

Priesthood and the race question

Engagement Week held a conference on Race in Mormonism

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As part of last week's Engagement Week here at Utah Valley University, the Eugene England Series delivered on its promised theme called Dialogical Exploration of Race in Mormonism.

Guest speakers Darius Gray and Margaret Blair Young spent time behind the microphone discussing Mormon issues on how to improve race relations inside a world-wide church of 15 million members that continues to increase in diversity.

"There's a difference between the restored gospel of Christ and church culture," said Darius Gray, former president of The Genesis Club of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "and in church culture there is room for diversity."

To that point, Gray highlighted how leaders of the LDS faith appear to be striving to improve the leadership's speed and clarity by releasing multiple statements regarding its past with the issue of race and priesthood.

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DARIUS GRAY
Former President of
The Genesis Club

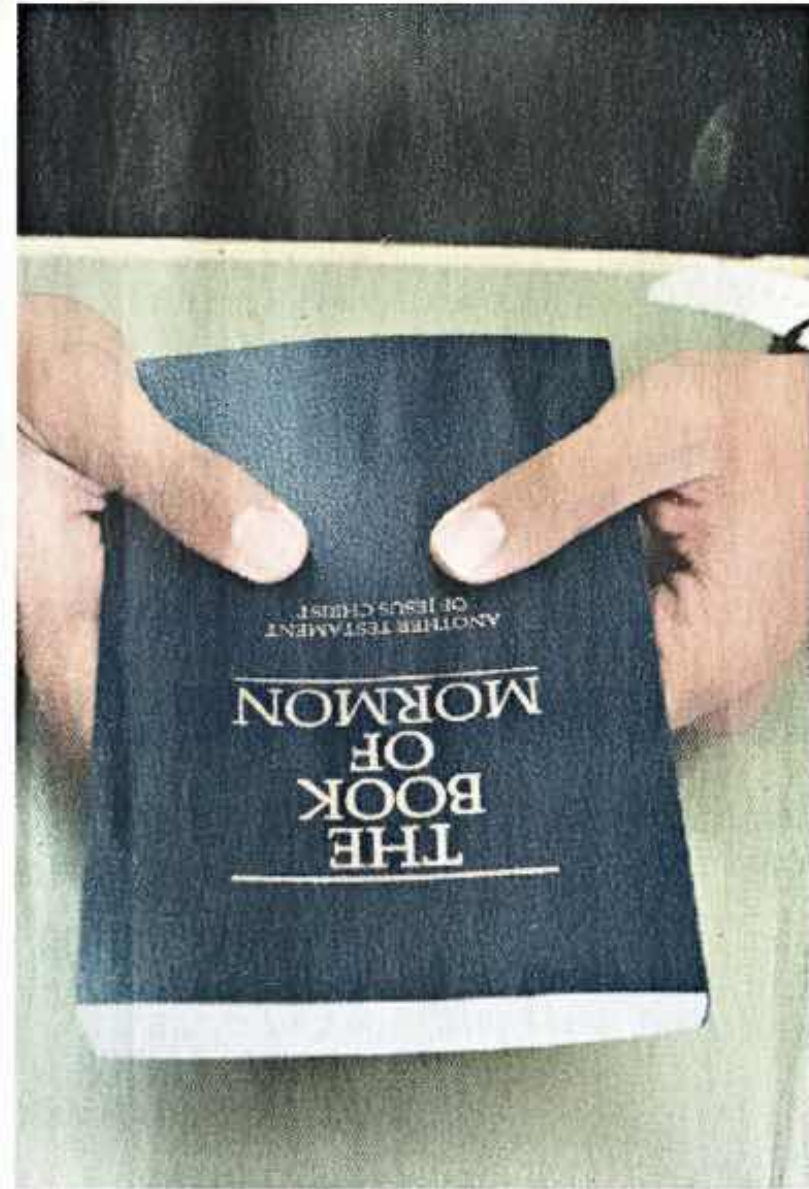


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Panelists discuss catching the Mormon church's culture up with its doctrine.

Gray emphasized a situation from 2012 where a retired BYU professor, Randy Bott, was interviewed for an article with the Washington Post discussing the LDS Church's stance on race.

"The positions attributed to BYU professor Randy Bott," the Church responded, "... absolutely do not represent the teaching and doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints...It is unfortunate that the Church was not given a chance to respond to what others said."

Gray expressed surprise that, "the church did something that it did not in the past, typically that sort of thing would have the church going under cover." He instead called the Church's statement, "bold...earth breaking news...and [I] was frankly stunned that they came so quickly."

In December of 2013 the LDS Church issued another statement titled Race and the Priesthood, stating "Today, the church disavows theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of disfavor or curse, or that it reflects action in a pre-mortal 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."

However, Gray was quick to point out in his opening remarks that, "priesthood restriction was far more consequential than many realized, and continues to affect Mormons of all complexions, though the LDS statement of Dec 6th of last year does not have the power to change hearts."

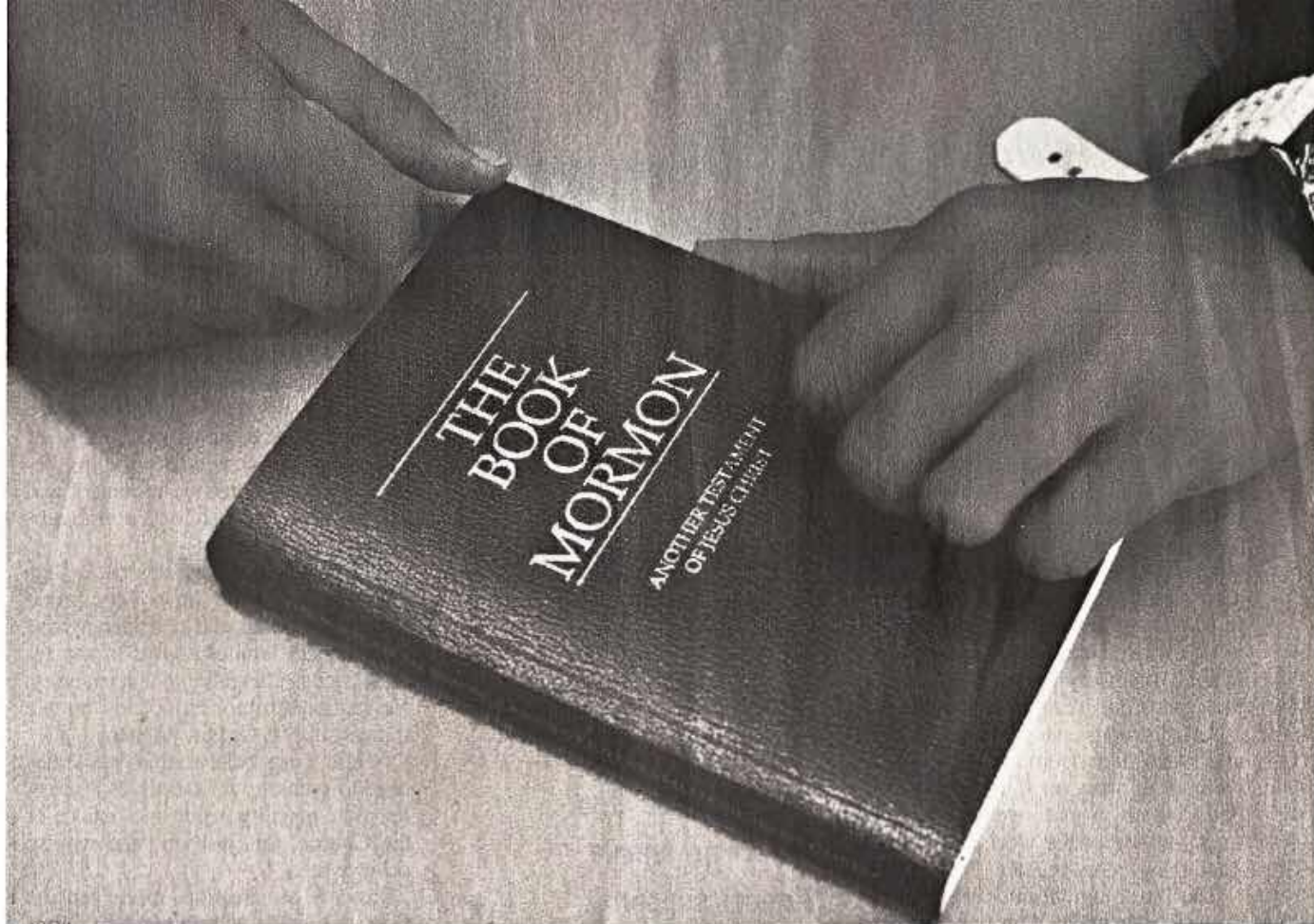


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LAURA FOX

Experts discuss the implications of Mormon church's disavowal of its formal policies on race and the priesthood.

Gray's ubiquitously bold and candid statement was later met with emotion when he stated that, "we need to have a healing and we need to do better."

Margaret Blair Young, author of *Standing on the Promises*, offered multiple solutions on how to change the hearts of people with regards to race and priesthood. Young urged all members to keep copies of the December 6th Race and the Priesthood statement, asserting, "keep them in your wallets; make copies of the final two paragraphs that the church disavows the curse of Cain

and the idea of premortal performance."

Young went on to give four other tips that would improve overall relationships both inside and outside the Mormon faith on the issue of race and priesthood. First, read. Second, listen. Third, get involved. Forth, think and re-think.

"Be willing to speak for someone else. If you see someone being mistreated you obviously don't let that go; we are responsible one for another." Young mentioned that the Church's 1978 revelation allowing priesthood ordination to all worthy males required

action from the Church membership.

After Young's remarks, a question was posed to the both Young and Gray as to whether either of them had any thoughts on how individuals can effect change on other issues within the Mormon faith. Darius Young offered up these concluding words.

"To my LGBT brothers and sisters, I see their struggle paralleling the black civil rights struggle. There are those that would contend otherwise but from my viewpoint it is a similar struggle. I see the women's place not only in the LDS church, but society, as a simi-

lar struggle. Sadly, the human condition is as it's been and it requires change; it requires effort, and frankly it requires prayer. We black folks who are now in the inner fold wouldn't have gotten there without God. We had to do our part...whatever it is we do, because I don't say you do, but we do, we ought to do in love. If we do it with rancor and bitterness, the spirit of God cannot assist us, and that's critical in getting it done. Build up the family – the family of God – and we can't do it with that sort of a negative attitude. We have to work and change paradigms."