Mormon Women and the Right to Wage Work

Vella Neil Evans

On 23 September 1989, President Gordon B. Hinckley offered the following challenge to Mormon women: "Get all the education you can. Train yourselves to make a contribution to the society in which you will live. . . . Almost the entire field of human endeavor is now open to women." He further cited Rachel Carson as an exemplar, "trained in her field and bold in her declarations" (1989, 96–98). A week later, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Council of the Twelve proclaimed, "The highest titles of human achievement—teacher, educated professional, [and] loyal employee . . . are earned under a uniform requirement of worthiness" by both men and women (1989, 20). After nearly a century of Church leaders' increasing disapproval of women's paid employment, these two addresses attracted considerable attention. The statements quoted, here taken from context, suggest real support for women's wage work. As analysis of the complete text will demonstrate, however, the speeches actually reflect subtle "shifts in spirit," not changes in Church policy.[1] In this essay, I will analyze recent Church discourse against a pattern of constricting employment options for women and will discuss the implications of that pattern.

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[1] I have lifted the statements cited from context and linked them together to summarize the elements of support. However, this concentration produces an exaggerated expression of approval. The complete texts are much more equivocal and ultimately provide slight, if any, increased support for women's wage work. In support of this claim, the lead editorial in the 4 October 1989 Salt Lake *Tribune* observed that

From the time the Church was organized in 1830 until it was well established in the American West, most Mormon women participated in some exchange-value employment.[2] These efforts were usually necessary for survival, taken for granted by the community, and ignored in Church discourse. Some sisters were employed as domestics, tutors, midwives or nurses; but most labored on the family farm or business, took contract work into their homes, or sold or exchanged items that they had produced.

Advertisements for women seeking work appeared in local papers of the period, but the most extensive record of exchange-value effort is located in private journals and correspondence. Caroline Barnes Crosby recorded in her journal that when her family moved to Kirtland in 1836, she "braided near a hundred" palm leaf hats and earned seventy dollars in that "first season" (in Godfrey, Godfrey and Derr 1982, 50). While a young married woman in Nauvoo, Zina D. H. Jacobs noted that she knit mittens for twenty-five cents a pair and spun extra knots of yarn to "procure an honest living" (in Beecher 1979, 304, 318). And during the trek west, when a money economy was less practical, Eliza R. Snow wrote in her diary that she had made a cap for "Sister John Young" and was paid roughly two pounds of soap. She observed: "So much I call my own—I now begin once more to be a woman of property" ("Pioneer Diary" 1944, 113).

Others were much more energetic than Sister Snow. Historian Leonard Arrington notes that one California woman "helped build her house, doing all the work on the fireplace and chimney. . . . [She] cut wild hay along the river bottoms, and stacked it for the cows in the winter; she grubbed the brush, hauled manure on the land, sheared the sheep, plowed, planted, helped make the irrigating ditches, and spun and wove cloth." And when she wasn't otherwise occupied, the woman "took in washing" (1977, 50). All such efforts distinguished Latter-day Saint women from the American middle-class ideal of dependency and fragility that was popular at the time (see Welter 1966).

After the Church was established in the Utah territory, women continued their exchange-value activities. For some time, economic

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while President Hinckley's message was welcome, the speech really reflected only a "slight attitude shift among the leadership of the Church" ("Condoning Women" 1989). President Hinckley further reinforced a conservative position at the Belle S. Spafford Social Work Conference, "Women in the Work Force," held in Salt Lake City on 23 February 1990.

[2] "Exchange value" signifies goods or services that are traded, exchanged, or sold as a part of a larger community economy. "Use value" work is consumed by the producer or limited to private or family consumption.

conditions remained unstable: impoverished converts drained community resources, crops and businesses failed, some polygamous men could not support all their wives and families, and non-Mormon merchants increasingly took advantage of the Mormon market. During this early Utah period, Brigham Young distinguished himself as the only Church president to persistently encourage women's exchange-value efforts. Quotations from his sermons reveal both his injunctions to women and also the range of justifications for their income-producing work.

In 1856 Brigham Young advised mothers to teach their daughters "some useful vocation," so they could "sustain themselves and their offspring" in the event their husbands left home either to serve Church missions or to devote their "time and attention to the things of the kingdom [of God]." Young noted that women's employment would prove the sisters "helpmeets in very deed" to their husbands and also contributors "in building up the [community]" (JH, 10 Dec. 1856).

Roughly ten years later, President Young advised women to take up work that would "enable them to sustain themselves, and [which] would be far better than for them to spend their time in the parlor or in walking the streets." He also advised women to take up printing, clerking, and retail selling to relieve the men who might as well "knit stockings as to sell tape" (JD 12:407). Along those same lines, in 1873 Brigham Young suggested that women had the strength to enter many male occupations but had been excluded because the men feared that women would "spoil their trade." He also criticized the "big, six-footer" man who sat sewing in a tailor shop while some women worked in the fields "plowing, raking and making hay" (JD 16:16–17). Thus men's need for greater freedom, community demands, women's skill at commerce, and the danger of indolent women justified women's wage work.

Young's most frequently cited statement concerning women's paid employment presents a somewhat different set of facts and values. On 18 July 1869, the President of the Church said:

> We have sisters here who . . . would make just as good mathematicians or accountants as any man; and we think they ought to have the privilege to study these branches of knowledge that they may develop the powers with which they are endowed. We believe that women are useful not only to sweep houses, wash dishes, make beds, and raise babies, but that they should stand behind the counter, study law or physic, and become good book-keepers and be able to do the business in any counting house, and all this to enlarge their sphere of usefulness for the benefit of society at large. In following these things they but answer the design of their creation. These and many more things of equal utility are incorporated in our religion, and we believe in and try to practice them. (JD 13:61)[3]

[3] The Church at the time also believed in and tried to practice polygamy, which allowed some women to leave their children and housekeeping duties to sister wives

We should not infer from this that Brigham Young advocated paid employment as a principal career for women. He told his daughter Susa that even if she were to become the greatest woman in the world but fail in her duty as wife and mother, she then would have "failed in everything." On the other hand, Young also told Susa that anything she did after filling her primary assignments would contribute to her "honor and to the glory of God" (Gates 1930, 232). Thus Young supported female wage work only after domestic responsibilities had been fulfilled.

Given that qualification, however, the 1869 sermon is unexpectedly liberal. Young recognized the "privilege" of professional study but concluded that women were educable and as effective in practice as men. In addition, Young suggested that professionally trained women would serve society *and* develop an extensive range of natural female "powers." In this latter assertion, Young clearly ignored the prevailing nineteenth-century belief that women had limited, feminine "traits" and were destined to operate in a separate sphere from men.

Not many nineteenth-century women became mathematicians, pharmacists, or attorneys as Brigham Young suggested. On the other hand, several Latter-day Saint women distinguished themselves by studying medicine at eastern universities and then establishing successful medical practices among the Saints. The Relief Society operated its own hospital for twelve years and until 1920 maintained a nurses training program that trained a significant number of Mormon women. Others found work in the numerous Relief Society cooperatives or in more traditional commerce.

Brigham Young died in 1877, and his immediate successors addressed other urgent matters including the precarious financial condition of the Church, the increased federal prosecution of polygamy, and then the drive for Utah's statehood. In contrast to a male focus on church and state politics during this late nineteenth-century period, both the *Woman's Exponent*, the organ of the Relief Society, and the *Young Woman's Journal*, published by the Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, supported paid employment for Mormon women. Writers and editors were typically prominent women within the Church whose statements would appear authoritative to female readers (see Beecher 1982). In addition, the journals were widely read by Mormon women and the publications' support for wage work was thus well known.

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while they pursued their own education and careers outside their homes. In contrast, lack of childcare and domestic support prevent many contemporary women from combining a demanding career with marriage and family.

An unsigned editorial in the 1 April 1877 *Woman's Exponent*, entitled "Be a True Woman,"[4] claimed that every job that opened for women was a "blessing" and urged readers to undertake the "real work"—an interesting comparison implied. On occasion, both the *Woman's Exponent* and the *Young Woman's Journal* supported women who worked for personal fulfillment, and both denied the exclusive, male breadwinner ethic. The *Exponent* observed that even those women "possessed of superior attainments" didn't like being "dependent altogether upon the . . . 'men folks,' but chose to earn some money on their own" ("Women" 1883). And the *Journal* stated that even "true women" no longer believed men should support them (Smith 1890). Both publications also assumed that women could manage two careers. The *Exponent* on 15 August 1877 specifically attacked the "pernicious dogma that marriage and a practical life work are incompatible" (p. 46) and elsewhere observed that if women were incapable of combining work and marriage, then neither could a "man do justice to any professional calling and prove a kind, affectionate, and loving husband" ("Head vs. Heart" 1874).

In response to warnings against creating a "third sex" and lost femininity, the *Exponent* concluded that the "large number" of employed women were "not brusque [or] masculine [but] wore bangs . . . ruffles and laces [and were] like the rest of woman kind" (N.V.D. 1892, 161). The most radical discourse ignored Brigham Young's dual career policy, which mandated motherhood and homemaking prior to, or in conjunction with, paid employment. In 1890 the *Journal* claimed that a woman "should have perfect liberty to follow the vocation which comes to her from God, and of which she alone is judge" (Smith 1890, 176). As early as 1873 the *Exponent* claimed that women were fully capable of deciding for themselves their life's work and concluded, "If there be some women in whom the love of learning extinguishes all other love, then the heaven-appointed sphere of that woman is not the nursery. It may be the library, the laboratory, the observatory" ("Education" 1873). These statements are significant because the writers stressed psychological benefits to women as a primary justification for women's work. In addition, some female leaders went so far as to suggest that a woman's personal decision, *even* if contrary to patriarchal assignments, could be correct for her.

As the Church moved into the twentieth century, internal schisms, the challenges of heterodoxy, and financial problems continued to

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[4] Most of the *Exponent* citations which have no author are taken from editorials which would have been written by Lula Greene Richards from 1872 to 1877, or by Emmeline B. Wells from 1877 to 1914.

demand the attention of the General Authorities; and sermons typically addressed issues of doctrine and accommodation. Articles from the *Deseret News*, however, indicate a marked decline of popular support for female employment during this time. For example, the 21 May 1904 *Deseret Semi-Weekly News*[5] reprinted an essay by F. M. Thompson which claimed, "The woman wage earner is under one aspect an object of charity, under another an economic pervert, under another a social menace." Thompson also charged that commercial labors undermined women's health, trained them to work like machines, and left them without necessary homemaking skills. The *News* concluded, "Women themselves are beginning to see a light, in which they may better appreciate their mission on earth." That mission was domestic.

At the turn of the century, large immigrant populations and smaller families in the so-called "native white stock" resulted in a popular concern over maintaining white supremacy and its traditional institutions. At the same time that a need for more white babies was perceived, however, middle-class women were increasingly visible outside their homes. Many entered commerce or higher education, some for financial reasons and others in response to feminist encouragement. Many more joined "ladies clubs" or participated in reform movements as part of the "social housekeeping" thought appropriate for women at the time. As a result of the discrepancy between the middle-class woman's assignment to produce a large family and her activities outside her home, religious and secular publications throughout the country examined the problem of "race suicide" and women's activities (particularly higher education and wage employment) that were thought to reduce fertility.

The *Woman's Exponent* and the *Young Woman's Journal*, however, continued to advocate women's wage work in varying degrees. Direct approval in the *Exponent* was less frequent and became more moderate; but the *Journal* maintained some direct support and provided indirect approval through role models. Lengthy feature articles were frequently devoted to female entrepreneurs and successful women in science, government, education, literature, the fine arts, and general business. In 1904, however, the *Journal* warned its youthful readers that a private income would give them "dangerous power" ("The Girl" 1905); and three years later lamented that if young women didn't damage their nerves in the paid labor force, they were likely to be "constantly besieged, after marriage, by the lure of gold" (Gates 1908). In such

[5] During different periods, the *News*'s distribution schedule and name varied. These variations do not indicate a different publication or change in ownership.

instances, the *Journal* identified negative consequences for women wage earners that did not accompany the male image.

In spite of such concerns, an increasing number of LDS women became commercially employed during World War I and the 1920s. By 1914, the relatively liberal *Woman's Exponent* had been replaced by the more conservative *Relief Society Magazine*, and support for Mormon women's right to work was somewhat attenuated. However, the *Magazine* ran a monthly feature that reported the varied efforts of working women and thus indirectly supported female employment. For example, in 1920 the publication recognized several dozen women for their achievements, including Jean Norris, a New York attorney appointed to the office of city magistrate; Lady Astor, who was elected to the British House of Commons; and Mrs. Yone Susuki, the "richest woman in the world," who employed thirty-five to forty thousand production workers and had an enlightened management policy (Anderson 1920).

During this same period, the *Relief Society Magazine* promoted cottage industry for its Latter-day Saint readers. In one article, Sylvia Grant advised women to earn "pin money" by cooking, sewing, knitting, telephone soliciting, addressing envelopes, and finishing film. Grant concluded that even when it was not "absolutely necessary" for a woman to make money, there was "ever so much satisfaction in earning enough to buy silver candlesticks instead of just ordinary ones" (1936, 572). Later, male Church leaders would denounce women who worked for luxuries.

The *Young Woman's Journal* maintained significant support for female employment until 1929 when it was absorbed by the *Improvement Era*. In 1927, for example, the *Journal* ran an extensive series on women's careers written by Agnes Lovendahl Stewart and entitled "What Shall I Do?" Among other suggestions, the magazine recommended teaching music (January), working in domestic arts and science (March), owning a beauty shop (May), and writing professionally (December).

In January 1929, the *Journal* told girls that setting a goal of economic independence was "vitally important" and reprinted the following with apparent approbation: "Many writers of today advocate the advisability of women continuing in their active outside profession even during the period when they are giving their best efforts to the home and family. They claim that a woman is a better wife and mother if she has these outside interests along with her home interests." Several paragraphs later, the article concluded that dual careers for women were "coming to be perceived as the wise plan for all women who would achieve, as well as to help others achieve, full personality" (Carroll 1929). Thus the sisters' publications defended women's work on

the grounds that it served the community, the family, *and* the woman herself.

In contrast, during the same period, Latter-day Saint men maintained their disapproval. The 19 May 1928 *Deseret News* quoted J. Reuben Clark's Mothers Day sermon, delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Clark claimed that the famous women of history had been wrong to acquire prominence because in doing so, they had placed themselves "in the field of competition with men." Early issues of the sisters' publications had infrequently defined women's employment goals in terms of competition. For example, in 1876 the *Exponent* warned that women were "no longer willing to be trammelled by narrow conventionalities" and if men were "really superior," they should "move on" as there was "room higher up" (Emile 1876, 84). In 1890 the *Young Woman's Journal* contended that "where woman is the stronger, she takes the precedence of man"; and men should acknowledge women as their competitors in "the arts or trades" (Smith 1890). After the turn of the century, however, Mormon women gradually withdrew their support for competition between the sexes, while the men increased their disapproval of the practice.

During the Great Depression, almost all popular discourse condemned women's wage work because it took jobs away from men. The Depression ended with the onset of World War II, however. Between 1941 and 1945, over four million American women entered the work force; and the national media promoted the move as patriotic. In contrast, Church discourse blamed working mothers for increasing juvenile delinquency and advised Mormon women not to seek paid employment during the war emergency. Instead, the *Relief Society Magazine*, the only remaining sisters' publication, advised women to volunteer in the war effort by planting victory gardens, preserving food, saving grease and cans for the war industries, and keeping their homes secure and attractive. The sanctity of home and family was a major concern, and the *Magazine* printed several variations on the following advice: "Keep home life in normal balance [and] so inviting" that adolescent girls, in particular, will not want "to roam the streets" (Williams 1942, 680).

The foregoing identify a value hierarchy which has buttressed arguments against women's paid employment for the last half century: a woman's obligation to nurture is greater than her need for income or self-fulfillment. The highest-ranking Latter-day Saint leaders have consistently supported this hierarchy, which was only indirectly challenged on the soft-news pages of the *Relief Society Magazine* from 1945 until its demise in 1970. Since the end of World War II, however, essentially all official Church pronouncements have discouraged wage work for

women. For example, in 1961 Esther Peterson, President John F. Kennedy's assistant secretary of labor, claimed that a woman's place was where she was "happiest—and it can be at home, at outside work or both." The *Deseret News* responded that, "a woman's place is . . . where she can give the greatest happiness to others," and most women worked not because of the "high cost of living, but because of the cost of living high" ("Mother" 1961).

In a similar vein, the December 1969 *Improvement Era* explained that a "cardinal teaching" in Mormonism is that the "man is the head of the family. He is to be the bread winner" (Tuttle 1969, 108). In 1971, Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Quorum of the Twelve equated women's liberation with deception and denounced free child care and equal employment as "evils" of the women's movement (1971, 17). In 1977 the *Church News* claimed that working women were probably responsible for juvenile delinquency, broken marriages, and ultimately a "handicapped new generation such as we have never before seen in America" ("Preserving Femininity" 1977).

In scores of similar statements, marriage, parenting, and homemaking are authoritatively defined as both necessary and full-time obligations that offset a woman's right to wage employment. Paid activities which women term "self-fulfillment" have been officially redefined as "self-indulgence." During the recent period of increasing options for most American women, contemporary Church leaders have cited a nineteenth-century theory of separate traits and spheres—which Brigham Young had rejected—to counteract twentieth-century feminism.

The feminist movement probably did not create Latter-day Saint women's interest in paid employment, however. In the late 1970s, as the effects of a national recession intensified, increasing numbers of Mormon women left their homes to join the paid labor force full- or part-time. The propriety of women's work became even more troublesome within the Church; but despite apparent need, Church leaders did not redefine the sisters' options. In 1979, during his final year of active public leadership, President Spencer W. Kimball published a reaffirmation of the sisters' domestic assignment in *Woman*, a book featuring treatises on role clarification for Mormon women by fifteen General Authorities. He stated that God intended the male to "till the ground, support the family, and give proper leadership" while the woman was "to cooperate, bear the children and rear and teach them" (1979a, 80).

During this same period, the Church advised women to prepare to earn a living "outside the home, if and when the occasion requires" (C. Kimball 1977, 59). However, male Church leaders have consis-

tently emphasized the word *requires* and interpreted "true need" as divorce, widowhood, or the husband's long-term disability. For example, in the March 1979 *Ensign* President Kimball said that women should not earn the living "except in unusual circumstances. Men ought to *be men indeed* and earn the living under normal circumstances" (p. 4, emphasis added).

In addition, from the prosperity of the 1950s to the leaner years of the eighties, even women whose families were reared were directed into volunteer service rather than paid employment. In 1979, the *Church News* advised such women to take "extra classes at school" and engage in "charitable pursuits in which [they] may help the sick, read to the blind, assist the aged, possibly influence for good those who are delinquent" ("A Woman's Place" 1979). And President Kimball advised women whose children were "gone from under [the] wing" to "bless" others' lives and "help build the kingdom of God" (1979b, 14).

Concern over competition and perceived threats to male dominance may have prompted some men to promote compassionate rather than salaried work for Latter-day Saint women. Speaking to a fireside group in San Antonio, Texas, in 1977, President Kimball called mothers to "come home" to their husbands and families and to abandon the paid employment that created "an independence which is not cooperative" (in Benson 1987a, 7). Ezra Taft Benson, then next in line to lead the Church, told BYU students, "Men are the providers, and it takes the edge off your manliness when you have the mother of your children also be a provider" (in Anderson 1981, 18). And in 1979, Benson also warned women that competition with men would diminish their "godly attributes" leading them to "acquire a quality of sameness with man" including aggression and competitiveness (undesirable in women but desirable in men).

From 1979 to the present, Ezra Taft Benson has maintained that conservative stance. In 1981, he observed that "Adam was instructed to earn the bread by the sweat of his brow—not Eve. . . . Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother's place is in the home." He also said women were unwise to disrupt their parenting even to "prepare educationally" for future emergencies that might require their employment (1981, 105). Two years later, Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking for the First Presidency, claimed that woman's real responsibility is "bearer and nurturer of children [while the] man is the provider and protector. No legislation can alter the sexes" (in Eaton 1983).

In February 1987, Benson, now Church president, told Latter-day Saint couples that while widowed or divorced women might have to work "for a period of time, . . . [a] mother's calling is in the home, not in the marketplace" (1987a, 5–6). At the church-wide, semi-annual

priesthood meeting in October of that year, he told his male audience that the Lord had charged all "able-bodied [men] to provide for their families in such a way that the wife is allowed to fulfill her role as mother in the home." President Benson concluded that young married men, like "thousands of husbands" before them, could work their own way through school and have their families "at the same time" (1987b, 2-4). This directive obviously puts tremendous pressure on young Mormon men (who tend to marry young). It would seem to prevent many of those without affluent parents from participating in extensive graduate or professional training. At the same time, it indicates the strength of President Benson's injunction to the women to remain in their homes, *even* at the expense of their husbands' preferred occupations. Thus the last word from the highest Church authority is that family men should fill an exclusive breadwinner role. President Benson's 1987 addresses also draw to conclusion a century of constricting employment options for Mormon women.

Secondary patterns within these discourses also provide interesting information about gender stratification within the Church. As historian Larry Foster has previously noted, the Church has grown increasingly more Victorian in its attitudes towards women's roles (Foster 1979). Victorian feminine traits of gentility, patience, self-denial, purity, and other passive virtues fit an inherent nurturant role. Men have also delineated women's "natural abilities" and ecclesiastical, domestic, and secular duties. In contrast, women have never had the power to define men authoritatively or create policies for them. From time to time, however, women have defined *themselves* and their duties; and typically these self-definitions have been more complex and varied than have the male definitions of women.

Second, men and women justify women's roles in different ways. Male directives rely on revelation (a privilege of priesthood holders), Old Testament injunctions (given by male prophets), societal and Church needs (both structured and maintained by men). Women are also admonished to accept their male-defined roles or weaken their standing as "natural" women and faithful Latter-day Saints. In contrast, women leaders have made no claims to revelation for the Church at large. They have, however, considered their own interests and needs, and those of the women they know, when defining roles. Some women have questioned the notion of separate spheres and of unique mental and emotional traits for males and females. Some women claim that each sister can independently interpret God's will concerning herself.

Men, more than women, have also been openly intolerant of competition between the sexes, both in employment and in the right to

define people and policies. This intolerance may reflect the value of power to some Latter-day Saint men. Certainly the effort to eliminate such competition has been visible within the last generation: women no longer publish independent journals, attend conferences called and designed by women alone, or present their own discourse to the Church until it has been reviewed and approved by men. Not surprisingly, women's official statements currently conform to the men's.

Against this backdrop of constricting options for women, the addresses by President Gordon B. Hinckley and Elder Russell M. Nelson take on significance. The first was introduced by a nostalgia for rural America and simple truths. I believe that President Hinckley spoke with unusual warmth at the 1989 General Women's Conference. He appeared appreciative of the sisters and concerned over women's domestic and financial well-being. In the presence of President Ezra Taft Benson, Hinckley encouraged extensive education for women and claimed that women had nearly unlimited choices for their endeavors. He did, however, wish marriage and freedom *from* "the marketplace" for *all* Mormon women.

Two weeks later, Elder Nelson claimed that the "potential for women" was greatest within the Church. In subsequent sections of his address, however, Nelson restricted that potential to a celestial salvation and a "divine mission" in which women place service to others ahead of personal need. Support for paid employment was confined by example to teaching school; and while Nelson praised the selfless efforts of his own favorite teachers (all unmarried as he identified them), he failed to recognize their relatively low salaries. Instead, he noted how the "vicarious ambitions" of those "humble women" had fueled *his own* efforts (culminating in a prestigious medical practice and powerful Church calling). Nelson ignored the irony of his own remarks, however; and his discourse suggests that woman's work, salaried or not, is literally serving man.

Most important, neither Hinckley nor Nelson recognized the financial realities for women today: Eighty-five percent of Mormon women will likely work for a significant period of time (Bernard 1990, 3). Between 5 and 10 percent of American women will never marry; most of these will support themselves and perhaps other family members as well. Many who do marry will find poverty in divorce. The Utah divorce rate currently exceeds the national rate of 50 percent.[6] Given

[6] KSL news anchor Dick Nourse reported on 1 November 1989 that the Utah divorce rate currently exceeds the national average of 50 percent. Exact figures on temple divorces are difficult to obtain, but they are probably lower than those for Mormon couples married outside the temple.

that 67 percent of the people living in Utah are Latter-day Saints,[7] this information suggests that from 30 to 50 percent of Mormon marriages probably end in divorce. Most divorced women receive custody of their children but scant child support and no alimony for themselves. In addition, most Latter-day Saint women will outlive their husbands, some by many years. Many will marry men whose ability to provide will be impaired by illness or injury. Many will marry men who are, or will become, severely underemployed.

The accuracy of these claims is already apparent: Latter-day Saints comprise two-thirds of the population of the state of Utah. In apparent violation of counsel, however, in 1987 women made up 44 percent of Utah's labor force. Sixty percent of Utah women over the age of sixteen were working or looking for work. This is 4 percent higher than the national average. Fifty-eight percent of married women, 71 percent of women in child-bearing years, and 37 percent of women with preschool children were labor-force participants. According to the July 1989 *Utah Labor Market Report*, most of these women work or seek to work out of economic necessity. Utah has ranked in the bottom quartile for per capita income for decades. Utah women earn less than two-thirds the salary of their male counterparts and eleven cents less on the dollar than the average American woman. Utah women also constitute the largest single group of discouraged workers in the state (ULMR 1989).

The single-female head of household may be at greatest risk. Nearly 23 percent of all families in America today are headed by a single parent—typically female and typically poor ("U.S. Gets" 1990). Such families are increasing, and the increase is most pronounced among U.S. minority populations and in developing countries. Interestingly, the Church is growing fastest in just these minority communities and in third world countries, where women outnumber men as converts. However, neither President Hinckley nor Elder Nelson noted the extent of this population—Mormon women who must work, do work, and receive low pay.

Neither did President Hinckley or Elder Nelson address the psychological needs of women who work for personal satisfaction. President Hinckley admitted early in his speech that some Mormon women "hunger [for] attention and opportunity to express their talents"; and he seemed to promise freedom in such expression when he stated that "almost the entire field of human endeavor" was open to women. However, by wishing women freedom *from* paid work, he left this

[7] This figure was provided by Don LeFevre of the church's Public Relations Department on 20 April 1990.

"recognition" of need without solutions. Thus real changes for women are found in the spirit of Hinckley's address.[8]

The Church's general proscription against women's wage work is problematic. As long as current social and economic conditions prevail, and as long as the Church idealizes early marriage, large families, and full-time mothering, most women will not prepare for work that will support them adequately; such work usually requires extensive training and/or sustained participation in the labor force. Instead, many women will continue in poorly paid work and then suffer if they are members of low-income households or if they become sole providers.

Without institutional support, Mormon mothers who need to work will struggle unnecessarily to combine parenting with wage employment. Women who resign positions simply to obey counsel may feel resentful and unfulfilled. Women without economic need who choose to work may feel rejected by an institution that claims to love and serve them.

In a gesture of true support of Church members, I would like to hear leaders address not only these alleged "women's" issues, but the range of *human*, work-related problems that define and constrain daily life. Is men's full-time employment and exclusive breadwinner assignment in the best interests of all concerned? Devotion to career has served the business community; does it serve individuals or the family? Does the Church condone the extended work week of the high-paying careers that keeps many professionals—largely men—away from their families? No one has recently suggested that men might like to share their provider role, although Brigham Young recognized that interest. Young also recognized the wide range of women's abilities and the value employed women could provide to the community. During the nineteenth century, *all* Mormon women who contributed to the "kingdom" were termed "Mothers in Zion," even if they were single and childless. Thus woman's nurturance was given wider scope and women's options were increased. Such freedom might benefit all concerned at the present time.

Have Church leaders taken into account the strain on Mormon males to support a large family, contribute hours a week in church

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[8] President Hinckley reinforced a conservative position at the Spafford Social Work Conference the following February. There he agreed that rising expenses place difficult burdens on families; but he also claimed that working mothers are a "root cause" of many tragic and widespread social problems, including the breakdown of the family and increased crime. In addition, he said that women who work only for personal satisfaction are likely to pay a terrible price for that choice. See Tim Fitzpatrick, "Ellerbee, Hinckley Differ on Working Women," the Salt Lake *Tribune*, Saturday, 24 February 1990, B-1.

attendance and service, and nourish relationships with wives and children, relatives and friends? What about the problem of day care in families where both parents work?[9] I would like to see the Church make a serious and sustained effort to teach members that both mother and father in dual-provider homes must do their share of housework and child care.

Finally, Church leaders might understand that women's interest in wage work may be neither unwholesome competition nor dangerous disobedience. Work can express and define the self. Chosen freely, it reflects the diversity of women and their lives. Those who truly want to address the potential for women within the Church might consider these issues.

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[9] The article "When Mom Can't Be Home: Making the Best of Second Choice," (*Ensign*, Feb. 1990, 16–21) by the General Presidency of Relief Society, is a first of its kind. More needs to be done along this line.

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