

An Interview With LeGrand Richards

Back in the late 1970's Mormon President Spencer W. Kimball announced that he had received a supposed revelation from God that "the time had finally come" to allow the Black man to hold the Mormon priesthoods which had been denied them since the early days of the church's history.

Informed observers of the Mormon Church suspected that pressures forced the leadership to change the policy. However, the primary focal point of the pressure did not come from the ACLU, NAACP or even the Federal Government, but rather from within the church itself. These observers looked to the south seeing Brazil as a real pressure point at the time. The LDS church had great successes in Brazil in the 70's in gaining converts, but that has raised great difficulties as well. Many of the Brazilians have Negro blood in their veins -- far more than the prohibitive "one drop" spoken of by Brigham Young and other leaders. With the opening of the Brazilian temple in 1978, the local Patriarchs in Brazil were apparently clamoring for something concrete to get them out of the obvious difficulty they were in.

All the speculation in the world does no good when it comes from sources outside of the "inner circle." But, the world was greeted with a Watergate-like stonewalling of silence from the top leadership concerning the details of what happened and why. That is, until LeGrand Richards was interviewed in August by Wesley P. Walters and Chris Vlachos. Surprisingly, Mr. Richards spoke freely about the why's and wherefore's of the decision making processes involved. This document reproduces the resulting correspondence between Mr. Richards and Mr. Vlachos which confirms that the "revelation" was nothing more than a carefully thought out expediency to solve a problem that the leadership knew would never go away.

So, after being out of print for a quarter century, on the following pages from the tract of the same name published in 1978, are the letter exchanges between Chris Vlachos and Mormon Apostle LeGrand Richards confirming the details of that famous encounter. Mr. Walters openly had his cassette recorder on during the interview so he wouldn't be distracted by taking notes. Although I no longer have a copy of that cassette, an exact transcript is now available at several internet locations. You can read it for yourself on line at: http://www.lds-mormon.com/legrand_richards.shtml amongst other places.

358 West 170 North
Orem, Utah 84057
11 September 1978

Elder LeGrand Richards
LDS Church Office Bldg.
47 E. South Temple St.
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Dear Elder Richards,

I wanted to write and thank you for our visits of August 16th and a week or so ago. Wesley Walters and I appreciated your kindness in spending so much time with us, and for explaining your experiences with regard to the recent revelation authorizing you to give the LDS Priesthood to Negroes. Since I did not take any notes at our first meeting, I wanted to write and verify a few important points which you made before I forget them.

One of the most interesting items which you mentioned was that the whole situation was basically provoked by the Brazilian temple--that is, the Mormon church has had great difficulty obtaining Priesthood leadership among its South American membership; and now with this new temple, a large proportion of those who have contributed money and work to build it would not be able to use it unless the Church changed its stand with regard to giving the Priesthood to Blacks.

I believe that you also mentioned President Kimball as having called each of the Twelve Apostles individually into his office to hear their personal feelings with regard to this issue. While President Kimball was basically in favor of giving the Priesthood to Blacks, didn't he ask each of you to prepare some references for and against the proposal as found in the scriptures?

Another thing which stands out in my mind was the prayer that President Kimball offered in the special prayer circle with the Apostles and First Presidency on June 1st: Didn't you say he prayed essentially that God would give you all the inspiration necessary to do what was pleasing to the Lord and what was best for the blessing of His children?

Elder LeGrand Richards
11 September 1978, p. 2

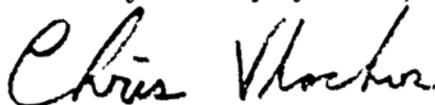
In addition to these details, I have tried to sequentialize what you told us about the revelation. The Twelve and First Presidency had a special prayer circle in the Salt Lake Temple on June 1st, where President Kimball prayed for guidance and inspiration in regard to Negroes. Then, one week later on June 8th, you all met again and the First Presidency presented the letter released on June 9th to all Church leaders to the Twelve in order to hear their reactions. A few members of the Twelve offered suggestions for a few changes in the document. Afterwards, all twelve Apostles voted in favor of the announcement. When we asked you if there was a written revelation, you said that the only written document was the June 9th letter--that it was considered to be sufficient. The next morning, all other general authorities met and voted in favor of the announcement. Then it was released to the press. I feel fairly certain as to the accuracy of these events, but just wanted to double-verify it with you.

I recall Wesley asking if the Mormons still believe that Negroes were less valient in the pre-mortal existence--this being a reason for their black skin. Didn't you say that the Brethren decided that the real reasons are still unknown? I do remember you saying that the Book of Abraham curse doctrine was considered with the pros and cons, and that you all decided that if Negroes live good lives, they are entitled to their blessings. I assume that this means no new interpretation of the Book of Abraham account?

When we talked about intermarriage, I got the feeling that the Mormon Church will not encourage them, but if they occur, the Church will support them. Is my perception accurate?

I guess that's about it. We did talk about other things, but these stick out more in my mind as the important parts. When you reply, please let me know if this accurately represents what you told Wesley and I. I really appreciate your personal concern in answering all our questions.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Vlachos". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Chris Vlachos

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The Council of the Twelve
47 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

September 12, 1978

Chris Vlachos
358 West 170 North
Orem, Utah 84057

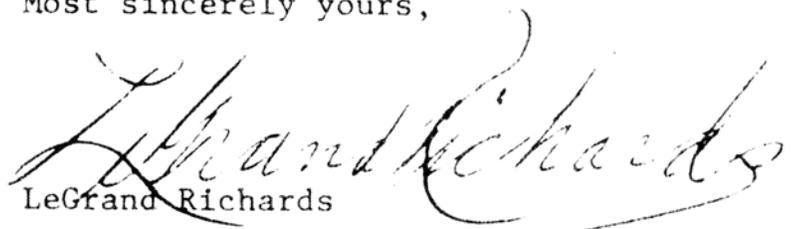
Dear Friend:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of September 11th and I don't quite understand the purpose of your letter. The explanations I gave to you when you were here in my office I did not intend for public use. I thought it would be for your own information. I don't think there is anything more I need to add to what I told you at that time.

It wouldn't please me if you were using the information I gave you when you were here in my office for public purposes. I gave it to you for your own information, and that is where I would like to see it remain.

With all good wishes, I remain,

Most sincerely yours,


LeGrand Richards

LR:mb

358 West 170 North
Orem, Utah 84057
15 September 1978

Elder LeGrand Richards
LDS Church Office Bldg.
47 E. South Temple St.
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Dear Elder Richards,

Thank you for your reply of 12 September. I am writing you again because your response left me very puzzled. After you told Wesley Walters and I the incidents surrounding the recent Negro revelation, we asked you if we could quote what you had said, and you said something to the effect that "Yes, you can quote me, for I have told you exactly what happened." Having been given that permission, I have told many people since our conversation of your personal story. Now you say that it was not intended for public transmission. Of course, I have no intention of publishing any of those events, but having received permission to share the story, I am writing you again to verify the main points. I will continue to share what you told us, and only wish to be sure that what I say is correctly representing what you said.

The basic points of the story as I remember them are:

1. That the whole situation was provoked by the Brazilian temple affair. Apparently, most of the South American members would not have been able to use the temple due to their Negro ancestry.
2. President Kimball personally interviewed each of the Twelve Apostles on the Negro question, and asked you all to prepare references for and against giving Blacks the Priesthood.
3. President Kimball's prayer offered at the June 1st prayer circle was that God would inspire you all to do what was pleasing to Him and what would be best for His children.
4. The letter sent to all Church officials was first presented to the Twelve Apostles by the First Presidency, and voted upon (affirmatively). This occurred one week after President Kimball's prayer for guidance.

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5. The official letter mentioned in point #4 was the only written document involved in the policy change. No written revelation or account of inspiration was otherwise produced.
6. No new interpretation of the Book of Abraham "curse" upon the descendants of Cain will be offered by the Mormon Church. You said that we still do not know why Blacks were cursed, and that the lack of valency in the pre-mortal existence is not a doctrine. The general feeling of the Brethren is that if Negroes live righteous lives, they are entitled to the same blessings as other members of the Church.
7. With reference to intermarriage, the Church does not encourage them, but if they occur, the Church will support them and allow temple sealings to take place.

As I mentioned in the first paragraph, you originally told us that we could quote you as having related these facts. This we will continue to do, but I truly wish to have your verification of the above seven points so that we do not mis-quote you.

Thank you once again for your personal concern with this matter.

Sincerely yours,



Chris Vlachos

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The Council of the Twelve
47 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

September 19, 1978

Chris Vlachos
358 West 170 North
Orem, Utah 84057

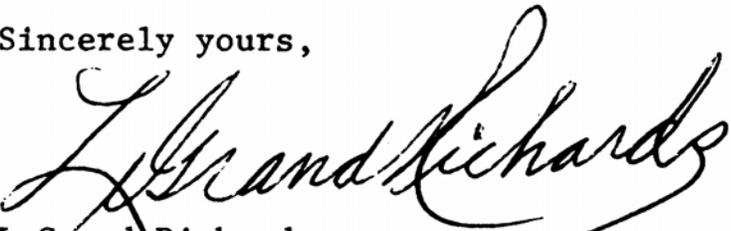
Dear Mr. Vlachos:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of September 15th.

The reason I replied to your last letter as I did was because some time ago I received a letter from someone down in your area, complaining about what you were saying. I don't remember just who the letter was from but I didn't feel that my interview with you was something that you would want to be publicizing all over. I don't have any objections to your telling it to a friend, as you have stated in your letter now of the 15th. I see nothing wrong in your statements reviewing our interview.

I send my best regards.

Sincerely yours,



LeGrand Richards

LR:mb