

**INTERVIEW WITH MORMON APOSTLE
LEGRAND RICHARDS CONCERNING THE
1978 NEGRO "REVELATION"**

Interviewed by Wesley P. Walters at the LDS Church Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah on 16 August 1978. Bold face parenthetical notes are supplied by the compiler.

Recently, Spencer W. Kimball, the current Mormon Prophet rocked the Mormon [and non-Mormon] world with the news release that the Mormon church was abandoning its long held denial of the Mormon priesthood to those of Black African ancestry. The news release mentioned a "revelation" from God as the source of this change.

Because there has not been a published text of the "revelation" supposedly given to President Kimball where a "thus saith the Lord" might be recorded; much street level speculation has occurred about the circumstances surrounding the bringing forth this very dramatic change.

However, recently Mormon Apostle LeGrand Richards had an interview with Wesley Walters in which many of the specific details surrounding the change in this policy were made crystal clear. When Wesley Walters shared this information with me, I immediately saw the great significance to Mormon and non-Mormon alike. Therefore, the following is a transcript of the portion of this interview pertaining to the Negro "revelation."

WALTERS: On this revelation, of the priesthood to the Negro, I've heard all kinds of stories: I've heard that Christ appeared to the apostles; I've heard that Joseph Smith appeared; and then I heard another story that Spencer Kimball had had a concern about this for some time, and simply shared it with the apostles, and they decided that this was the right time to move in that direction. Now, are any of those stories true, or are they all?

RICHARDS: Well, the last one is pretty true, and 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. Brother Kimball [The Mormon Church President] worried about it, and he prayed a lot about it. He asked each one of us of the Twelve [The Council of Twelve Apostles] if we would pray--and we did--that the Lord would give him the inspiration to know what the will of the Lord was. Then he invited each one of us in his office--individually. When you are in a group you can't always express everything that's in your heart. You're part of the group, see--so he interviewed each one of us, personally, to see how we felt about it. He asked us to pray about it. Then he asked each one of us to hand in all the references [from Mormon teachings] we had, for, or against that proposal. See, he was thinking favorably toward giving the colored people the priesthood. Then we had a meeting where we meet every week in the temple. We discussed it as a group together, and we prayed about it in our prayer circle. We held another prayer circle after the close of that meeting, and he [President Kimball] lead in the prayer; praying that the Lord would give us the inspiration that we needed to do the thing that would be pleasing to him and for the blessing of his children.

The next Thursday--we meet every Thursday--the Presidency came with this little document written out to make the announcement--to see how we'd feel about it--and present it in written form. Well, some of the members of the Twelve suggested a few changes in the announcement, and then in our meeting there we all voted in favor of it--the Twelve and the Presidency. One member of the Twelve, Mark Petersen, was down in South America, but Brother Benson, our President [of The Council of the Twelve], had arranged where he could be reached by phone, and right there while we were in our meeting in the temple, Elder Kimball talked with Brother Petersen, and read him this article, and he [Petersen] approved of it.

WALTERS: What was the date? Would that have been the first of June, or something?

RICHARDS: That was the first Thursday, I think in, May. At least that's about when it was. After we all voted in favor of it, we called another meeting for the next morning, Friday morning, at seven o'clock, of all the other General Authorities--that includes the Seventies' Quorum and the Patriarch and the Presiding Bishopric. It was presented to them, and they all had an opportunity to express themselves. There were a few of the Brethren [this term means

Mormon General Authorities] that were out presiding in the missions. The Twelve were appointed to interview each one of them. I had to interview Brother Lee and read him the article, and asked him his feelings. He was thrilled, because he labored down there in Brazil, and he knew what it would mean for those people. So every member of the General Authorities to a man approved it before the announcement went out.

We had a letter from our colored man up in Ogden; it read like this: he was a member of the Church, and he said--"If the Lord is willing to let me have my wife and children in this life, why wouldn't He be willing to let me have them in the next life?" That makes sense, doesn't it? You know the Lord gave a revelation to the Prophet Joseph where He said that, "There is a law irrevocably decreed in the heavens before the foundations of the earth were laid, upon which all blessings are predicated, and no blessing can be obtained except by obedience to the law upon which it is predicated." [D&C 130:20] Well, all that means is that if you want wheat, you've got to plant wheat, doesn't it? If you want corn, you've got to plant corn. Well if I plant wheat and get a harvest, and the colored man plants wheat and takes as good care of it, why isn't he as much entitled to the harvest as I am? You see? So we figured the same for spiritual blessings. If the colored man lives as good as I do, serves the Lord, and so forth, why isn't he as much entitled to the blessings as I am? You see that? It's been a united decision; there's been no adverse comment by anyone, other than in California.

WALTERS: What about intermarriage, is it OK?

RICHARDS: What?

WALTERS: Intermarriage--is that in view too?

RICHARDS: Well no. We've never [recommended it] before this decision was reached. We've always recommended that people live within their own race. The Japanese ought to marry Japanese; the Chinese ought to marry Chinese; the Hawaiians ought to marry Hawaiians; and the colored people ought to marry coloreds.

WALTERS: And that would still be your position on that?

RICHARDS: That is still our position. But, they are entitled to the temple blessings--the sealing of their wives to them. It's all conditioned on their living. Now if they live right, and they're devoted, and they're good clean living, why shouldn't they get the blessings?

WALTERS: Now when President Kimball read this little announcement [in the staff meetings with the other General Authorities], was that the same thing that was released to the press?

RICHARDS: Yes.

WALTERS: There wasn't a special document as a "revelation", that he had and wrote down?

RICHARDS: We discussed it in our meeting. What else should we say besides that announcement? We decided that that was sufficient; that no more needed to be said.

WALTERS: Was that the letter you sent out to the various wards?

RICHARDS: And to the Church; and to the newspapers, yes.

WALTERS: Will that become a part of "scripture"?

RICHARDS: Yes, I've already thought in my own mind of suggesting we add it to the Pearl of Great Price, [the fourth book of LDS "scriptures"] just like those last two revelations that we've just added.

WALTERS: At that point, is there a special reason why you add it to the Pearl of Great Price, rather than to the Doctrine and Covenants? Is it just more convenient to put it in there, instead of adding another number, or something?

RICHARDS: I don't know that we've even discussed the reason which book it should go in; but the Pearl of Great Price was written and assembled later than the Doctrine and Covenants was. My grandfather [Franklin D. Richards] was the one that organized the Pearl of Great Price. When we discussed it in our meeting, we didn't discuss whether it should go in the Doctrine and Covenants, or the Pearl of Great Price, we just discussed how it would be to have those two revelations in the Pearl of Great Price.

WALTERS: Will this affect your theological thinking about the Negro being less valiant in the previous existence? How does this relate? Have you thought that through?

RICHARDS: Some time ago, the Brethren decided that we should never say that. We don't know just what the reason was. Paul said, "The Lord hath before appointed the bounds of the habitations of all men for to dwell upon the face of the earth," [a paraphrase of Acts 17:26]. He determined that before we were born. He who knows why they were born with black skin or white and so forth. We'll just have to wait.

WALTERS: Is there a tendency to feel that people are born with a black skin because of some previous situation, or do we consider that black skin is no sign

anymore of anything inferior in any sense of the word?
RICHARDS: Well, we don't want to get that into doctrine. Think of it as you will. Paul said, "Now we see in part and we know in part; we see through a glass darkly. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away, then we will see as we are seen, and know as we are known." [a paraphrase of I Corinthians 13:12] Now the Church's attitude today is to prefer to leave it until we know. The Lord has never indicated that that black skin came because of being less faithful. Now, the Indian; we know why he was changed, don't we? The Book of Mormon tells us that. He has a dark skin, but he has a promise that through faithfulness, that they shall again become a white and delightful people. So we haven't anything like that on the colored thing.

WALTERS: Now, will this new revelation; has it brought any new insights or new ways of looking at the Book of Abraham? I think traditionally it is thought of the curse of Cain, coming through Canaanites and on the black-skinned people, and therefore denying the priesthood?

RICHARDS: We considered that with all the "for's" and the "against's", and decided that with all of that, if they lived their lives, and did the work, that they were entitled to their blessings.

WALTERS: But you haven't come up with any new understanding of the Book of Abraham? I just wondered whether there would be a shift in that direction. Is the recent revelation--(RICHARDS: What?)--Is the recent revelation in harmony with what the past prophets have taught, of when the Negro would receive the priesthood?

RICHARDS: Well, they have held out the thought that they would ultimately get the priesthood, but they never determined the time for it. When this situation that we face down there in Brazil--Brother Kimball worried a lot about it--how the people are so faithful and devoted. The president of the Relief Society of the stake is a colored woman down there in one of the stakes. If they do the work, why it seems like that the justice of the Lord would approve of giving them the blessing. Now it's all conditional upon the life that they live isn't it?

WALTERS: Well I thank you for clarifying that for me, because you know, out in the streets out there, there must be at least five, ten different stories about the way this happened.

RICHARDS: Well I've told you exactly what happened.

WALTERS: Right. Well thank you so much, I appreciate it--

RICHARDS: If you quote me you will be telling the truth.

WALTERS: OK, well fine. You don't mind if we quote you then?

RICHARDS: No.

[The interview continued for ten more minutes, but nothing more was said with respect to the 1978 Negro revelation.]

I would like to thank Apostle Richards for his honesty with Wes Walters and for making known the real circumstances surrounding the "revelation."

What conclusions are we to draw then? Simply, that there was no appearance from "on high," nor a divine message containing a "thus saith the Lord" for mankind. Rather, we see that President Kimball was forced into considering a change because of the pressures on the church in Brazil [and most certainly elsewhere]. History hints at the fact that the "curse" on the Negro came from pressure put on by the Slavery backers in Missouri. Now that President Kimball has finally reacted to public pressure, we can see that the "curse" never did come from God in the first place!! Since God didn't place the "curse" on the Negro He didn't have to remove it. The "Board of Directors" just voted upon the suggestion made by the President of the Mormon corporation. It may have been a sound business decision, long overdue and good public relations--but it was not a revelation from God.

Dear Reader, examine yourself and your relationship with God. Cast aside any entanglements with false Prophets and false religions. Seek salvation and relationship with the true and living Jesus Christ of the Bible. Jesus alone can save [Eph. 2:8-9].

Prepared by:

Bob Witte
Box 31663
Phoenix, AZ 85046

For further information contact: