allowed for them to be ordained. The racial restriction on priesthood prior to the Levitical priesthood evidently was not applied to

Blacks in Smith's time. However, slavery was a different matter and Smith taught Noah's prophecy specifically applied to this. Smith (1836:290) said,

It is my privilege then, to name certain passages from the bible [*sic*], and examine the teachings of the ancients upon the matter, as the fact is uncontrovertible [*sic*], that the first mention we have of slavery is found in the holy bible [*sic*], pronounced by a man [Noah] who was perfect in his generation, and walked with God. And so far from that prediction being averse to the mind of God it remains as a lasting monument of the decree of Jehovah, to the shame and confusion of all who have cried out against the South, in consequence of their holding the sons of Ham in servitude! 'And he said, Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.' [Gen. 9:25]

Trace the history of the world from this notable event down to this day, and you will find the fulfillment of this singular prophecy. ...I can say, that the curse is not yet taken off from the sons of Canaan, neither will be until it is affected by as great a power as caused it to come; and the people who interfere the least with the purposes of God in this matter, will come under the least condemnation before him[.]

This was an opinion that was common among various Christian denominations in Smith's day. If Christians could still be considered right with God and hold to this position, and if so-called prophets are entitled to non-inspired, fallible positions, then could Smith hold this false position without it counting against him being a prophet of God?

This interpretation of Scripture certainly was racist. However, the people who used to hold this position were probably inconsistent for the most part.¹⁰⁹ In other words, perhaps they held that 1) all humans are made in God's image, and all are created equally in their humanness, and 2) Blacks were inferior and justly punished with slavery. Many people in Smith's day were as inconsistent as the early American founders owning slaves and holding to the Declaration of Independence which states that all men are created equal and endowed by the Creator with the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Or perhaps many then were simply ignorant in thinking Blacks were not human. If Blacks were regarded as inferior, then it is unclear if this meant that they were something less than human or else

¹⁰⁹ Regarding soteriology, R.C. Sproul (2018:25) thinks of Arminians as "barely" Christians by way of a "felicitous inconsistency."

were thought of as on the bottom rung of humans. Regardless, one is not right with God by always being consistent. If consistency were a criterion for salvation, no one would be right with God.

At least at the end of his life, Smith (1978:5:217-8) held that Blacks were equal to all other humans and if they were given the same opportunities of Whites, they would be like them. They are even more refined than Whites in the federal government, Smith claimed. Further, recall that Reeve points out that from Mormonism's inception, there were no racial barriers.

So perhaps Smith would be entitled to an inconsistent position here as well. There is no indication in these passages that advocate for slavery that Smith was speaking in his official prophetic capacity. As such, he was as entitled to non-official judgments as anyone else.

Speaking of inconsistency, in the last year of his life, Smith (1843; 1844a) referred to Blacks as "Niggers" on at least a couple of occasions. In a letter Smith wrote to John C. Calhoun and published by *The Joseph Smith Papers* (an arm of the LDS Church), a footnote on the term calls Smith out. It reads:

This racial slur was commonly employed by white Americans by the nineteenth century to refer derogatorily to people of African descent. Black Americans strongly objected to the use of the term. The Church Historian's Press also condemns the use of this word but retains it in document transcripts to accurately present the historical record and to illuminate the oppressive racial landscape faced by Black Americans. Church leaders today have asked Latter-day Saints to 'lead out in abandoning attitudes and actions of prejudice,' which includes rejecting racist language. (1844a)

Pryor (2016:205) also confirms the etymology of this racial term when she said,

As African Americans became free in the North, however, nigger latched on like a shackle. White Americans of all classes and ages hissed out the word, branding free black people as foul smelling, unproductive, licentious, and unfit for self-rule. By the 1820s, blackness, not slavery, marked people

of color as occupying a fixed social class. Most significantly, the word nigger became a slur in conversation with black social aspiration.

As horrible as this is, it should not be used to rule Smith out from being a prophet of God. If it does, then the Apostle Peter would have also been disqualified when he showed partiality to the Jews and removed himself from eating with the Gentiles. Neither Peter nor Smith were perfect. They were sinners just like everyone else.

5.4.2.3. Brigham Young

Young said all his sermons were to be considered Scripture (JD, 1870:13:95, 264). This means that he presumed to be speaking in the name of God. Again, J. Reuben Clark, Jr (1979:76) seems to agree with this principle when he states that prophets do not need to always claim, “Thus sayeth the Lord”, since some sections of the D&C do not utilize this phrase and they obviously are accepted as Scripture.

Some statements were not even sermons, and yet Young still claimed to be speaking in the name of the Lord in these following instances. According to Wilford Woodruff’s (1852:362-3) journal, on January 16th, 1852, in an address to the Utah Territorial legislature, Young said that until all Abel’s seed are redeemed, any having just one drop of Cain’s seed cannot hold the priesthood and because of this, Blacks of African ancestry cannot be a part of governing. Young said he knew all this and spoke it “now in the name of Jesus Christ” (363). Not long afterwards, Young (1852:2) again seemed to invoke his prophetic status when he said, “If there never was a prophet, or apostle of Jesus Christ spoke it before, I tell you, this people that are commonly called negroes are the children of old Cain.” Because of this, they could not hold the priesthood until all the rest of Michael’s [Adam’s] children receive the blessings of it. Later in this same address (5-6), Young said that if the Church consents to interracial marriage with Blacks of African ancestry and “that they shall come in with with [*sic*] us and be partakers [*sic*] with us of all the blessings God has given to us”, that is the time

the priesthood [*sic*] is taken from this Church and kingdom and God leaves us to our fate. The moment we consent to mingle with the seed of Cain the Church must go to destruction [*sic*],—we

should receive the curse which has been placed upon the seed of Cain, and never more be numbered with the children of Adam who are heirs to the priesthood [*sic*] untill [*sic*] that curse be removed.

The Church today thinks they still hold the priesthood even though they have given Blacks of African ancestry the priesthood and the right to marry interracially. So, is the Church today right, or is it wrong and was Young right? Perhaps the Church failed in 1978, and the priesthood was indeed taken from them. Then again, perhaps neither Young nor the modern Church were really speaking for the Lord.

Young also made numerous racist statements in sermons. He once stated that he would “prophesy” and his word would “be as true as any word ever spoken from the heavens.” He then said that LDS may be older, in their sixties or seventies, and look “young and handsome”, but if they apostatize, they become “grayhaired, wrinkled, and black, just like the Devil” (JD, 1857:5:332).

It is clear from simply these statements alone that the Bible would declare Young to be a false prophet. God never commanded these racist statements. No one who apostatized began to look old and black “like the Devil”. External blackness is not the inherent external feature of the Devil anyway. The rest of Adam’s children have still not received the blessings of the priesthood and been redeemed, and yet the Church allows Blacks to have the priesthood and govern anyway. This was not supposed to happen according to Young’s prophecy. These statements fail both biblical tests for being a prophet of God. God is not a racist as Young portrayed him, and Young’s prophecies failed.¹¹⁰

5.4.2.4. John Taylor

The late President John Taylor once taught in a sermon that the curse of Cain was passed onto Ham’s wife so that after the flood “the devil [*sic*] should have a representation upon the earth as well as God”. (JD, 1881:22:304) The obvious reference was to Blacks of African ancestry who were thought to be of the lineage of Cain through Ham’s wife. This statement is like Young’s physical description of the Devil above. Both statements really reflect the character of God and what he allows to take place.

When Taylor (1845:857) was an apostle, he also clearly taught that Blacks were fulfilling the Genesis 9 prophecy. He said,

¹¹⁰ Though applied to a different context, it is still noteworthy that LDS philosopher Blake Ostler (2006) says of Brigham Young, “I personally believe that his theology was a disaster for the most part.”

History and common observation show that these predictions have been fulfilled to the letter. The descendants of Ham, besides a black skin which has ever been a curse that has followed an apostate of the holy priesthood, as well as a black heart, have been servants to both Shem and Japheth, and the abolitionists are trying to make void the curse of God, but it will require more power than man possesses to counteract the decrees of eternal wisdom.

Given these racist statements, Taylor also seems to have failed as a prophet of God. However, Taylor's talk was not a general conference talk and Taylor never claimed (as Young did) that all his sermons were to be considered Scripture. Further, Taylor's written comments on Genesis 9 in a church periodical have no indication that they were meant to be anything more than simply his opinions. No Mormon has ever regarded *Times and Seasons* as Scripture. However, Taylor was offering the same abhorrent racist opinions as Christian pastors in the same timeframe.

5.4.2.5. The 1949 First Presidency statement

The 1949 First Presidency statement reaffirmed the priesthood ban. This was an official pronouncement from the top leadership of the Church. The basis for this ban, the statement proclaims, was "not a matter of the declaration of a policy but of direct commandment from the Lord" (Harris & Bringhurst, 2015:66). This indicates that they were not acting on their own to set a policy based on their fallible opinions but instead had a direct commandment from the Lord. They purported to speak in the name of the Lord on this matter.

However, this error reveals that at the time the First Presidency was not speaking the words the Lord had commanded even though it claimed it was revealing the "direct commandment from the Lord". Since even the modern LDS Church admits that the 1949 First Presidency was wrong concerning the ban and its justification, the question is: Who is wrong and who is to be believed? Obviously, someone was not speaking for the Lord after all. Perhaps the current First Presidency was merely giving its own fallible opinion that the 1949 First Presidency was wrong. There is no revelatory statement from any First Presidency after 1978 that says the 1949 statement was wrong about the ban being a direct commandment from the Lord.

5.4.2.6. The 1969 First Presidency statement

Recall that the official 1969 First Presidency statement said: “Our living prophet, David O. McKay, has said, ‘The seeming discrimination by the Church toward the Negro is not something which originated with man; but goes back into the beginning with God’” (82). The context both before and after this statement refers specifically to the priesthood ban. The basis for this is not the opinions of man, but what God had revealed to the Church. The Church was speaking in the name of the Lord on this matter.

However, just like the 1949 statement, the Church today recognizes that the Lord did not reveal a priesthood ban. Priesthood bans were simply part of the racist “theories advanced in the past” as the 2013 GTE puts it. Nonetheless, why would the 2013 GTE be a revelation? It was the work of the historian Reeve with the Brethren’s stamp of approval and some of their own contributions. As such, perhaps the 2013 First Presidency was merely putting forth their own *theories* on this matter.

To complicate matters, the 1969 statement contradicted the 1949 statement with the former claiming agnosticism regarding the reasons for the ban. So, who is to be believed? Both were claiming to speak for the Lord. Why should the current spokesmen always be believed? If they have been wrong before, chances seem good that they will be wrong again and lead the Church astray.

5.5. Concluding thoughts

Again, this chapter proposes the Reformed apologetic solutions for perennial racism within the LDS Church. This chapter does this by using grammatical-historical methods. It is an apologetic study that applies certain skills (techniques) in examining how the LDS Church presents its position on the one hand and defends it on the other hand. It is within this Reformed apologetic framework that the solutions for perennial racism within the LDS Church are properly understood. Specifically, this chapter discusses how Mormonism *implicitly* promotes White supremacy in their worship and how they have made prophetic racist claims that did not come to pass or were provably false. The chapter argues that both these racist features of Mormonism invalidate it as truly being of divine origin.

God is not a man in his nature (Hos 11:9; Gal 4:8), so he does not have a particular race. Those who claim to speak in the name of God but teach false gods are biblically identified as false prophets and those who claim to speak in the name of God but give false prophecies are also biblically identified as false prophets. The biblical solutions in this chapter as well as chapter 3 avoid both these issues and therefore do not promote a perennial racism.

Most LDS do not care. They still regard their past racist prophets and apostles as true prophets and apostles of God. For LDS, the tests that the Bible gives for being a prophet of God are ultimately irrelevant. Why? Because, again, they assume God has already spoken to the LDS General Authorities as well as to those LDS who have their testimony. That is what is ultimately relevant for them. Once one has a testimony, then whatever the prophet says is all that matters. This is why the late First Counselor in the First Presidency, N. Eldon Tanner (1979) concluded a First Presidency Message by saying, “When the prophet speaks the debate is over.”

However, those who love God more than their church, their sin, feelings, culture, friends, or family will be consumed with allowing God’s word to direct their paths. Psalm 119:20 says, “My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.” Earlier, the Psalmist says, “How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.” (119:9) Later, he says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (119:105) Jesus teaches that God’s word is truth and Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35; 17:17). The Bible that Jesus used was the same Old Testament used today. This should not come as a surprise, since Jesus promises that the law would persist throughout all time (Matt 5:18). Jesus says the same concerning his own words (Matt 24:35). He also promises that his sheep will hear his voice and not be led astray, but will follow him (John 10:24-7). Discovering and listening closely to what he originally revealed is the priority of the Reformed apologetic approach.

As a result of this reverence for the word of God, the Bereans were declared to be “more noble” since when they heard what Paul was telling them, they searched the Scriptures to see if what he was saying was true (Acts 17:11). Notice that nothing is mentioned about the Bereans praying about Paul’s message. Perhaps they did, but what ultimately mattered to them was verifying Paul’s message in the light of Scripture. This is how they knew that Paul was not a false apostle, but an apostle of Jesus.

Finally, notice also the order here. Contrary to the LDS Church's emphasis on the role of living, modern, or current prophets to know what to believe and do, the prophets in the Bible are bound by what God has already revealed. This is consistent with what Paul teaches in Galatians 1:6-9—any gospel other than that which has already been received is to be damned. Some so-called living or modern prophet's legitimacy depends on the Scriptures that already exist. If the prophets do not fit their message to what has already been given, their message is to be rejected. In this sense, the prophets have spoken, and the debate is over. Any so-called prophet must not contradict the word of God. LDS have this completely backwards.¹¹¹

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This research project is about examining the existence of perennial racism within Mormonism from a Reformed Christian apologetic perspective. That is, there is a priority of understanding the Bible as originally given, and everything else must be understood by considering this word since it is taken to be God's revelation. The historical-grammatical approach to understanding the original texts is not only applied to Bible, but also to other LDS Scripture and other LDS prophetic statements. Thus, with this as a backdrop, this thesis answers the religious normative question regarding racism—if racism is endemic to Mormonism, should Mormonism be rejected as being from God? This last chapter offers the findings to this question, a conclusion, and recommendations. The recommendations include possible areas for future study and recommendations also for traditional Christian mission praxis.

¹¹¹ Some may argue that Kimball has this order right when he declares the Adam-God theory is “not according to the scriptures”. However, LDS still follow whatever their current prophet has declared despite the clear meaning and priority of scripture.

6.2. Findings

6.2.1. *LDS racism has not ended with the 1978 revelation*

Within the central question to this thesis, there is a question as to racism being endemic to Mormonism. Many assume the 1978 so-called revelation ended racism and any other associated problems in the LDS Church. Since that time, though, LDS leaders have increasingly sought to not only distance the Church from its racist past, but to root out other current expressions of racism. This research study attempts to answer the question: Is racism and its other associated problems in the LDS Church merely a thing of the past?

The thesis finds that racism continues within the LDS Church. As stated, that is rather benign. Racism may continue in every church, since every church is made up of imperfect people. However, the finding of this thesis is based on an inference to the best explanation that racism indeed has divine origins in the LDS Church, and as such, the Church cannot be from God but must originate from man. This follows from the fact that racism cannot be from the all perfect being.

6.2.2. *The LDS Church has lost credibility on this issue*

While Joseph Smith Jr allowed Black African men to be ordained throughout his tenure, his successor, Brigham Young, instituted a public policy that denied the priesthood to Black men of African descent. That policy stood for most of the history of the Church—until the 1978 revelation. Not long after the Church was founded, its survival became a central issue. That meant accommodating itself to the broader American racist culture. This was manifested in condoning slavery and prohibiting interracial marriage, both of which set the stage for the priesthood ban. Throughout its history, those in leadership have exhibited a dissembling pattern over the issue of racism.

Even if it turns out that the Church today is not racist, it still has a major issue with its past racist revelators who contradict what the current revelators state. Despite recent apologetic and peacemaking attempts, the Church should not be trusted for giving divine direction. Even the Church itself has admitted that their past revelators have made racist statements, and thus, the issue remains perennial. Looking simply from within the Mormon system, there is no way to *objectively* determine who is to be believed—the past

revelators or the current ones. Despite LDS testimonies, it seems more likely that neither past nor current revelators are to be believed.

When racial discrimination turns out to be clearly wrong and when the leaders *continue* lying to sustain their Church, how likely is it that the Mormon leaders are being led by the Lord at all? This is not assuming perfection as a qualification to be led by the Lord. Other than the Lord Jesus, every man is a liar (Rom 3:4). The point here is simply a pattern of dissembling. The old saying is important to keep in mind: “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” Further, the story of the boy who cried “wolf” too many times comes to mind. This thesis finds there is simply too much troubling history on this racism issue to continue trusting the LDS Church as the “one true Church” that speaks for God.

6.2.3. The Bible does not have divine racism

The Bible should not be used as a *tu quoque* argument to justify racism. Of course there are various problematic passages in the Bible. However, none of these categorically promote a divine sanction of racism. These days, in contrast to fundamentalist branches of Mormons, LDS often accept standard modern Christian and Jewish interpretations of historically troubling racial biblical passages. Thus, Christians may consult LDS apologists and utilize some of these interpretations to demonstrate that the Bible does not have a divine sanction of racism in it.

6.2.4. LDS non-biblical scriptures have divine racism

The BOM and PGP both have passages that seem to indicate a divine sanction of racism. There have been literal and non-literal attempts by Mormons to understand these passages. The literal approach has been the majority view. Further, especially since 1978, both the literal and non-literal interpretations want to defend God not being a racist in these Scriptures. This thesis study finds that both these interpretations fall short. There are indeed contextual problems with these interpretations.

Concerning the BOM, a more natural reading is that though God values everyone in any race as precious as the other and provides all with the opportunity to come unto him (cf. 2 Nephi 26:33), this does not excuse the fact that the BOM also teaches, perhaps inconsistently, that God cursed or punished certain people with, not simply a darkened heart, but a literal dark skin for his purposes (e.g., 2 Nephi 5:21ff.).

Thus, all people are equally valuable to God as his creation, as people who can follow him, but in the BOM not every skin color is as valuable to him. There, white skin is more valuable than black skin, and God uses the latter to segregate these people from his righteous white skin people.

Within the PGP, the Book of Moses in conjunction with the Book of Abraham more naturally reads that the race of the Canaanites was cursed by God and found to be inferior to other races. Regardless if their skin was not directly cursed by God as in the BOM and regardless of whether the Canaanites were indeed the ancestors of Black Africans, the PGP seems to teach that the Canaanites, as a race, still received divine cursing to various extents and were thus inferior to other races (e.g., being prohibited from preaching so that they may repent and end up in Zion with all other people groups).

6.2.5. Recent descriptive cultural LDS racist examples

There are still descriptive cultural racist examples found among LDS. The Church itself has admitted the problem and has recently said that they want the entire Church to work at rooting out racism on all levels. This implies even in their leadership. Of course, these racist examples are generalities and do not necessarily demonstrate that the Church is false, but there certainly continues to be a problem when many or most LDS demonstrate these racist examples.

6.2.6. Prima facie, the LDS God is an exalted white man

Mormonism's anthropomorphism entails that God belongs to a particular race or ethnicity even if that turns out to be interracial. However, the Church approved artwork consistently portrays the Father as an exalted White man. Since God is referred to as "[t]he supreme Governor of the universe" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013d[appendix]:652), then his White ethnicity would also be supreme. To avoid that conclusion, Mormons may offer at least a couple of responses: 1) plead ignorance of what race or ethnicity God is or 2) demonstrate how God is not supreme after all (at least not in absolute terms). Neither option seems satisfying, especially to potential converts looking for answers and are simply told to go to God directly with their issues and gain a testimony. Nonetheless, these responses

demonstrate how the idea of God as an exalted White man is only a surface problem. The larger issue has to do with thinking of him as any sort of human of a particular race.

That issue goes against the Bible when it teaches that God in his nature is not a man (Hos 11:9; Gal 4:8). As a result of this, Mormon prophets fail the first biblical test for being a prophet of God. They are not supposed to teach a different god than the one that has already been taught... even if they give signs or wonders (Deut 13:1-5). This is the case regardless of whether they have the approval of their church or not.

6.2.7. Mormon prophets have made false prophecies

The second biblical test for being a prophet of God is from Deuteronomy 18:20-2. The passage says that if a prophet claims to speak in the name of the Lord and contradicts what the Lord has commanded, or if the prophecy foretells what does not come to pass, then that prophet is not of the Lord. Many examples of LDS prophets issuing racist statements may be given and evaluated as to whether they fit this biblical criterion. Here, it is helpful to distinguish between prophetic statements on the one hand and statements made by prophets on the other. The latter does not necessarily contradict the biblical criterion for being a prophet of God since prophets are human and have opinions (some of which are true) and do make mistakes. However, when they claim to be speaking for the Lord, they are claiming that the Lord is speaking through them and thus, they are not supposed to err. They cannot advocate for racism under these conditions. Yet LDS prophets have clearly done this. As a result, they should not be considered prophets of God. The Church sustaining them even when they clearly err is irrelevant to the matter.

6.3. Summarizing answering the research question and meeting objectives

Given these findings, the answer to the research question is that Mormon racism and its other associated problems is certainly not a thing of the past. It is a perennial issue. The specific objectives for this thesis are met. The history (context) and theology (content) of perennial racism are discussed. LDS racist teachings from both their Scriptures and their modern revelators are analyzed. Certain LDS cultural

practices that further racism are discussed. Finally, Reformed Christian apologetic solutions are proposed to answer Mormon perennial racism.

6.4. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that Mormonism does indeed have a perennial racism. Having said that, it is important to note that it is not as extreme as other more hateful versions in the marketplace of ideas. Obviously, LDS certainly have no desire to kill Blacks. Nonetheless, Mormon racism is still continually exhibited in their Latter-day scriptures, in their other past prophetic statements and tacit endorsements (at least in their literal anthropomorphism), in their anthropological, cultural, behavioral features and beliefs. There are issues here that are still troubling to LDS and are particularly hurtful to Black LDS.

Having said that, it is important to recognize that even though no one is perfect, LDS people are generally kind and at least attempt to be loving to all ethnicities. This is particularly shown in their outreach programs. Furthermore, these days, LDS desire everyone to be brought into their church and to have the opportunity to be equals in exaltation. LDS would agree with the well-known Protestant hymn “Jesus Loves the Little Children”:

Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world;
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Although there has been no formal apology, the LDS Church has admitted to past failings in teaching racist theories. However, they refuse to see how these teachings—even if mere theories on God’s nature—have biblically invalidated their prophets and apostles from being prophets and apostles of God. The Bible has given two basic tests for being a prophet of God, and Mormon prophets have failed on both counts. Those who follow these prophets need to heed the Lord’s warnings and flee false prophets (e.g., Matt 7:15-20; 24:24).

For those who hold the Bible to be the word of God and the means whereby so-called prophets are to be tested, the conclusion of this study is that Mormonism is to be rejected as having divine origins. As such, LDS must repent from following a false god and false prophets who give false Scriptures and false prophecies. Others must also be warned from joining this pseudo-Christian organization.

6.5. Recommendations

6.5.1. Limitations and possible areas for future study

The thesis was limited in its quantitative work. Having an up to date look at how many LDS still believe that the priesthood ban was God's doing, that black skin was given as a curse due to exercising one's agency inappropriately in a pre-earth life, or that a literal dark skin was given to the rebellious people in the BOM would have greatly enhanced the section on descriptive features of LDS. It would also be interesting to test how many LDS Black Africans even know about these issues.

The thesis was also limited in its focus to the general beliefs of LDS. However, it would have been particularly interesting to explore the monarchotheism or kingship monotheism of influential LDS apologist Blake Ostler, who rejects an infinite regress of Gods and accepts an absolute *supreme* human Monarch. This God still lives in a beginningless universe that he is subservient. What are the ramifications of Ostler's theological beliefs regarding racism? Can he avoid the charge of racial superiority for this God without an infinite regress of Gods? In addition to Ostler, it would also have been an interesting survey to examine in more detail the different racial beliefs of other churches that hold to Joseph Smith being a prophet of God.

The thesis was also limited in its historical scope. For example, only a handful of historical examples of racist false prophecies were proffered. Of course, many false statements from LDS prophets may be exhibited, but doing more work to demonstrate specifically racist LDS prophecies would be quite valuable.

Finally, the thesis was limited in not answering more theories concerning the cursing of skin in the BOM. Belnap (2021:195-370) has a huge survey of options in defending the BOM sans divine racism.

6.5.2. Practical application

The point of this study is not merely to uncover Mormonism's perennial racism. That is certainly a worthwhile task. However, the more important task was a Reformed apologetic examination of the topic. As such, the study was primarily an attempt to defend the Christian faith from the lure of Mormonism. This thesis does not intend to leave Mormons in a state of hopelessness, but of hope.

Many years ago (early 2000s), the researcher was engaged in evangelism outside of Temple Square in downtown Salt Lake City when a skeptic, probably a disgruntled ex-Mormon, showed up. He was not there to counteract what the researcher was doing but to distribute his own literature against certain historical problems of the LDS Church. The point apparently was to get Mormons out of their church so that they may find the joy of nothingness. What a hopeless task!

The primary recommendation for Christian mission praxis regarding this whole study is to point everyone to the God of the Bible, so they may have eternal life. Jesus teaches that eternal life is knowing the only true God and Jesus (John 17:3). False gods kill eternally (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The Triune God of Christianity is by his very nature not a man and therefore cannot have a particular race or ethnicity to him. He is the creator of everything else outside himself. Since he is truly supreme over all creation, he is not limited to a body to act within creation. He is not dependent on anything, but everything is dependent on him (Acts 17:24-5). He is infinitely greater than Mormonism's exalted man of some race.

After exchanging pleasantries with LDS, ask them first if they believe God is an exalted man with flesh and bones. LDS will obviously admit this to be true. That should be followed up by asking if they hold God to be supreme. LDS will also obviously admit to this as well. Then ask them if that is the case, what race, ethnicity, or color he is. The answer given usually depends on how old the LDS person is and how long they have been in the Church.

As mentioned earlier in a previous chapter, the researcher (Sivulka, 2024a) asked his older neighbor lady about this issue in February 2024, and she responded that God is White, and everyone was going to be White like him after this life. The lady failed to see how this was White supremacy, since in her mind, everyone was going to be with him after this life. The researcher responded by saying, “It sounds like it is just a nicer version of White supremacy.” The lady’s statement raised questions concerning whether the whiteness being described was a literal skin pigmentation or simply a synonym for purity. If the latter, then this does not answer the question about the literal skin pigmentation that seems to follow from the belief that God is an exalted man. Of course he is pure. However, if he has a body with a certain height and weight, then what racial features are exhibited with that body? Further, what is meant when the neighbor claimed that everyone is going to be with God after this life? How does that fit with the LDS teaching that most will not be with him in the afterlife, but consigned to lesser degrees of glory? That led to a discussion about how one makes sure one will arrive at the Father’s kingdom as the ultimate destination.

When the researcher (Sivulka, 2024b) asked a couple LDS missionaries about God’s color in May of 2024, they replied, “Does it matter?” The researcher replied, “If God is supreme and an exalted man, then his color would be supreme.” The missionaries simply replied, “We don’t have time for this,” and they left.

In September 2024, the researcher (Sivulka, 2024c) asked a couple other LDS missionaries about the racist implications of their view of God. They replied that God does not hate anyone. Instead, he loves all his children, and as a result, no racism is involved. Indeed, there is no longer any discrimination of Blacks of African ancestry from the priesthood and thus, no discrimination from exaltation. Yet White supremacy still seems to be in place. In other words, on the LDS view, God’s race still seems to be better than all other races given his exalted, supreme status. Every part of the Heavenly Father is still supreme, including his skin. If some have that color and others do not, then it would follow that some are superior to others in this respect.

The LDS view trivializes God’s nature and seems content to do so. God turns out to be an exalted man with a specific color. He has other physical features: his eyes are also a specific color, he has a specific height and weight, his hair is a specific color, he is a he and thus, has certain male sexual features, etc.

At the October 2024 General Conference, one Black LDS told the researcher that God may well turn out to be an exalted White man, but it just has not been revealed (Sivulka, 2024d). If that is the case, then some humans, particularly White males, look more like their Heavenly Father than others. “All are equal, but some are more equal than others,” as Orwell famously wrote. That will be the case throughout eternity regardless of whether all humans share the same color as their Heavenly Father in the resurrection. Nonetheless, all humans look more like their Heavenly Father because they all share the same nature. They are all human. At this point, God’s color supremacy is an irrelevant topic to most LDS as they think ignorance is bliss.

However, the racism issue comes more into focus when the topic turns to whether God cursed people with their race. This is where the racial topics of the BOM, PGP, and the priesthood ban are relevant.

In July of 2022, a Black shuttle driver named Samuel picked the researcher and his family up from the Salt Lake airport (Sivulka, 2022). He happened to have a BOM with him. The researcher asked him if he believed it. The driver said he did and that he was some leader of a local Black African LDS congregation. The researcher then asked the driver what he made of the BOM curse on, and segregation of, people with dark skin in Alma 3:6—a curse taken from them so that they got white skin and the segregation ended when they repented, as we read in 3 Nephi 2:14-6. The driver had no idea what to say. It seemed he had never thought about it before. The researcher was then able to invite the driver to visit the researcher’s website—JosephLied.com.

In November of 2024, the researcher (Sivulka, 2024e) told a few LDS sister missionaries across the street from his home about these problems with the BOM. The response was that this was simply metaphorical. If this is the case, then one wonders why skin was the subject rather than the biblical and BOM subject of one’s heart. Skin is external whereas heart is internal, and both are distinguished in 2 Nephi 5:21. It is more metaphorically understandable in claiming a heart is white or black. However, late LDS sociologist Armand Mauss likened the BOM skin references to being thick or thin skinned. However, why use the 2 Nephi 26:33 passage to refer to literal skin pigmentation to make an anti-racist point—a passage almost all LDS utilize to refer to all literal skin types, while in the context, 2 Nephi 5 refers to God cursing the Lamanites with “a skin of blackness”? Finally, the point of the skin coloration was physical. It was to

keep the Nephites from wanting to interbreed with the Lamanites. There was to be physical segregation until the Lamanites repented and joined the Nephites, but even then, there was to be no mixing of their seed, or the curse of dark skin would be on the Nephites as well as their offspring (2 Nephi 5:23; Alma 3:9, 15). How would innocent offspring metaphorically inherit dark skin? The only sense this makes is in terms of very physical, and not metaphorical, language.

In addition to this, one may also ask LDS if they believe the PGP to be the word of God. Once that is affirmed, then questions arise concerning God cursing the Canaanites with blackness, God not allowing them to hear Enoch's preaching which may have allowed them to partake of Zion with all other people groups, and banning them from the priesthood. Again, whether that relates to Black Africans being banned from the LDS priesthood or not is beside the point. It appears their Scripture is again presenting God as a racist.

On the 5th of July 2025, the researcher (Sivulka, 2025) received a text message from someone claiming that they were going to soon be baptized into the LDS Church. The researcher called Joseph Smith out as a false prophet that did not teach, as the Bible does, that the God of the Bible is the only creator of everything outside himself. The individual who texted the researcher replied that they believed Smith was a prophet and that the researcher should read the BOM with an "honest heart". The researcher replied that he already had done just that and had also done so with the rest of the LDS Scriptures, and then he proceeded to point out that the racist passages in the BOM indicate that it was a nineteenth century fraud. The passages were cited, and the individual was asked if they had read them and if so, what did the individual make of them. Just over a week went by, and the researcher received a text from this individual who said, "You are right[. L]atter[-]day [S]aint is bad." At this point, the researcher gave the individual a basic gospel message and encouraged them to commit their life to King Jesus as their Good Shepherd, who will lead them to find a good church. The individual replied with a big thumb-up emoji. As Latayne C. Scott once said in a book endorsement, "...I heard long ago that it's easier to inoculate against Mormonism than it is to do a 'Mormonectomy.'" (Dommeyer, 2018)

The point in all these conversations is not necessarily to prove Mormonism is racist by being able to answer every objection. Rather, the point is to get LDS thinking about their own worldview and then to contrast that with what the Bible teaches about God.

However, the approach is certainly not for everyone. Joel Groat (2018) cautions not to raise the subject of racism in Mormonism without a well-established relationship. The researcher, though, would obviously not go that far. He recognizes what a sensitive subject this is, but the effectiveness of the approach seems more dependent on the person being addressed. At numerous times the researcher has used this approach with strangers, and it seemed to be worthwhile to get them at least to think seriously about their worldview implications. Further, truth bothers people like a pebble in a shoe. Eventually, the problem must be dealt with. So, an approach like the one suggested here may not yield the immediate results one hopes for, but that is no reason to dismiss its use outside of well-established relationships. Finally, many times, the immediate results also depend on the one challenging the Mormon. The preacher's attitude of love covers a multitude of sins. Having said that, though, it is obvious that some subjects are simply too sensitive to touch and walls will immediately go up. Wisdom is always needed for steering a conversation which way it is to go.

As a result, it may be worthwhile not to discuss the doctrine of God and its racist implications *immediately*. Instead, it may be worthwhile to attack the problem indirectly and, depending on how that goes, circle back to the primary issue. In other words, one may try asking the individual if they have ever considered the biblical test for a so-called prophet in what he or she commands or foretells in the name of the Lord (Deut 18:20-2). If the LDS individual seems interested, one may then bring up how it seems that Young and the First Presidency statements of 1949 and 1969 all clearly failed this test. For example, Young spoke in the name of the Lord how Blacks of African ancestry would never receive the priesthood until all other descendants of Adam had been redeemed. Young also prophesied that since Blacks of African ancestry were of the seed of Cain, they were banned from the priesthood. He also prophesied that apostates would take on physical blackness and look just like the Devil. So, the question naturally arises, how does one make sense of all this? Should not this biblically demonstrate a false prophet?

At this point, if the Mormon is engaged, one is off to the theological races. The evangelist must continually trust God to give the increase (1 Cor 3:6) despite the messiness of the situation and the imperfections of those involved in the conversation, and as God's word begins to be preached, the evangelist must trust that God's word will not return void but accomplish what it is sent out to do (Isa 55:11). The evangelist must trust what God says about his word being active, sharper than any two-edge sword, and that it pierces the heart with precision (Heb 4:12). If an unbeliever continues to suppress the

truth (whether from God’s natural or biblical revelation) in unrighteousness, then this individual will be held culpable and will be rightly judged one day. However, the prayer is always for God’s mercy to triumph over judgment, knowing he delights to show mercy (Micah 7:18).

As a final word in addition to individual evangelization, preaching, and apologetics, the researcher’s thesis supervisor, Dr Takalani Muswubi (2025), points out that the recent developments in rooting out racism within the LDS Church are encouraging and should be further encouraged. Those who follow Christ should have a heart for justice and peace in every area of life. Muswubi recognizes that something as pervasive as “[W]hite supremacy does not just transform quietly: [it] must be recognized, investigated, understood, and intentionally abandoned or dismantled.” He advocates continual research on these recent developments within the LDS Church. The Church has been moving from within and from without. The moves from within come from its leaders, scholars, activists, as well as from the rank and file. We should remember that “[e]very good and perfect gift is from above” (Jas 1:17). We all should be thankful for the 2013 GTE even if we do not agree with all its conclusions. We all should be thankful for the Church’s recent calls to root out racism. We all should be thankful for LDS scholarly work to demonstrate the past racist theories of the LDS Church. We all should be thankful for the work LDS laity do on social media in pointing out racism within their church. Christians should at the very least pray about these changes—that God will use them to do away with the evils of racism, and more importantly, that he would use these changes to draw more Mormons out of the darkness of their Church and to his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

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