

The Need for a New Mormon Heaven

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IN MARK TWAIN'S *Letters from the Earth*, Satan, who has been banished to earth, writes letters home to Michael and Gabriel. Mortals, he writes, have imagined a heaven that contains "each and every imaginable thing that is repulsive to a man, and not a single thing he likes! . . . He has left entirely out of it the supremest of all his delights, the one ecstasy that stands first and foremost in the heart of every individual of his race — and of ours — sexual intercourse!" In heaven, "prayer takes its place. . . . His heaven . . . has not a single thing in it that he *actually* values. It consists — utterly and entirely — of diversions which he cares next to nothing about here in the earth, yet he is quite sure he will like in heaven." These diversions include "church that lasts forever, and a Sabbath that has no end," continuous harp playing, and singing. There is no variety in activities and no intellectual stimulation (1938, 15–20).

I used to love this description because my Mormon heaven seemed far superior to this standard Christian heaven that Twain's Satan describes. Sexual intercourse *does* have a place in Mormon heaven, though not as an end in itself. Heavenly residents are busy with activities. Those righteous individuals who become gods in Mormon heaven will certainly be using their intellects as they create worlds and keep them running, and they will undoubtedly be learning continuously. Mormonism never suggested there would be continual music, nor continual church or Sabbath days in heaven.

Lately though, Satan's comments about mortals' relationship to their heaven have hit close to home. While the appealing aspects of Mormon heaven that I have mentioned have allowed me to feel smug, there are other aspects of Mormon heaven that I, like Twain's mortals, "care next to nothing about, here in the earth" (1938, 16). Still other aspects of Mormon heaven offend

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and annoy me in their earthly counterparts, and I can't imagine that I will like them any better in heaven. Much in this heaven violates my idea of fairness and of how God operates. Much does not seem logical, does not ring true to me, and leaves me feeling apprehensive rather than motivated to earn a promised reward that seems a little like a punishment.

I acknowledge that some of what I present as Mormon heaven is probably not the heaven many living Mormons anticipate, and some Mormons may not even have been exposed to some of these ideas about heaven. Yet many of the most influential nineteenth-century Church leaders, including three prophets, taught these ideas, and they have not been superseded by new teachings. Some Church members continue to promote these or similar ideas; they are still found in our temple ceremony and in our scriptures.

Lowell Bennion has taught that God is reasonable, fair, impartial, and benevolent, and when he acts differently in scriptures or in our theology, we can assume that those portrayals are not accurate. Bennion has also taught that for a church to be a good church it must provide people with a sense of their intrinsic worth and equality (Bennion 1956, 7; 1959, 38; 1981, 34, 35, 39). When I apply the Lowell Bennion test to the current concept of heaven, I find it wanting.

Parts of this Mormon heaven seem profoundly wrong because they give women and single men a diminished sense of self-worth here on earth. It is hard not to conclude from the patriarchal nature of this view of heaven that those who can be patriarchs are eternally superior to those who cannot be. Furthermore, this theology of heaven reduces many people to "things" — things that someone else will receive as a reward, things that someone else can use to help him achieve glory, and things that someone else can dominate. I believe that heavenly patriarchy, and the hierarchy and unequal rewards for comparable righteousness that it spawns, are the cultural gospel, authored by Mormon males, not the revealed gospel authored by God. The doctrine is colored by these males' cultural milieu and their desires for power and glory.

Various writers, such as Goethe, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, have turned Genesis 1:26–27 inside out to claim that man has created God in his own image. Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee said it best in the play, *Inherit the Wind*: "God created man in His own image — and Man, being a gentleman, returned the compliment" (1963, 70). Taking "man" to mean "males" rather than "humankind," religious feminists have refocused this idea and said that males have created a male God and have projected the patriarchal systems of the cultures in which they lived into heaven. According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Most images of God in religions are modeled after the ruling class of society" (1975, 74). After the ruling patriarchy creates a God and a heaven like itself, it then "sacrilizes the existing social order as an expression of the will of God" — that is, it gives itself a stamp of divine approval (1986, 5).

I am going to describe some patriarchal, hierarchical aspects of this Mormon heaven, its marital framework, and then Mother in Heaven, the shadowy deity of Mormon heaven. Within each topic I will focus on the individual features that are unappealing, unreasonable, and destructive to the egos of

mortal Mormon women and single men. Be warned that my analysis is very personal and full of my own opinions.

This heaven is a highly structured, organized society. Heber C. Kimball preached that priesthood ranking will be just as it is here, “and you will find all the officers down to the deacon” (JD 4:82). This heavenly “patriarchal priesthood” denotes a system of eternal organization and government of families. I presume that it is labeled “patriarchal” because it is male-centered. Descriptions of the heavenly structure focus on a man’s kingdom and a man’s male progeny. A woman’s kingdom and female progeny are almost non-issues.

People in the celestial kingdom are grouped into both family units and dispensational units, and every conceivable unit in heaven is ruled over by an exalted patriarch. God rules over everyone, Christ rules below him, and Adam below him. Patriarchs who were notable during their earthly lives, such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Jacob, though subject to God and Christ, preside as patriarchs *over* the people in their dispensations. As one of these Joseph Smith will preside as patriarch over the people of the current dispensation (Andrus 1970, 1973; Esplin 1978; Widtsoe 1939; Ehat and Cook 1980, 297–99).

This is not an obsolete nineteenth-century doctrine. I first learned of this heavenly hierarchy in a Relief Society class in 1977. When the teacher said that Joseph Smith would be our king in eternity, I was horrified — certain that she was promoting her own misunderstanding. I was also amazed that no one else seemed alarmed. Apparently this was either old news to others in the class, or else it did not disturb them. After class when I expressed my doubts about her information, the teacher said she got it from religion classes at BYU.

Showing that theology can change, the Church has rejected one layer of heavenly hierarchy accepted in the nineteenth century. For a time faithful Mormon males were sealed to important males in the Church’s hierarchy rather than to their own fathers. For example, in heaven Brigham Young would be a patriarch *under* God, Christ, and Joseph Smith but *over* those men and their families who were sealed to him. Some men who were sealed to Brigham Young, John D. Lee for example, also had men sealed to them. The strains this put on relationships between these mortal men caused the hierarchy to rethink this practice. During Wilford Woodruff’s administration the Church abandoned these adoptive sealings and members were sealed only to their own parents (Brooks 1973, 73–74, 122–24; Irving 1974; Esplin 1978).

In heaven each righteous man would be patriarch over his righteous descendants. A person born in the 1980s would be subject to God, Christ, Joseph Smith, and the thousands of righteous males who are his or her ancestors. All of a man’s righteous descendants will make up the kingdom over which that man will rule. Brigham Young explained, “Now if I be made the king and lawgiver to my family, and if I have many sons, I shall become the father of many fathers, for they will have sons, and their sons will have sons, and so on, from generation to generation. . . . In this way we can become King of kings, and Lord of lords, or Father of fathers, or Prince of princes, and this is the only course, for another man is not going to raise up a kingdom for you”

(JD 3:265–66). When Brigham Young warned that those people who depend upon other people to lead them “never can hold sceptres of glory, majesty, and power in the celestial kingdom” (JD 1:312), his language makes it clear that administrative efficiency was not the reason for this hierarchical system. This system was organized so that males could rule, gain honor, and have power over others.

Religious groups who feel persecuted have a tendency to expect that after the end of human history they will finally receive the power and status to which they are entitled by right of their superior righteousness, knowledge, and commitment (Hansen 1977). Nineteenth-century Mormon theology shows a preoccupation with attaining power and status in the millennium and in heaven. The developers of our theology took at face value the scriptural references to being rewarded in heaven with crowns, thrones, and kingdoms. Some early Kirtland elders asked rhetorically, “If the Saints are not to reign, for what purpose are they crowned?” (HC 2:5–22) Inheriting thrones and crowns had to mean inheriting kingships and kingdoms.

I believe that *wanting* kingdoms, they misread a promise of kingdoms into the scriptures. The New Testament’s answer to the elders’ question “If the Saints are not to reign, for what purpose are they crowned?” is found in 1 Corinthians 9:24–25. Saints receive a symbolic crown: just as the winners of races are crowned with a garland of laurel leaves for their achievement, the Saints receive a crown of recognition for having endured righteously to the end (*Interpreter’s*, 1:746). The scriptures that mention crowns talk of crowns of glory, crowns of immortality, crowns of righteousness, crowns of honor, but never crowns of kingship. The thrones mentioned are almost always God’s throne.

I think that Joseph Smith’s desires rather than God’s inspiration prompted the only unambiguous scriptural promises of kingdoms. Doctrine and Covenants 121:29 promises “All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers shall be . . . set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Section 132 promises those who marry “by the new and everlasting covenant” that they shall “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . then shall they be above all because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them” (v. 19–20). Because the scriptures and those who interpreted them have given me no other reason for the existence of heavenly kingdoms, I believe that this theology has patriarchs ruling in heaven because patriarchs-to-be thought that, deprived of due recognition and power on earth, they deserved a truly grand reward in heaven. No one suggests that anyone in the celestial kingdom is in need of being ruled—instead, it is the earthly patriarchs who feel the need of the glory, honor, and power of ruling.

I find this heavenly structure neither reasonable nor appealing. First, any kind of ruling hierarchy among celestial beings seems inconsistent with a God who loves us equally and who rewards us according to our faith and works, not according to our gender, marital status, rank in the Church’s hierarchy, or

our progeny. Second, Brigham Young implied that people who need to be ruled won't be given the highest eternal reward. This elaborate layering of managers seems entirely unnecessary among people who are worthy of celestial life. In addition, these rulers are chosen more for their gender, the time of their birth, and the size of reward they deserve than for their management or leadership skills.

Third, I can't imagine that people worthy of the highest degree of the celestial kingdom would aspire to or even be interested in having status and power over other people. I can't imagine any good reason for heavenly kings beyond God and Christ. If kings exist, I think their role must be to serve their subjects as Jesus did when he washed the feet of his disciples and as King Benjamin did throughout his life by laboring with his own hands.

Fourth, a hierarchy appeals only to those who believe they will be among the rulers rather than among the ruled. Because Mormon hierarchy is patriarchy, all women will automatically be among the ruled, eternally subject to an endless string of grandfathers. From a man's point of view, there is nothing fair about being subject to one's father for all eternity, nor about ruling over one's son only because one man preceded and sired the other. Furthermore, there is nothing fair about being subject to exponentially more grandfathers by virtue of being born in 1980 A.D. rather than in 980 B.C.

By promoting rule in the afterlife by patriarchs, this view implies that even in this life patriarchs are worth more than other people. Giving some righteous people kingdoms and power over other righteous people reduces those other people to things — things making up the kingdom awarded to the patriarch for his righteousness, and things the patriarch can dominate. I don't believe that God would reward some righteous people by diminishing others.

In order to attain the highest rank and reward in this Mormon heaven a person must be married in the temple. The unmarried and people married in any way other than a sealing ceremony are doomed to the fate outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 132:16–17: "To minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory. For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever." These verses explain that single people have not obeyed the command to get married, and therefore, by definition, are not righteous. Mormon leaders teach an exception to the harsh penalty presented in this scripture: people who had no fair chance to be married correctly get a chance to marry after mortal life.

In mortality Mormonism offers single adults an awkward and isolated social status that evokes either suspicion or pity in other Mormons. It condemns them to a life of sexual frustration and encourages feelings of unrighteousness, guilt, and inadequacy. For single men it offers significantly fewer chances to serve in high management positions in the Church. This heaven offers single people an eternity even worse than the second-class existence they enjoyed in Mormon society on earth. I find it unreasonable to think that God

would have structured the rules for salvation to do this to people who are single during mortality. I also think that the difference in eternal rewards for single people and married people is so great that a just God couldn't have authored them.

Why does Mormon theology do this to single people? Because of the idea that the highest glory in heaven includes becoming a god and reigning over the kingdoms which we create by procreating. Two levels of heavenly kingdoms exist in our theology. The first, as I have said, is a kingdom made up of former mortals, primarily one's descendants. To rule over one of these one must have descendants in mortality. But the lack of earthly progeny to rule over is not what keeps single people from receiving the highest heavenly reward.

Rather it is the inability to produce heavenly progeny. This second kind of kingdom is made up of the children conceived in heaven who will inhabit earths created by their parent gods. Creating includes not only making a world, but peopling it through procreating, through sexual union with one's spouse. Parley P. Pratt rhapsodized that "the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore." From Joseph Smith he "learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring" (1938, 297-98).

I am not arguing against the idea that happy marital unions should continue in heaven. I find the doctrine of eternal marriage one of the most appealing of our theology, and I hope that my marriage will continue there. But rather than viewing eternal marriage as a precondition for the eternal reward of kingdoms in heaven, I see a good marriage being its own reward in heaven just as on earth. Similarly, rather than viewing eternal singleness as a condition deserving eternal punishment, I see it as a condition with limitations (that some might see as punishments) inherent in it. Rather than being punished because, lacking a spouse, one cannot produce progeny in heaven, the inability to procreate here or in heaven is perhaps its own punishment. Surely there is more to being kings, queens, gods, and goddesses than procreating, and those who remain single in heaven need not have external limitations placed on them when singleness necessarily includes limitations.

While I've got no interest in ruling over, nor being god to anyone, there is something intriguing and enticing about creating worlds and keeping them running; but for me, the issue is apparently moot. Instead of creating mountains, trees, or marine life, I can earn the right to fill the role of "birth-machine for spirit children" (England 1986, 28) because the other creating is done by the power of the priesthood, a power that women will have in a very limited way, if at all. Brigham Young taught that "the Priesthood . . . is the law by which the worlds are, were, and will continue forever and ever. It is that system which brings worlds into existence and peoples them, gives them their revolutions, their days, weeks, months" (Widtsøe 1939, 30).

Orson Pratt elaborated that priesthood was the power for “the regulation of the materials in all their varied operations. It is that power that formed the minerals, the vegetables, and the animals in all their infinite varieties which exist upon our globe. It is that authority that reveals laws for the government of intelligent beings.” This priesthood is so essential that God, knowing his son would be worthy of having and using the priesthood, “thousands of years beforehand” allowed him to “have the power to create worlds and govern them, the same as if he had already received the consecration” (1853, 145, 147).

Our theology currently gives women no hope that their participation in priesthood will ever be great enough to allow them to create anything but children. Some women might be excited by the possibility of providing the womb through which a never-ending stream of children would be born, but I am not. I don’t look forward to producing progeny while my husband is creating reptiles and planets and inspiring mortals to fashion reasonable governments and legal systems. Gene England rightly called this limited, unequal role for women in eternity “absurd” “humiliating” and “degrading” (1986, 23).

Our temple ceremony has some further limiting, unequal, and degrading implications for women’s heavenly existence. Each woman is promised that she might eventually be a queen and priestess *to her husband*, while her husband is promised that he might eventually be a king and a priest *to God*. All women, married or unmarried, are required to covenant to *obey the law of their husbands as their husbands obey the law of God*, while all men are required to covenant to *obey the law of God*. Thus males are linked directly to God, and women to God only through their husbands — even women who have no husbands. This link takes on a twist when people being married are symbolically brought into heaven by a male playing the role of God. A man is brought into heaven by an anonymous male temple worker playing that role. But a woman is brought into heaven by her husband playing the role of God to her. So not only does the temple ceremony suggest that women reach God through their husbands, but that husbands, on some level, act as god to their wives.

Though both men and women need spouses to achieve the highest eternal glory, a husband helps his wife attain salvation in a way that a wife does not do for her husband. Daniel Wells taught that if treated well, women would stick to their husbands “because it is for their salvation in the kingdom of our God. It is for this they are here, and they will cleave to you for it; and it is your office, right and privilege to extend that blessing to them. . . . Wives . . . seek their salvation through [their husbands]” (JD 4:255–57). According to Lorenzo Snow, the head of a family must have the spirit of the Lord, “and he should possess that light and that intelligence, which, if carried out in the daily life and conduct of those individuals, will prove the salvation of that family, for he holds their salvation in his hands” (JD 4:243).

As recently as 1978 a priesthood manual for young men taught that “a fine Latter-day Saint girl is counting on you to provide the way to exaltation for her and the spirits in heaven that will come to your home to grow in the

gospel” (Inglesby 1985, 29). *The Melchizedek Priesthood Personal Study Guide* from 1984 included the following: “Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: ‘[Husbands] must . . . love their wives, sacrifice for their well-being and salvation, and guide them in holiness until they are cleansed, sanctified, and perfected, until they are prepared for exaltation in that glorious heaven where the family unit continues. Husbands thus become in effect the saviors of their wives’ (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 2:519)” (pp. 47–48).

An essential part of this theology of marriage in heaven is polygamy. While it is unlikely that the Church will again promote polygamy in mortality, it is still a vital part of Mormon heaven. As Doctrine and Covenants 131 and 132 explain, polygamy in heaven enables celestial beings to procreate kingdoms over which a righteous man would preside as god. I say “man,” because while the woman is a participant, the focus is completely on the male and his kingdom. A man obtains the highest kingdom in heaven only by entering into this kind of marriage. If he does not, “that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase” (131:2–4). His wives “were given unto him” (132:37, 39, 52, 61, 62) “for he shall be made ruler over many” (v. 44). They “belong unto him” and “are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth . . . and for their [presumably the women’s] exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men” (v. 63).

Eugene England has argued against heavenly polygamy, suggesting that it be dropped from our theology of heaven. His chief objection was that it made fidelity impossible. With multiple partners no two spouses could experience complete trust and sharing of themselves with each other. I agree with this objection, but I will elevate his secondary objection into my primary one. Heavenly polygamy “is simply a way of saying that one good man is in some sense the equivalent of more women than one, however good. And whether what is implied is that one man can emotionally and sexually satisfy more than one woman or is capable of balancing more than one woman spiritually or intellectually or managerially or whatever . . . the implications seem to me to discredit women, to in some essential way reduce them to less than full equivalence with men” (1986, 27–28).

I can see how nineteenth-century American men, trying to conceive of a heaven, could construct one in which one man *was* the equivalent of a number of women. Nineteenth-century American culture was sexist and patriarchal, and most people, women as well as men, believed that men were superior to women in many ways. Brigham Young reinforced this notion for Mormons by stressing that he led his wives not by force but “by a superior intelligence.” If the servants of God allow a woman to be their leader, he noted, “they have sunk beneath the standard their organization has fitted them for. . . . Let our wives be the weaker vessels, and the men be men and show the women by their superior ability that God gives husbands wisdom and ability to lead their wives into his presence” (JD 9:307). On another occasion he preached that women are weak. “It is the decree of the Almighty upon [women] to lean upon men as their superior” (JD 12:194).

I can see no reason to let such a theology stand without protest. It can't be any healthier for Mormon men to believe that they are inherently and eternally superior to all women than it is for Mormon women to believe that they are inherently and eternally inferior to righteous Mormon men. Yet as long as heavenly polygamy remains in our theology, these self-evaluations will naturally arise. As long as Doctrine and Covenants 132 remains in our scriptural canon, heavenly polygamy is a part of Mormon theology.

Heavenly polygamy, more than anything else in our theology, reduces people to things. Emily Dow Partridge, a plural wife to Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, complained, "even our own people seemed to think that the Lord had given men plural wives for stepping stones for them and their first wives to mount to glory on" (Hill 1977, 353). The greater the number of wives and children a man has in heaven, the greater his power, kingdom, and eternal glory. In the worst materialistic sense rather than in the best metaphorical sense, wives and children were a man's riches. Benjamin F. Johnson remembered that "the Prophet taught us that Dominion & power in the great Future would be Commensurate with the no[.] of 'Wives, Children & Friends' that we inherit here" (Van Wagoner 1986, 45). Joseph Smith counseled his Sunday audience to "use a little Craftiness & seal all [the people to yourself that] you can" so that you can claim them in heaven (Ehat and Cook 1980, 331).

Wives (and children) became objects to be given to righteous men as rewards, or taken from sinful men as punishment. Joseph Smith taught Lucy Walker that "many would awake in the morning of the resurrection sadly disappointed; for they, by transgression would have neither wives or children, for they surely would be taken from them, and given to those who should prove themselves worthy" (Hill 1977, 356). Brigham Young recast this idea in terms of Jesus' parable of the talents. The man who would not take plural wives may get to the celestial kingdom, "but when he gets there he will not find himself in possession of any wife at all. He has had a talent that he has given up. He will come forward and say, 'Here is that which thou gavest me, I have not wasted it, and here is the one talent,' and he will not enjoy it, but it will be taken and given to those who have improved the talents they received, and he will find himself without any wife, and he will remain single forever" (JD 16:66).

Men too become objects in a system of heavenly polygamy. Mormon marriage sealings revived and revised the Old Testament practice of Levirate marriage. When a man marries a widow who was married for eternity to her first husband, any children who result from this second marriage are credited on the eternal tally sheet to the first husband. Regardless of the role this second husband played in the lives of this wife and children in mortality, in eternity, he is the source of the seed that helped produce children for the first husband (Foster 1981, 164).

Polygamous wives sometimes viewed their husbands as vehicles through which they could attain exaltation. The best example of this was the practice

of “marrying up,” catalogued in 1986 by Richard Van Wagoner. In a general conference in 1861 Brigham Young, talking on divorce, said that “a woman could leave a man — if the woman preferred — another man higher in authority & he is willing to take her. & her husband gives her up.” Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Young was sealed to Joseph Smith while being married for time only to Henry Jacobs and eventually left Jacobs to be a plural wife of Brigham Young, for “President Young told Zina D. if she would marry him she would be in a higher glory” (p. 43). Brigham Young announced to Henry Jacobs that Zina and her children were his (Brigham’s) property. Here, and in his proposal to Martha Brotherton, in which he promised that “if you will accept me, I will take you straight to the Celestial Kingdom” (p. 18), Brigham was trading on his status, selling himself to a woman by offering that she could ride his coattails to exaltation. Van Wagoner observed, “A Mormon male of hierarchical rank, with feet firmly planted in the priesthood, seemed a sure ticket to heaven” (p. 46).

Rather than seeing any compelling reason to think that we must populate heavenly kingdoms into existence so that these kingdoms can be our eternal reward, I see a compelling reason not to believe that God authored this system. It again reduces people to things. Women are the means by which men populate their kingdoms. They are also symbols of their husbands’ obedience to the commandment to marry, or to marry polygamously; under polygamy, the more wives a man has, the more righteous he is. Women are also taken from men as punishment or given to them as rewards. Men are tickets to celestial glory. Each spirit child is one more being for its parents to be sovereign Lords over.

The theology’s promise of an exalted future of creating worlds and procreating kingdoms supposedly follows a pattern set by God himself. Yet it is hard to match the language used by nineteenth-century Mormon men talking about their own heavenly future, with the Mormon concept of God. The emphasis on becoming a ruler over a family of subjects and wielding scepters of power is inconsistent with our description of God’s character.

While we certainly accept and occasionally use such titles as “King of Kings” to describe God, he is most commonly “Heavenly Father,” an intimate deity. We are supposed to be able to go to him with our deepest thoughts and questions, our most personal concerns. He in turn takes time for each of us and is passionately concerned about our well-being. Mormonism teaches me that I am a child of God. While I may well be a subject in God’s kingdom, I am not instructed to perceive myself as another person to be dominated to add to his personal power. His glory is not greater because he procreated me. I can’t conceive of him basking in his own marvelousness, or taking pride in the vastness of his dominion.

In this view of heaven exalted couples follow the pattern set by God and his eternal female companion. My Star B Primary manual produced in 1985 has a lesson on “Our Heavenly Family” (pp. 12–15). It tells me to teach the six-year-olds that in heaven, “they were a part of a heavenly family. Heavenly Father was their father, and they had a mother in heaven.” She must finally be officially accepted in Church theology.

Granting that it is rare to find Mother in Heaven in lesson manuals at all, the lesson's portrayal of her is typical of the way official Mormondom deals with her. She appears fewer than ten times, always as "mother in heaven" (all small case), in contrast to forty plus appearances of "Heavenly Father" (capitalized), and twenty plus appearances of Jesus. How is she described? As one of the heavenly parents who loved my children. She is like Heavenly Father, who is great and good and wise and knows everything and is perfect. My children loved her in heaven and wanted to be like their heavenly parents. In summary, she exists, has some good characteristics, and she loves.

How is Heavenly Father described? Jesus was *his* son. *Heavenly Father* called a meeting; *he* had a plan. If my children choose to do right they can live with *him* forever, being "just as happy and great and wise and good as *Heavenly Father* is." *He* planned what my children should do on earth, *he* knew it would not be easy, *he* gave them families, prophets, and Jesus. My class wanted to become like *Heavenly Father* and *Jesus*, and they wanted to choose the right like *Heavenly Father* and *Jesus* wanted. They can return to live with *Heavenly Father* and *Jesus*. In summary, Heavenly Father's companion when he is loving his children is Heavenly Mother. His companion when he is performing any other action is Jesus. Wouldn't the writers of the manual have been safe in saying that Jesus was the son of a heavenly mother as well as a heavenly father, that she also knew earth life would not be easy, and that she as well as Heavenly Father wanted us all to choose the right?

Although she is great and good and wise and omniscient and perfect, it is not for any of these qualities that she is valued. Her value is in her fertility. She exists to procreate, not to create, to inspire, to guide, to plan, to intervene, to empower, to comfort. As Erastus Snow explained in 1886, logic dictated that she must exist: "Now, it is not said in so many words in the Scriptures, that we have a Mother in heaven as well as a Father. It is left for us to infer this from what we see and know of all living things in the earth including man. The male and female principle is united and both necessary to the accomplishment of the object of their being, and if this be not the case with our Father in heaven after whose image we are created, then it is an anomaly in nature" (JD 26:214). Heavenly Mother is necessary because procreation can't be achieved by males alone. During the era of polygamy some suggested that she is only one of many mothers in heaven. They reasoned that procreation of spirit children could be accomplished more efficiently if Heavenly Father could impregnate many heavenly mothers, just as exalted mortals' procreation of spirit children could be accomplished more efficiently if exalted mortal males could impregnate many wives.

Yet, peculiarly, even this narrow sphere of creation is denied her in all official Mormon accounts of creation. The primary account, Genesis 1, uses the singular "God" throughout except in verse 26, where without explanation God says, "let *us* make a man in *our* image." Mormon variations of this scripture add other gods to explain this change from singular to plural, but the other gods are never explicitly female and are sometimes explicitly male. In Moses, "I, God" creates, apparently alone, until suddenly, "I, God, said unto

mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: "Let us make man in our image." Bizarrely, these two males, God says, "created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them" (Moses 2:26-27).

In Abraham 4, the grammatically plural "Elohim" becomes the numerically plural "the Gods" thus eliminating the singular/plural shift. This might, but does not necessarily, include women. The temple ceremony presents Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael sharing creation duties. Elohim and Jehovah transform Michael into Adam. So not only is Mother in Heaven not a participant in creating the light, the darkness, plants and animals, she gets no credit for the one kind of creating allowed her.

Heavenly Mother is not an equal partner with Heavenly Father in any sense. She is second to her husband in everything, to her son in many things, and even to the Holy Ghost. Since she has no sphere of operations, she has no power. Everything that deity does is credited to God, to Christ, or to the Holy Ghost. Our First Article of Faith specifies that "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." There is no official, creedal statement which claims that we believe at all in Mother in Heaven.

Authority, both temporal and eternal, is linked to priesthood, a power that our Mother in Heaven apparently is without or possesses only in a limited way, because she is female. Her husband possesses all of it there is to possess. On this score, she is second to her son, for even before Christ was either a mortal or resurrected and exalted, he had all the priesthood power he might need to create everything. As a mortal he had authority to speak for God, while she appears not to have enough authority to speak for even herself. She is certainly second in veneration to her husband, for until recently, she existed only in the hymn, "O My Father," and was otherwise ignored. Prayers and worship are all directed to the Father alone except in rare gatherings of the unorthodox and of feminists. We must conclude that she is second in worth to her husband.

I will guess that this is another case of projecting current social reality into heaven. I can see why nineteenth-century Mormon men would envision a Mother in Heaven as a bearer and nurturer of children, for these were the primary roles American society allowed women. There was little precedent for a powerful, creative woman with independent spheres of action — and any women who were this way were generally derided as being "unwomanly" rather than praised for their talents. I can see why today's General Authorities who define womanhood as stay-at-home mothering would also envision her this way. But I can't see any reason now to let such a degrading concept of the female deity continue to exist without protest.

Mother in Heaven is a nothing at best, and at worst is a housewife. Given the status that women have had throughout the history of Mormonism and given the patriarchy that still rules in our Mormon and larger society, Mother in heaven can be nothing other than the faceless, nameless, unavailable-for-theological-purposes blank that she currently is. Our theology has allowed

her no authority nor power; she gets no acknowledgment for her distinctive contributions, whatever they are. She has no self apart from her husband.

Unless we can begin to see mortal Mormon women as significant in their own right, we will never see our Mother in Heaven as significant in her own right. She will only have significance because of the male she married or sired. As long as she is only the eternal housewife, producer of babies, and nurturer of children, mortal Mormon women will be expected to find those limiting roles satisfying.

I am not asking that we project a 1980s-vintage female executive into heaven and call this Mother in Heaven. But I wish there were more caution from those who project onto Mother in Heaven the traditional earthly model of housewife and nurturer of children. I would prefer that we project no model of womanhood into heaven to define her. Instead, since revelation often comes when questions are asked, I am encouraging Church authorities to ask for revelation about her. Then we might learn what she really is.

I can't change the reality of what heaven is. My wishing, hoping, and needing won't make it what I want it to be. But neither does Brigham Young's or Joseph Smith's. I believe that they and other Mormon males projected their own needs and desires into heaven, and that their heaven probably does not resemble actual heaven any more than my ideal heaven does. I reject much of their vision of heaven because it is destructive. It is based upon the notion that males are the truly significant beings: *their* kingdoms, *their* posterity, *their* creative priesthood power, *their* rank, and *male* deities are its focus, while females, including female deities, are an afterthought — ignored, restricted, and demeaned. This erodes the self-worth of women whose self-esteem is already low and encourages pride in men who already have a disproportionate sense of their own importance.

Rewards are given in this heaven because of gender, marital status, and hierarchical position as well as righteousness. Without minimizing Brigham Young's sacrifices and faithfulness, for example, should we really believe that he deserves a grander eternal reward than do the families who bravely attempted to settle the uninhabitable areas in Southern Utah that he sent them to? Should his reward surpass the rewards of the women who supported their children and their husbands as well, while those husbands were away on missions? Would a just God give him a better reward than he gives the hidden-away second and third wives of men who rarely visited or contributed to their families' economic well-being? Should his reward be greater because of all his wives and children than Spencer W. Kimball's is because he only had one wife and a handful of children?

These men's vision of heaven reduces many good people to insignificance. In 1967 Tom Stoppard rewrote *Hamlet* focusing on two minor characters, Rozencranz and Guildenstern. However, even as the major characters in their own play, they merely pass the time as they wait for their encounters with Hamlet. Although the focus is on them, they exist only to help action progress in *Hamlet*'s story; they are foils to enhance his distinctiveness; they define themselves according to their place in his life. In focusing on males, and par-

ticularly on males with hierarchical status, the Mormon vision of heaven reduces all others to minor characters in these males' heavenly lives. Its creators fashioned fine rewards for themselves but did not consider that their rewards wiped out the identities and personal significance of other people. Almost everyone becomes a minor character in someone else's story, and many people, especially women, children, and unmarried men, never do get to be the major character in their own story.

All Mormons become minor characters in Joseph Smith's story in heaven, as we become the subjects in the kingdom over which he rules. All children become minor characters in their parents', particularly their fathers' stories, as their numbers are added up to expand the vastness of their parents' kingdoms. All polygamous wives, who "belong" to their husbands, who "are given" to them like presents and can be taken from them and given to other husbands, also contribute by their numbers to the vastness of their husbands' kingdoms. Husbands become major characters in their own stories as they amass kingdoms, but wives are only the facilitators who help bring the subjects of those kingdoms into existence. Each of us deserves to be the major character in our own story in heaven, but does our current theology of heaven allow each of us that right?

To make Mormon heaven into something that rings true, that could reasonably have been structured by a God who loves us equally and fairly and who wants the best for each of us, I would simply make it less specific. Rewards would be based on faith and works, and each righteous person's reward would provide her or him with happiness. All people could continue to enjoy the company of those who were important to them on earth and could form emotional bonds with whomever else they chose. There would be meaningful, stimulating, creative activity there. Each person would be valued for her or himself, not for family ties, function, or earthly hierarchical position.

I have said all this not to complain, but rather to encourage Church members and leaders to rethink our theology of heaven. The nineteenth-century Mormon men who fleshed out the theological skeleton provided by scriptures and revelation fleshed it out according to their own cultural prejudices. They structured it to compensate themselves for the deprivations they felt they suffered on earth. But their prejudices and their needs should no longer be misread as representing heavenly reality: they are time-bound, not eternal. It is time to reject those aspects of Mormon heaven that are uninspired, unreasonable, unfair, damaging, and serve no virtuous end.

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