

# The Grammar of Inequity

*Lavina Fielding Anderson*

THE THOUGHTFUL AND SUBTLE philosopher Montaigne once remarked: “Most of the grounds of the world’s troubles are matters of grammar” (in Auden and Kronenberger 1962, 155).

Now this is not just one of those terribly clever French writers being cute. He was expressing a principle that I, as a writer and editor, have come to see as a fact of our universe. The way we arrange words is determined by and, in turn, determines the way we arrange our reality. The labels we apply to people determine, in large measure, our relationships with them; but our relationships also reshape those categories and labels.

This essay explores some of the strengths of deliberately choosing to relate to our world with gender-inclusive language in three areas crucial to our religious life—our scriptures, our hymns, and our prayers. I recognize that not everyone is comfortable analyzing the way we speak or altering traditional forms of speech. That discomfort may become particularly acute in the discussion on prayer where I double the stakes: I urge not only using inclusive language, but also replacing the formal language of prayer with everyday speech. I make this double plea because I feel that one shift in understanding—including Mother in Heaven—cannot occur without the other—praying in the most familiar and direct ways we can.

---

*LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON* is president of *Editing, Inc.*, former associate editor of *DIALOGUE*, co-editor with Maureen Ursenbach Beecher of *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (University of Illinois Press, 1987), and editor of *My Father, David O. McKay* by David Lawrence McKay (*Deseret Book*, 1989). A version of this paper was first presented at the Mormon Women’s Forum, 30 November 1988, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Why am I urging this program of grammatical reform? Inclusive speech is not only ethically right but has profound spiritual consequences. How we read the scriptures and how we pray shape our relationship with our divine parents. It is a truism to say that we speak in ways that are familiar to us, but it is a painful thing to realize that the familiar speech of our religious experience excludes women. The mother tongue belongs to the fathers. For Latter-day Saints, familiar religious speech is the language of the King James and Joseph Smith translations of the Bible, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon, and the Pearl of Great Price. The scriptures are profoundly exclusionary. It is an agonizing paradox; but to the degree we love and use the language of the scriptures, we also love and use the language of exclusion.

Yet this is not my view of God. I feel to the very depths of my soul that the Savior's mission was to women as well as to men, that our theology embraces a divine couple, that the place of our Mother in Heaven is as secure as that of our Father in Heaven, and that a full understanding of godhood will eventually include an understanding of her powers, principles, and responsibilities.

I feel that women must be fully included in the gospel of Jesus Christ, not because the scriptural texts fully include them nor because our theology perfectly includes them but because any other pattern does violence to the fabric of the universe, distorting and misshaping the image of God that I strive, however imperfectly, to see and reach toward. When language becomes a veil, masking and disguising God, then it is imperative, as a matter of spiritual health, that language change. I think that the process, though arduous, will be accompanied by joy.

#### INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CHURCH

I had the instructive experience some time ago of reading through an entire conference issue of the *Ensign* (November 1988) looking specifically for messages of inclusion and exclusion. I would not particularly recommend this exercise, except as a research project, since it narrows one's focus. Nor is it the way I usually read conference addresses. However, I enjoyed spending this concentrated time with the conference texts, discovering points of agreement, feeling called to repentance by some talks, comforted by others, and being astonished by still others.

But with my particular assignment in mind, I looked for references to women and made lists. I excluded scriptural quotations because women are comparatively rare in the scriptures. In the interests of

fairness, I also excluded references to Jesus and Joseph Smith. This particular conference happened to be the October 1988 conference, in which Richard G. Scott was made an apostle. I excluded references to him that were ritual expressions of welcome to the Quorum of the Twelve and references to President Benson that were expressions of support, appreciation for his presence, and so forth.

Here are the results of what I found:

1. Except in the priesthood session, all talks were addressed equally to both men and women.
2. When speakers quoted named individuals who were not scriptural personages, they quoted thirty-one men and five women.
3. In examples and stories, thirty involved men only, nine involved women only, and seventeen involved men and women.
4. Twenty men and two women were named.

Yes, the results were fairly lopsided. So what else is new? And furthermore, expressions of ritual indignation about the imbalance are actually pretty boring. Far more interesting are some additional observations:

One is that Michaelene P. Grassli, the Primary general president, spoke in the Sunday afternoon session with General Authorities on both sides. This is definite progress. This new custom is a trend which I'm happy to applaud along with the continued presence of the women organizational leaders on the stand.

Another cheering item is that about half of the General Authorities who referred to their wives called them by their names. I also consider this to be a helpful, hopeful trend since a name is an individual expression of personhood whereas "wife" (like "husband") is a role that is automatically created by marriage.

Even more significant in the good news department were the evident, serious, concentrated efforts of the men who spoke to use inclusive language in their remarks. For example:

1. In Elder Neal A. Maxwell's eloquent address, he said: "Why do some crush and break the tender hearts of spouses and children through insensitivity and even infidelity?" and called them "pathetic men or women." The reference to "breaking the tender hearts" of course echoes the language of Jacob's strong denunciation of adulterous husbands in the Book of Mormon ("ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives," Jac. 2:35). Elder Maxwell has correctly noted that either spouse can commit adultery with the same devastating effects (p. 33).

2. Elder David Haight rephrased a quotation from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich that had originally applied only to women so that it also included men: "I suppose every Mormon [man and] woman [have] measured [themselves] at one time or another against [their] pioneer ancestors' "

(brackets his). Elder Haight also added a masculine example to parallel Laurel's feminine one. "Could I leave my wife and children without food or means to support themselves while I responded to a call to serve a mission abroad, or take these same innocent ones, dependent solely upon me for their survival, into hostile territory to set up house-keeping and provide a livelihood for them? Or, were I a woman, [and here's he's quoting Laurel's example], 'could I crush my best china to add glitter to a temple, bid loving farewell to a missionary husband as I lay in a wagon bed with fever and chills, leave all that I possessed and walk across the plains to an arid wilderness?'" (pp. 82-83). Yes, we all know that most pioneer women could probably not accurately be described as "solely dependent" and, in fact, usually managed to support those same husbands on missions while putting food on the table for their children at home—but it's quite obvious that a sincere effort to apply a principle of inclusiveness prompted Elder Haight's remarks.

3. President Thomas Monson, in speaking at the priesthood session, referred to athletic teams of "young men and young women" (p. 44).

4. President Howard W. Hunter reminded his listeners that "God knows and loves us all. We are, every one of us, his daughters and his sons" (p. 60). This language is particularly noteworthy because it specifies daughters and sons, rather than the more usual phrase "children of God," and also puts daughters first.

5. Elder Richard G. Scott, in referring to the dedication of the Mexico City Temple, mentions the presence of "many of the men and women leaders of Mexico and Central America" (p. 76), a deliberate and inclusive specification instead of the more usual reference just to "leaders."

In short, I feel confident in affirming a sensitivity and courtesy on the part of General Authorities that manifests itself in real efforts to use more gender-inclusive language and to include women more visibly in the public rituals of general conference. Why, then, did I end up feeling those all-too-familiar and all-too-awful feelings of grief as I read the thoughtful and kindly messages of these sensitive and decent men?

The answer is that it has very little to do either with them or with me. The mechanisms of patriarchy are embedded deep in our culture and our language. I have long been dismayed at what the Church "does" to women, but I have been short-sighted. The Church neither invented the mechanisms of patriarchy nor shaped the grammar of inequity. The sources of oppression seep through the bedrock of our culture itself. That insight has brought me feelings of understanding and even forgiveness that are very healing.

However, it has not brought me acceptance. Inequity is wrong—ethically and morally wrong. If the wrong runs to bedrock, then correcting it cannot be done quickly and easily—but it must be done. I am not qualified to discuss political and economic strata in that bedrock, but I do want to explore the sedimentary accretions of its grammar.

I am going to use President Ezra Taft Benson's powerful closing address as an example. I do so with some hesitation, since I am aware of the real danger of making a person "an offender for a word," in the terms of Isaiah's rebuke of those whom he calls "the scorers" (Isa. 29:20–21). Not in a critical spirit, then, but to demonstrate the terrible irony that "feasting" on the words of the scriptures is a diet deficient in inclusiveness, let's look at that address. President Benson speaks to "my beloved brethren and sisters" and refers to "offspring of a loving God," children of God, members, parents, leaders, teachers, and families, all in gender-neutral language. But he also refers to "the agency of man" and "all mankind" and says (1) "God reveals His will to all men," (2) "I testify that it is time for every man to set in order his own house. . . . It is time for the unbeliever to learn for himself that this work is true," and (3) "In due time all men will gain a resurrection" (p. 87). Although he appropriately uses masculine references about the apostles Christ chose and about the president of the Church, there is no contextual reason for exclusionary language in the settings of the quotations I have just cited.

I am not, as I said, accusing President Benson of insensitivity or discourtesy to women. I am simply using his address to point out how deeply and strongly traditions of usage grip our language. Yet I believe that we cannot correctly understand either the God we worship or our own ultimate potential as gods as relationships of male-female inequity. If I am correct, then we must change those traditions and foster a new language of inclusion. But how? We will not find a complete answer to this dilemma in the scriptures, nor in our history, nor in our theology, although we can find support for an inclusionary position in all three. I believe that we must find the answer first in our own hearts, then turn outward with questions—not questions like "Why are things the way they are?" or "How can we make *them* or *it* change?" but "How can I behave so that my actions mirror the truth of what I feel in my heart?"

What are the implications of approaching our scriptures, our hymns, and our prayers with language that reflects our deepest convictions about the relationships that should exist among men and women and about our even more important relationship with God?

### READING THE SCRIPTURES TO INCLUDE

An obvious beginning is to read the scriptures with inclusionary language. This is quite a bit easier than we might think. Our son, Christian, was, as I recall, about four and a half when I realized how adept he had become. Our bedtime story involved a rabbit in red overalls, and I said something like, "See the bunny? He's looking for something to eat." Christian, absorbed in the picture, commented absentmindedly, "Or she." At age eight, Christian had no trouble editing John 3:3 at normal reading speed to emerge as: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man [or woman] be born again, he [or she] cannot see the kingdom of God." Inclusionary language has already become, to a large extent, the familiar speech of our son, and we hope that he will learn to correct exclusionary language with the same reflex that he corrects incorrect grammar.

I might add that Christian is getting into the spirit of the thing at age nine and is lobbying to include children. Now, if a nine-year-old can successfully negotiate the grammar of this passage—"Except a man or a woman or a child be born of the water and of the Spirit, he or she cannot enter into the kingdom of God"—I think the rest of us just might be able to stumble along in his or her footsteps.

In addition to the very real psychological impact for women of consciously including themselves and for men of consciously including women, there are some theological advantages. Think, if you will, of Christ as the "Son of Man—and Woman."

Let us become editors—all of us. Let us shape our daily experience so that inclusionary language becomes our common speech.

### SINGING OUR HYMNS IN A NEW VOICE

My husband, Paul, who has received probably more attention and appreciation for his hymn texts in the new hymnal than anything else he has done in a list of quite considerable achievements, has observed wryly that more Mormons get their theology from the hymnal than from the scriptures. As a former English major, I would also observe that more Mormons get their poetry there as well. It is unfortunate, then, that our current hymnal, the first in two decades, made no visible effort to modify or reduce exclusionary language in its texts.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I hope to see in print soon an excellent paper on exclusionary language in the hymns that Jean Ann Waterstradt, retired professor of English at Brigham Young University, delivered at the Association for Mormon Letters annual meeting 27 January 1990 at Salt Lake City.

It is more difficult to change words in many hymns than in the scriptures, however, since there are requirements of rhythm and, even more difficult, of rhyme to consider. Frankly, our family editings are not overly concerned with creating smooth alternative readings to the hymns; but our growing ability to spot and correct exclusive language as we sing along has enlivened many an otherwise lackluster song practice session. This month in our ward, we've been singing "Know This, That Every Soul Is Free" (no. 240), which includes those truly shattering lines: "Freedom and reason make us men;/Take these away, what are we then?/Mere animals . . ." As I recall, I sang "make us persons," Paul sang "make us human," and Christian sang "make us homo sapiens." Christian then continued with gusto, "Take these away, what are we then?/ Meer schweinchen . . ." (He had just learned the German word for "guinea pig" and was delighted to find such a good place to use it.) I think this memory may even replace that memorable Sunday when we all disgraced ourselves with giggles over a line that talked about how "faith buoys us up" and Paul triumphantly sang, "boys and girls us up."

Many uses of "man" or "men" in a hymn yield gracefully to such monosyllables as "we," "us," "all," or "souls," as: "Gently raise the sacred strain,/For the Sabbath's come again/ That we may rest . . ." (no. 146). Or the line from "It Came upon the Midnight Clear": "Peace on the earth, good will to all . . ." (no. 207); "And praises sing to God the King, and peace to us on earth" (no. 208). I confess that I haven't found a graceful solution to the last line of "I Believe in Christ," which concludes: "When on this earth he comes again/To rule among the sons of men" (no. 134). Usually we just go for broke and recklessly cram in, "To rule among the sons and daughters of men and women."

I'd suggest experimenting with your own singing to find gender-inclusive language that you feel comfortable with. I loved reading Kelli Frame's (1989) report of her glorious experience in singing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" with feminine pronouns ("She overcometh all/She saveth from the fall . . ."). At our last scripture study group, I tried singing it with inclusive pronouns: "They overcome it all/ They save us from the fall/ Their might and power are great./ They all things did create/ And they shall reign forevermore." It truly *felt* glorious!

### ENCOUNTERING OUR HEAVENLY PARENTS IN PRAYER

A third area in which our language truly benefits from thoughtful reshaping toward a more inclusive reality is in our prayers. Here, I think grammar offers a single-stone solution to two hard-to-kill birds:

the impediment of formal language and the fact that our public prayers are addressed only to God the Father.

I am not, at this point, urging that we pray to Mother in Heaven. I hope the time will come when we can address both of our divine parents in our public petitions; but for the moment, I propose a first step toward that solution. I think that the real obstacle to including our Mother in Heaven in public prayers is not theological as much as it is grammatical. We've all worked hard to master the intimate pronouns and verb forms of seventeenth-century England. We have a real intellectual and emotional investment in the grammar of such prayer phrases as: "We thank thee that thou hast preserved us in health and dost maintain us before thee and pray that thou mightest continue so to do." Again, after putting in thirty or forty years, we hear such language as familiar speech. There is a shock in hearing, "We thank you that you have preserved us and do maintain us and pray that you will continue to do so."

I am firmly convinced, however, that we have confused reverence with grammatical familiarity and, as with inclusive language in the scriptures, it's simply a matter of saying the new words over and over until we get used to them. I suggest that we start praying privately in our own normal speech, using *you* and *your*. It will make these prayers more intimate, more natural, and more loving. It is a pleasant coincidence in our language that *you* is both a singular and a plural pronoun. I think that once we make the grammatical adjustment of hearing the ambiguous *you*, we can then tackle the theological problem of how many people it refers to.

There is, however, a political problem. (There usually is with grammatical points.) The Church has a policy on the language of public prayer. Those seventeenth-century pronouns and verb forms have become shibboleths of ecclesiastical respectability that are hard to displace. When I worked on the *Ensign* staff, we prepared a special issue on prayer in January 1976. It included a message by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "Why the Lord Ordained Prayer," that included ten points he thought essential in understanding prayer. In addition to such points as "ask for temporal and spiritual blessings" and "use both agency and prayer," he also insisted, "Follow the formalities of prayer."

Our Father is glorified and exalted; he is an omnipotent being. We are as the dust of the earth in comparison, and yet we are his children with access, through prayer, to his presence. . . .

We approach Deity in the spirit of awe, reverence, and worship. We speak in hushed and solemn tones. We listen for his answer. We are at our best in prayer. We are in the divine presence.

Almost by instinct, therefore, we do such things as bow our heads and close our eyes; fold our arms, or kneel, or fall on our faces. We use the sacred language

of prayer (that of the King James Version of the Bible—*thee, thou, thine, not you and your*). (p. 12)<sup>2</sup>

This argument deserves some serious consideration. I do not question that Elder McConkie was absolutely sincere in what he said or that this description represents his experience. However, I honestly cannot say that my best prayers have always been uttered in “hushed and solemn tones.” Many of my best prayers have been uttered when I’ve been all but speechless with fury, or sobbing with pain, or near bursting with delight. I know, because these are the prayers when I feel instantaneous and profound contact—not always answers, but unquestionably a fully understanding listener.

Nor do I believe that we “instinctively” assume the posture of prayer. I may hold the world’s record for length of term as a Sunbeam teacher, and I can state authoritatively that there is *nothing* instinctive about folding one’s arms. Likewise, I don’t think we instinctively use the “sacred language” of prayer. I think we instinctively try to use the most meaningful language we have, but people who are floundering around trying to decide between “wilt” and “wouldst” are not having a worshipful experience. They are having a confusing experience and, if the prayer is offered in public, probably an embarrassing one as well.

For that same issue of the *Ensign* in January 1976, the staff commissioned an article by a BYU professor of English called “The Language of Formal Prayer.” It begins by quoting Joseph Fielding Smith’s guilt-producing statement that the rise of modern translations of the scriptures that use “the popular language of the day, has, in the opinion of the writer and his brethren, been a great loss in the building of faith and spirituality in the minds and hearts of the people” (in Norton 1976, 44). From that point, the article is well written and engaging. It explains the rules for using *thou, thee, thy, thine*, and their accompanying verb forms and provides several useful quizzes to check knowledge and skill levels as the article progresses.

I remember liking the article very much in 1976; now, I’m rather shocked at myself. It is not that the article’s quality has deteriorated in the meantime but that my feelings about how we should relate to God have changed. I recognize now that even in 1976, I was maintaining a rather complex double standard in my prayer speech. As a missionary a decade earlier in France, I had learned appropriate Mormon prayers

---

<sup>2</sup> This position is not just a historical one but a very current one. The home teachers’ message for February 1990, delivered by my visiting teachers along with the visiting teachers’ message for the same month, concluded its remarks on prayer with: “We can show greater respect to Deity by using *Thee* instead of *you*, *Thou* instead of *your*, and *Thine* instead of *yours*.” (Typescript in my possession.)

which, as a matter of linguistic convention, use the intimate pronouns, *tu-toi*. These are, like their English counterparts of *thee* and *thine*, the only pronouns in French for singular *you*. French, again like English, uses the plural “you” (*vous*) on “formal” occasions whether one individual or several is being addressed. Missionaries were forbidden to *tu-toi* anybody except little children “as a matter of propriety”; but normal French-speakers *tu-toi* lovers, relatives, youngsters, chums, pets—and God.

Clearly, if the Church were being consistent about addressing God in the most exalted and formal speech available to them, French members and missionaries would have been counseled to use *vous*. They weren’t, I believe, because the issue was not one of formality at all. The issue was one of having a special language—and in English, a now difficult, abstruse, and abnormal one—reserved for God. I am pleased that this is one cultural manifestation of Mormonism we have failed to export.

As I gained more familiarity and fluency in French, I began using French for my private prayers. I still remember how tender, how affectionate, how *close* it made me feel to God. Naturally I asked myself why my own language did not have quite this effect. As the daughter of two conscientious and thoroughly orthodox Latter-day Saints, I literally cannot recall ever having heard God addressed as *you* up to that point. I maintained the habit of praying in French for a full fifteen years after my mission because I cherished its intimacy. I feel a special love for Alison Smith, a convert of two weeks, because of her prayer in a University Second Ward sacrament meeting in Seattle two years after my return. Untutored in torturous King James English, she helped me realize that intimate prayer did not have to remain a solitary vice.

Since its founding, the Church has been attached to the King James Version of the Bible; but as Philip Barlow’s (1989) careful and convincing essay establishes, that attachment is largely a historic accident—a combination of tradition and the personal preference, bolstered by the persuasive but illogical arguments, of J. Reuben Clark, Jr.

Similarly, the attachment of any special reverence or respect to *thee* and *thou* is based on historical ignorance, a reading backward into a perfectly ordinary grammatical construction of a magical meaning. The grammar text I studied as a junior at BYU makes this point perfectly clear.

The author, Paul Roberts, explains lucidly and even humorously an evolution in English that I am quoting at some length because I think it represents essential information:

In Middle English, the following forms occurred:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nominative:	thou	ye
Genitive [possessive]:	thy, thine	your, yours
Objective:	thee	you

The functional distinctions of the genitive forms were not quite what they are at present, but *thou*, *thee*, *ye*, and *you* correspond to *I*, *me*, *we*, and *us*. Since then two important changes have taken place.

The first is the elimination of the singular and the use of the plural for both numbers. This apparently stemmed from the custom of kings to use the pronouns *we/us* in referring to themselves. Since the king spoke of himself in the plural, it was thought polite and proper to address him in the plural. This token of courtesy was then extended in the upper classes to all those of superior rank. Then, since one often wishes to be polite to equals as well as to superiors, it became the regular second person singular pronoun among the courteous. For a long time *thou/thee* continued to be used for communication with inferiors and intimates. . . . English, however, eventually extended the polite form to all situations; this may indicate more courtesy or democracy among the English. At any rate, the old singular has all but disappeared, and the formal plural now serves both numbers. *Thou*, *thy*, *thine*, and *thee* are now used chiefly in addressing God in prayer. They lingered a long while in poetic language, but are little used, except humorously, by first-rate modern poets. (1954, 58-59)

The second tendency, he continues, is a trend toward simplification: the nominative *ye* was annexed and overwhelmed by the objective *you*, and Roberts cheerfully predicts that the same thing would have happened to *I* and *he*, *she*, and *it* if left to their own devices, as the construction "Me and him will do it" demonstrates. "However," he sighs, "the efforts of elementary-school teachers have arrested the movement, or at least slowed it down" (1954, 59).<sup>3</sup> I might also add that

---

<sup>3</sup> A more recent grammarian, writing a decade after my BYU expert though still twenty years from our own time, provides a more elegant and thoroughly historical background:

A grammatical innovation, of somewhat questionable value, which is due to French influence, is the polite substitution of the plural for the singular in the second person. The origin of this custom is to be found in the official Latin of the later Roman Empire, in which a great person of state was addressed with "you" instead of "thou," just as, in formal documents, he wrote "we" instead of "I." The use of the plural "you," as a mark of respect, passed into all the Romanic languages, and from them into German, Dutch, and Scandinavian. It is a well-known fact that forms of politeness originally used only in addressing superiors have in all languages a tendency to become more and more widely applied; and hence in Europe generally the singular "thou" has, except in religious language and in diction more or less poetical, come to be used only in speaking to intimate friends or inferiors. In England, during the last two centuries, the use of *thou*, so far as ordinary language is concerned, has become obsolete; it is only among the speakers of certain local dialects that it continues to be employed even by parents to their children, or by brothers and sisters to each other. Our language has thus lost whatever advantage it had gained by having a polite as well as a familiar form of address; and unfortunately the form that has

Quaker plain-speech has simplified ruthlessly in the other direction. *Thee* is used for both nominative and objective cases: “Thee is a Friend” (rather than “Thou art a Friend”) and “God gives thee health and strength.”

My point is simple. There is nothing inherently “sacred” about obsolete though charming language. The eloquence and beauty of the King James Version deserve our study and love for those qualities—but not because they help us communicate better with God. God does not listen more approvingly to “Wilt thou bless us?” than to “Will you bless us?”. In fact, he probably does not even have to listen more attentively, given his merciful promise to listen to the prayers of our hearts rather than those of our lips. That being so, requiring children, young people, and converts to make their petitions to the Lord in a fragmentary and foreign formal language reminds me uncomfortably of the situation the Savior condemned during his mortal ministry: “Woe to you. . . . You shut the kingdom of heaven in [people’s] faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matt. 23:13, New International Version).

At home, we use the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the Phillips translation, and *Good News for Modern Man* (or *Persons*). These editions do not use inclusionary language but, as I’ve mentioned, we’re handling that quite nicely on our own. Our intention is simple: we want Christian to understand the scriptures, to seek information from them, and to think about them. We want them to speak directly to him, to convey the spiritual experiences of others, and to be models of and catalysts for his personal spiritual experiences. We don’t want the scriptures to lie in a category completely apart from all of his other learning experiences.

I think other people will enjoy the same experience. When Paul gave a Christmas Sunday School lesson a few years ago, he read the Luke nativity from the J. B. Phillips version and had several people come up and say, “That was so beautiful! Did you write it?” I suggest that reading the scriptures in an accessible translation will bring a

---

survived is ambiguous. There is a translation of the New Testament into modern English in which *you* is everywhere substituted for *thou*, except in addresses to the Deity. It is a significant fact that in one place the translator has felt obliged to inform his readers by a footnote that in the original the pronoun changes from the plural to the singular. The English language is, in respect of clearness, decidedly the worse for the change which has abolished the formal distinction of number in the second person of the pronoun and the verb. (Bradley 1967, 44–45)

freshness and immediacy to their message that we quite desperately need. From there, it is an equally logical and rewarding step to make them gender inclusive.

A related grammatical point is the argument that *man* is a generic which includes *women* as part of “all mankind.” I concede that the term has, in fact, been so used and still is. But I don’t buy the argument. Rather, I see *man* as a categorical noun, the existence of which implies a correspondent: man/woman. Other examples are husband/wife, parent/child, teacher/student, master/slave. Correspondence is not the same as inclusion. The category of *husband* predicts but does not include the category of *wife* any more than the category of *child* includes the category of *parent*.

It is an unfortunate historical and social fact that most of these categories connote hierarchy—subservience and superiority. Precisely for that reason, then, I think we should be both scrupulous and courteous in acknowledging the real existence of each category. If one category cannot exist without the other, then both deserve to be named. Grammarian Roberts, writing more than thirty years ago, reflects both the cultural understanding of that time and the problems which have been fully realized in the succeeding three decades: “The word *man* is ambiguous in that it may be masculine (a male human being) or common gender (any human being). In “Man was put into this world to suffer,” *man* probably means both man and woman. In “Be a man,” it means *man*, not woman. This ambiguity of *man* has encouraged the substantive use of *human*” (1954, 51).

I think that it is much more graceful and practical to simply acknowledge that English contains both parallel terms and inclusive terms: brotherhood/sisterhood/siblinghood, mankind/womankind/humankind, husband/wife/spouse, son/daughter/child. If we want to communicate gender, then let’s use the marvelously specific tools our language gives us. If we want to communicate inclusion, then let’s not use confusing gender-laden nouns which we must afterwards explain.

For example, a well-meaning attempt at being inclusive can paint the unwary speaker into this type of corner:

“This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39)

The word *man* as used above is generic. It includes man and woman, for, as Paul said, “Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11). (Hinckley 1988, 10)

I fully respect the speaker’s intentions, but how could it possibly have escaped his notice that *man* could hardly have been so unques-

tionably inclusive if he had to use both *man* (definitely male in Paul's example) as well as *woman* to define it? I anticipate the inevitable, though probably delayed, day when we will be able to read that scripture as "to bring about the immortality and eternal life of people"—or souls, or human beings.

Reading the scriptures inclusively, singing hymns inclusively, and praying with inclusive language are quiet grammatical revolutions that will reshape our reality to make it more truly a partnering—an equal honoring of maleness and femaleness. But it will be inadequate without an underlying commitment, which must be renewed often, to inclusiveness. We must accept the realities of the world we live in and forgive where we can understand; but we must never, never acquiesce in justifying it.

As I read through those often inspiring conference messages, wondering why I felt so sad, I received my answer when I came to the greeting of an apostle to Elder Richard G. Scott, the newest apostle. It reads: "Elder Scott, I would just like to add my welcome to the others that have been given to you as you assume this great position. You are joining a unique quorum. It is made up of very common men with a most uncommon calling. There is a spirit, a unity, a devotion in this body like none other you will ever experience. We are excited to have you and your great talent and abilities with us in our quorum. Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!" (p. 73)

Then I knew the source of my sorrow. I will grieve before the Lord and I will not be comforted until those words can be spoken to a sister, as well as to a brother, before the Holy Parents of us all, until we can fulfill in our society the promise of Paul: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Auden, W. H., and Louis Kronenberger. *The Viking Book of Aphorisms*. [New York:] Dorset Press for Viking Books, 1962.
- Barlow, Philip L. "Why the King James Version?: From the Common to the Official Bible of Mormonism." *DIALOGUE* 22 (Summer 1989): 19-43.
- Bradley, Henry. *The Making of English*. New York: Walker and Company, 1967.
- Frame, Kelli. "From the Editor." *Mormon Women's Forum* [Newsletter] 1 (Oct. 1989): 1.
- Hinckley, Gordon B. "Our Responsibility to Our Young Women." *Ensign* 18 (Sept. 1988): 8-11. Address to Regional Representatives.

McConkie, Bruce R. "Why the Lord Ordained Prayer." *Ensign* 6 (Jan. 1976): 7-12.  
Norton, Don E., Jr. "The Language of Formal Prayer." *Ensign* 6 (Jan. 1976): 44-47.  
"Pray Always." Home teacher's message for February 1990. Typescript in my possession.

Roberts, Paul. *Understanding Grammar*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.