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A Reply to the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times Henry W. Richards

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Book Reviews

RICHARDS, HENRY W. *A Reply to the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1965. 159 pp.

The writing of this book was undertaken by Mr. Richards in acceptance of a challenge in an "open letter" by Mr. Stephen M. Silver "to bring your doctrine forth in a manly way, that it might be put to the test. . . ." It seems that Mr. Silver, whose parents were neighbors to Mr. Richards, had left the L.D.S. Church and joined the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times. Mr. Richards, who was fond of his neighbors, was eager to bring young Mr. Silver back into the Church. He told Stephen's mother that he had found enough "proof and information" to prove the doctrine of the Church of the Firstborn incorrect. Mr. Silver stated that he at first thought to write privately to Mr. Richards but believing that their "lectors" would be "equally interested" in Mr. Richards' findings, decided to write "this open letter."

In the introduction to the book, it is made clear that the main problem of controversy is "Priesthood Government . . . ; who's got the keys and who doesn't."

It is pointed out that the "LeBaron movement" maintains that there are two offices higher than the First Presidency of the Church, the President of the High Priesthood of the Church (an office of the Melchizedek Priesthood) and the Presiding Patriarch of the Church (an office in the Aaronic Priesthood); and that the authority of the highest office was given by John the Beloved to Joseph Smith, who conferred it upon Benjamin Johnson, who conferred it upon his grandson, Alma Dayer LeBaron, who conferred it upon his son, Joel F. LeBaron. The second highest office, according to the LeBaron group, was handed down to Margarito Bautista without a break in authority.

All prophets of the L.D.S. Church down to and including Joseph F. Smith are accepted by the "LeBaronites," and both churches accept the four standard works of the L.D.S. Church. The LeBaron group also accepts the *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by Joseph Fielding Smith. In addition, they also

acknowledge their own booklet *Priesthood Expounded* (published in August, 1956) and their periodical *Ensign* as being official. In addition to using the two above-mentioned publications, Mr. Richards also obtained information concerning the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times from tape-recorded interviews with the leaders of their church.

Mr. Richards' first chapter deals with the founding and organization of the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times in some detail, giving also their articles of incorporation. Chapters two and three deal with the LeBaronite claims to having two priesthood offices higher than that of president of the Church. Mr. Richards brings out the fact, admitted by the LeBaronite leaders, that there is no written evidence that Benjamin Johnson was ever ordained to be president of the High Priesthood. Mr. Richards also points out that nowhere in L.D.S. literature is there any evidence that the patriarchal office is higher than the office of president of the Church, nor is there any evidence that the office bestowed by John the Baptist had any patriarchal authority whatsoever. Another major problem discussed is whether the apostleship is a priesthood or an office and whether apostles have the authority to ordain other apostles or not.

Because the LeBaron group claims to have received all of their authority from Benjamin Johnson, his writings are used by Mr. Richards to show that Joseph Smith gave "all the keys and powers bestowed upon me" to the Twelve Apostles, and that "after the Prophet's death, Brigham Young became Israel's great leader, a prophet, seer and revelator to the Church in all the world . . . holding every key of priesthood and power pertaining to the kingdom of God on the earth and the salvation for the dead."

Sundry matters are next taken up in a series of thirty-five questions to Stephen Silver, in which Mr. Richards seeks an answer to what he considers certain false teachings and statements of the LeBaronites. One of these is the claim by William Tucker that Joel F. LeBaron is the "one mighty and strong." (D&C 85:7), when Joel F. LeBaron had personally told Mr. Richards that his father Alma Dayer LeBaron was the "one mighty and strong."

The author concludes his work by pointing out that both Alma Dayer LeBaron and wife, Maude LeBaron, who had been

excommunicated from the Church on grounds of adultery, had written to President Heber J. Grant (Mrs. LeBaron having written on three different occasions, the first time in July, 1926 and the third time in Feb., 1942), asking for forgiveness and readmission into the Church. Mr. Richards poses the question of why they would do this if they knew that Heber J. Grant had no authority and that Alma Dayer LeBaron himself claimed to have the highest priesthood authority on earth.

There are two rather unimportant, yet quite noticeable, errors in the book. On page twenty-three, Mr. Richards has confused the publication date of the *Documentary History of the Church* (published in 1902) with that of the *Comprehensive History of the Church* (first published serially in *Americana Magazine* from 1909-1915 and first published in book form in 1930). Ordinarily this would nullify a point made by Mr. Richards, but he needs only to replace his reference from Vol. I, page 271 of the *Comprehensive History of the Church* to Vol. I, page 243 of the *Documentary History of the Church* in order to make his point equally valid. On page 129 of the book D&C 139 should read D&C 130.

Mr. Richards did a tremendous amount of research, both in the scriptures and in the beliefs and history of the LeBaronite Church, in order to write his book. Yet, his book does not purport to be a history of the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times. If one desires a background in this subject in addition to Mr. Richards' book, he could profitably read *Origins and Development of the Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times*, a master's thesis at B.Y.U. by Lyle O. Wright.

It is the reviewer's opinion that Mr. Richards has done a very capable job in performing the task that he set out to do.

Russell R. Rich