



Helvécio Martins, from Brazil, sustained as a General Authority on March 31, 1990.

and expanded missionary work among blacks, unexplored challenges to their growth and retention remain in counterpoint to their happiness with priesthood inclusion.

Despite the cultural miscommunications that remain, black Latter-day Saints enjoy opportunities in all phases of Church activity, including missionary work, quorum leadership, BISHOPRICS, and STAKE PRESIDENCIES, along with other members. The first entirely black African stake was organized in 1988. Indeed, black Latter-day Saints may be an LDS historical enigma that has emerged as a prime example of success in LDS brotherhood and sisterhood.

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BLASPHEMY

Blasphemy denotes sacrilegious actions, speech, or thoughts that mock or revile God. A person blasphemes who, understanding the gravity of this behavior, willfully belittles or maligns God, the Godhead, or that which is of them, such as the commandments, covenants, ordinances, revelation, scriptures, and prophets.

Under the LAW OF MOSES, blasphemy—understood anciently to be mainly the unauthorized uttering of the ineffable name of Jehovah (YHWH)—was a heinous offense punishable by stoning (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:10–16). Charges of blasphemy figure twice in the Book of Mormon—in Sherem's false accusations against Jacob (Jacob 7:7) and in Korihor's insolent speech before the chief judge (Alma 30:30). In these cases, and generally, blasphemy embraced many forms of impiety, whether directed against God, against his servants (Acts 13:45), against the king (1 Kgs. 21:10), or in some cases against holy places or things, including the law (Acts 6:13). However, when blasphemies were spoken in relative ignorance, the gift of mercy could mitigate the requirements of justice (1 Tim. 1:13).

If a person with spiritual knowledge intentionally blasphemes God or the divine, the sin is most serious. For those who have entered into the NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT, blasphemy in extreme form is a sin against the HOLY GHOST wherein one assents anew unto the death of Christ and the shedding of his innocent blood. This is called the UNPARDONABLE SIN against the Holy Ghost (Matt. 12:31–32; D&C 132:27).

Emphasizing the gravity of the sin of blasphemy for those who claim to be his followers, Christ revealed that when he comes to purge the world he will commence with those "who have professed to know my name and have not known me, and have blasphemed against me in the midst of my house" (D&C 112:26).

Latter-day Saints are to refrain from blasphemy and the taking of the name of God in vain. Profanity and acrimony diminish spirituality and must be avoided: “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col. 3:8). People are not defiled, Jesus emphasized, by what goes into the mouth, but by what comes from the heart: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). Accordingly, Latter-day Saints are enjoined to avoid all forms of evil speaking of God, of the Lord’s anointed, and, by implication, of all that is his, for “in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (D&C 59:21).

[See also Profanity.]

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BLESSING ON FOOD

Blessings on food are prayers to thank God for providing sustenance and to ask his blessings both on the food and on those who share it. In Mormon homes such blessings precede each meal and may be given by any member of a dining party, adult or child. In private these prayers are spoken orally, but may be spoken silently by individuals dining in public. All blessings on the food are addressed to God in the name of Jesus Christ. They are spoken from the heart as there is no prescribed prayer.

Latter-day Saints follow the patterns established by Christ and his disciples in blessings on food. When feeding the multitudes, Christ gave thanks for sustenance (Matt. 15:35–36) and blessed it (Matt. 14:19). Paul taught that food was to be received with prayer and thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4:3–5).

Biblical examples of praying over food are the basis for the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions of blessings on food or saying grace. Converts to Mormonism tended to continue these traditions from their prior faiths, and to be bolstered by the Latter-day Saint instruction on prayer: All things

are to be done “with prayer and thanksgiving.” Food and all “good things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart, . . . to strengthen the body and enliven the soul And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things” (D&C 59:7, 17–19, 21).

Petitioning God for blessings on the food to be eaten is typical of Mormon table blessings. This may include requests for nourishment and good health, for strength to do one’s work and God’s will and to be of service. Other blessings on the diners or on those who prepared the meal are also deemed appropriate.

In many cultures, breaking bread or sharing a meal with others is an act of hospitality. According to Latter-day scripture such sharing may also be a foretaste of the future Messianic banquet (D&C 58:8). Because family meals provide opportunities for sharing the deepest spiritual concerns and rejoicings, it is especially appropriate to begin such occasions with prayer and the invocation of the Spirit. In LDS families this prayer is customarily spoken at the beginning of the meal only, and not also following the meal, as is the custom among some people of other religions. Because there is no prescribed form for Latter-day Saint blessings on food, such blessings enable families daily to express their own feelings, thoughts, and words in intimate prayer and fellowship two or three times a day.

CHRISTINE QUINN CHRISTENSEN

BLESSINGS

The term “blessings” is used in two different ways in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In a broad traditional sense as used in many cultures, the word applies to all good things that come in a person’s life—the wonders of nature, the joys of family, the benefits of liberty and education—anything and everything that enriches life. Such blessings are often pointed to as a manifestation of God’s love for his children. Latter-day Saint writings are interspersed with this usage. In more specific terminology, blessings refer to ORDINANCES performed under PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY.

A PRIESTHOOD BLESSING may be given only