

Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years

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It is an incredible honor to be here with you. I was not yet born when the women who published *A Beginner's Boston* met at Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's house in Boston to talk about their lives, launching the organized contemporary feminist movement. When the first issue of *Exponent II* was published, I was three years old, living in a religiously observant and conservative LDS home in Orange County, California, a home where there was no *Dialogue*, no *Exponent II*. I was eight years old and listening to President Kimball speak at the Rose Bowl when I saw the Mormons for ERA-hired plane tow its banner—"Mother in Heaven Loves ERA"—through the skies of Pasadena. I was so curious, but there were no Mormon feminists in my world—at least none that I knew of. Not until Eugene England walked into the classroom where I sat for my August 1989 orientation at Brigham Young University did I know there could be such a thing as a Mormon feminist. But since then, since I was eighteen years old, I have been fed, sheltered, warmed, and nurtured by Mormon feminist communities as a thinker, believer, critic, activist, scholar, writer, mother, and human being by women like Lorie Winder Stromberg, Elouise Bell, Margaret Toscano, Gloria Cronin, Lavina Fielding Anderson, Judy Dushku, Kay Gaisford, Becky Linford, and so many others. I have been welcomed into feminist networks, relationships, and venues created and tended to by women working long before my arrival. I feel an enormous debt of gratitude and a sense of honor in being part of this important work with all

of you. I am here to say thank you to the women who built this movement, our spiritual home.

I am sensitive to the fact that we are here in the wake of yet another difficult moment in Mormon feminist history after the excommunication of our sister Kate Kelly and during yet another season when progressive Mormon women and men in many places are being monitored, called in by their priesthood leaders, instructed not to participate vocally in Sunday meetings, released from callings, and subjected to other informal disciplinary actions. It has certainly been a difficult few months for me. I have been surprised by my own reactions, so much so that I stepped entirely back from blogging and social media, largely because I have not known what to say that could encourage and contribute.

It's a moment that reminds me of a letter I came across in my research for the anthology of Mormon feminist writings that I am editing with Hannah Wheelwright and Rachel Hunt Steenblik, to be published next year by Oxford University Press, which features so many of you, and to which many of you have contributed. This letter comes from March 1979, from the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum, an association of older Mormon feminists in Provo, Utah, expressing dismay about anti-feminism within the Church to LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball:

Dear President Kimball:

We speak for a sizeable minority of LDS women whose pain is so acute that they must try to be heard. Does the First Presidency really know of our plight? We cannot believe that anyone deliberately seeks to destroy us; nevertheless that is the signal we are receiving. We feel that we are the victims of a deliberate and punishing ultra-conservative squeeze to force us out of fellowship. . . . Suddenly many devoted Mormon women are being treated like apostates. . . . We desperately need to know whether, after serious consideration, soul-searching, and prayer, you indeed and in fact find us unworthy, a minority open to attack, and ultimately expendable. If not *can the word get out* that Mormon feminists are not to be subjected to intimidations, rejection for

Church assignments, loss of employment, and psychological excommunication? Every difference of opinion or sincere question should not be answered with a threatening indictment of one's testimony. We are women who love the Lord, the Gospel, and the Church; we have served, tithed, and raised righteous children in Zion. We plead for the opportunity to continue to do so in an atmosphere of respect and justice. For decades we have been part of the solution, whatever the need has been; we are saddened to be now considered part of the problem.¹

It was a letter that perhaps some of us feel we could have written in September 1993 or June 2014. The familiarity of this letter—its sentiments, its plaintiveness—could be taken as an indicator of how little has changed in the last few decades. Certainly in editing this book I've been struck time and time again by the persistence of Mormon feminism's core challenges and questions. In 1981, Nadine Hansen was among the first Mormon women to write about female priesthood ordination; last April, I stood with Nadine in the chilly rain outside the Tabernacle on Temple Square at the second Ordain Women direct action. Can we measure change? Will Mormon feminism always find itself engaged in a cyclical series of repressions and recoveries, push-forwards and institutional pushbacks?

Cycles of retrenchment may never end, but the contexts in which we experience them certainly do. Whoever could have imagined in 1970 the rise of the internet, let alone its impact, for better and for worse, on Mormonism and the Mormon feminist movement? Thanks to the great feminist tool that is Facebook, we who once may have felt ourselves isolated in our wards can find virtual communities of Mormon feminists on the internet and share with them—all day and all night if we want—our historic moment and our lives. We once relied on hand-mimeographed newsletters sent quarterly by snail mail: my copy of the Mormon Alliance newsletter always came with an inked heart above the address label, straight from the hand of Lavina Fielding Anderson, and that heart meant the world to me. Now, we repost links to Mormon feminist or progressive blogposts, hit “like” buttons, share, and comment, all in real time. As dazzling as this virtual

community is, the internet has also served as a new platform for the expression of anti-feminism, straining friends and family networks and creating a new warrant for surveillance of Mormon feminists. Then there is the dizzying sense of amnesia and inertia one gets from the constant scrolling of the newsfeed, every day bringing to our feminist blogs and Facebook groups newcomers with entry-level feminist awakenings—vital, crucial, necessary, to be sure—but also no sense of history, no anchor points in collective memory and experience.

It all makes one hunger for a rainy Saturday afternoon in New England, curled up in a chair near the window with the print *Exponent II* or maybe a book like *Mormon Enigma* and a cup of chamomile tea. That hunger for a book to anchor collective memory and serve as an opportunity for preservation, reflection, and the cultivation of conversation, common perspectives, and common dreams is one of the major reasons I undertook the compilation of the Mormon feminism anthology. Not since 1992, when Lavina Fielding Anderson and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher's *Sisters in Spirit* and Maxine Hanks's *Women and Authority* were published, has there been a substantial compilation of Mormon feminist writings.

For Mormon feminists, now is the time to honor the forty-year legacy of this movement by taking steps to preserve and convey our own Mormon feminist history. Only by looking at our history can we gain perspective on our shared and individual experience and develop strategic insights to set priorities for our future. Having spent the last ten months fairly immersed in historical Mormon feminist writings from 1970 to the present, I would like to take this opportunity to offer the product of my own historical reflection by identifying what I believe are some key challenges the Mormon feminist movement should and must face in its next forty years.

1. Mormon feminism needs to continue to press Mormon theology forward

I often explain to my colleagues in the progressive religious community the profoundly democratic character of Mormon

theology—that we have no trained clergy, no seminarians, no professional theologians, no theological seminars. Still, in compiling this anthology of Mormon feminist writing, I have been deeply impressed by the significant theological work Mormon feminists have accomplished over the last forty years. We inherited from Joseph Smith an *arrested restoration* on matters of gender: elements of the endowment ceremony and Smith’s own remarks to the Nauvoo Relief Society indicate that he saw women as heirs to priesthood, but he never quite realized that vision before his martyrdom in 1844. As Susa Young Gates wrote, “The privileges and powers outlined by the Prophet . . . have never been granted to women in full even yet.”²

This complicated, unfinished theological business around gender belongs to us. We must continue to honor the theological study of Mormonism as a valuable enterprise. If the debate over priesthood has revealed anything, it is that theology—especially Mormonism’s theological history—is not well understood and not well regarded by LDS leadership or laity. Historical theology has not been used by our leaders as a resource in addressing contemporary issues. We know that the twentieth-century rise of the bureaucratic church brought with it a flattening, simplification, and dehistoricization of Mormon theology. Feminist theological work has shown that the history of our faith’s teachings on gender is far more complicated than most Mormons realize. We must preserve this body of knowledge. We must make sure Mormon feminist theology stays accessible—especially longer, more nuanced arguments that may not find their way to blog posts.

I’ll say it here: I think Margaret Toscano is the most accomplished and significant Mormon theologian since James Talmage. Yet there is no definitive compilation of her written work, which is either scattered across back issues of progressive Mormon periodicals or filed in cardboard boxes in her office. At the secular university where she teaches, a university located in the heart of the Mormon cultural and intellectual universe, her theological work has been entirely disregarded, and until very recently Mormon studies has as well. Her landmark 1984 essay “The Missing Rib,” in which Margaret was the first to make the argument that the

endowment was intended by Joseph Smith as a form of priesthood ordination and that endowed women “can and do” hold the priesthood, exists only in a back issue of *Sunstone* and in a PDF dot matrix manuscript you can find if you Google it by name. I spent a few days of my sabbatical hand-typing into a new manuscript form “The Missing Rib” from that dot matrix printout. Caring for, preserving, and promoting the theological accomplishments of Mormon feminism must be one of our priorities going forward. If we do not keep historical theology alive, no one will.

2. Mormon feminism needs to continue to nourish the institutions that preserve our legacy, allow us to care for one another, and create our future.

This is a crucial time to check in on the health of our major Mormon feminist institutions, to attend to their foundations and safeguard their futures. The importance of this is underscored by the fact that we are not yet in a place where we can count on even historically progressive Mormon institutions to offer equal opportunity to Mormon women. Mormon women are still underrepresented in most of the major Mormon studies conferences and publications. Even as efforts are made to remedy this underrepresentation, we continue to face challenges in establishing relationships of mutuality and equality with many of our progressive male Mormon colleagues.

There are many reasons why Mormon women are underrepresented in Mormon studies. During the 1970s and 1980s, LDS church leaders openly discouraged Mormon women from pursuing professional lives in general, let alone seeking opportunities for professional religious study and teaching. The categorical exclusion of women from most LDS church leadership positions further constricts opportunities for women to produce and publish religious scholarship and reflection. There are no organized “progressive” branches of the Mormon movement (comparable to Reform Judaism or progressive Protestant denominations like the United Church of Christ or the United Methodists) to which progressive Mormon women seeking professional religious study and teach-

ing may migrate. Essential Mormon feminist historians like Linda King Newell have always worked as independent scholars, as has theologian Janice Allred; essential Mormon feminist theologians like Margaret Toscano have pursued successful academic careers in the humanities and social sciences, but their accomplishments as Mormon theologians and the impact of their writings on sizeable Mormon audiences is rarely acknowledged within the university.

Most have no opportunities to teach Mormon feminist thought in an institutional setting. Those who have managed to write about Mormonism from a feminist perspective have found themselves facing reprisals: Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery were “blacklisted” and prevented from speaking at LDS church-affiliated events after the publication of their biography *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (1985); Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich was rejected as a potential speaker at the Brigham Young University Women’s Conference by the BYU Board of Trustees in 1992; feminist literary critics Cecilia Konchar Farr and Gail Houston were fired by Brigham Young University in 1993 and 1996; feminist historian Martha Sontag Bradley left Brigham Young University in 1995 after facing significant anti-feminist harassment; and feminist scholars and theologians Lavina Fielding Anderson, Maxine Hanks, Janice Allred, and Margaret Toscano were excommunicated in 1993, 1995, and 2000. To younger Mormon women bold enough to consider a career, Mormon feminist intellectual work has seemed an endeavor rife with personal and professional risks and few opportunities and rewards. Consequently, during the 1990s and 2000s, publishing of Mormon feminist books slowed to a trickle.

For all of these reasons—absence of institutional supports, anti-intellectualism, anti-feminist reprisals, discouragement of young Mormon women from professional scholarship—Mormon feminist theology, scholarship, and writing have happened almost entirely through painstaking, uncompensated, independent grassroots efforts. Even today it happens not primarily in academic books or scholarly journals but rather on blogs and podcasts reaching audiences in the tens of thousands. Mormon feminist intellectual gatherings typically do not take place in

university-based conferences but independent community symposia, mountain retreats, or even camps welcoming to families and children. Mormon feminist theorizing happens—as it did in the 1970s—in hallway conversations at church and in between “regular” sessions at professional conferences; it happens in our kitchens, in our cars, on social media, and quite often with children and grandchildren on our laps and at our ankles. Our archives are in cardboard boxes in our garages, attics, and, when we have them, offices. As a reflection of our circumstances, Mormon feminist thought and writing tend to have a distinctly accessible and vernacular character, sometimes assuming forms—like the personal essay, a genre of Mormon feminist writing championed by Mary Bradford, or humor, exemplified in classic essays like Elouise Bell’s “The Meeting,” or the blog post—that are not often recognized for the serious work they attempt and accomplish. The history of literature shows that women have often written in popular forms, out of choice and out of necessity, with tremendous reach and yet with impacts that have been underestimated and under-acknowledged.

Similarly, the grassroots character of Mormon feminism is something to be celebrated. But its lack of institutional support and recognition raises concerns about the preservation and continuity of Mormon feminist thought. Many younger feminists have little exposure to the writings of our foresisters in the 1970s and 1980s. Older Mormon feminists have sometimes cycled out of activity in the LDS Church and Mormon feminist institutions, leaving younger feminists without the benefit of older women’s wisdom and perspective. Consequently, it seems that each new wave of young Mormon women comes of age into the great questions of Mormon feminism with few firm points of reference, each one reprising for itself the debates of the past. One of the reasons we undertook this anthology is to offer a point of reference and to protect and ensure the longevity of Mormon feminist thought. The growth of professional Mormon studies programs within the last five years at secular universities like Claremont Graduate University, Utah Valley University, and the University of Virginia has also created new

spaces of possibility for feminist or women-centered Mormon-focused research agendas, like the Claremont Mormon Women's Oral History Project or the Mormon Women's History Initiative. Graduate programs at these universities are also producing the first generation of professionally-trained Mormon feminist religious studies scholars, including Caroline Kline, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, Deidre Green, Sheila Taylor, and Amy Hoyt.³

Now is the time to document our history, to identify major collections of papers and digitize them or make sure that they are designated for reliable archives, to conduct endowment campaigns for our major institutions with 501(c)(3)s, to help those who are not 501(c)(3)s become so, to think about the needs of younger feminists and how to prepare for the thousands and thousands of young women who will come with every wave with every new generation.

3. Mormon feminism needs to press forward in addressing racial differences and build alliances with women of color.

Writing in 1995, Cecilia Konchar Farr offered a loving critique of the insularity of Mormon feminist retreat culture, which, she wrote, fostered

A feminism based on individual liberation, where meetings consisted mainly of entertainment, affirmation, and sharing stories of awakenings and abuses.

A homogeneous feminism that seemed, for the most part, comfortable in its familiar surroundings.

An insular feminism that based its desires for change almost solely on getting male leaders to understand women in the church.

A non-theoretical feminism, whose major premise was that women should no longer be silent.

An apolitical feminism that saw most of the women resisting a pull into a mild protest campaign, led by some of the more activist members of the group, which involved wearing small white ribbons on their lapels at church.

It was a feminism in the wilderness, focused on reform, and a feminism that highlighted all the imperfections of our smaller group—our homogeneity, our middle-class consciousness, our insularity.

And our whiteness as well. It is important to note the women in our tradition who have been anti-racist activists, like Maida Rust Withers, one of the founders of Mormons for ERA (MERA), who was on the faculty at Howard University and participated in civil rights activism in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, Sonia Johnson remarked that she was pushed out as a frontwoman for MERA because she was the only one who had not been an activist in anti-racism. Cecilia Farr, Gloria Cronin, and Margaret Young, all feminists, have worked to desegregate the curriculum at BYU. In more recent years, younger Mormon feminist bloggers and editors have made conscious efforts to include the voices of women of color in places like *Feminist Mormon Housewives*, *Young Mormon Feminists*, and in the pages of *Exponent II*. But simply inviting women of color into historically white Mormon feminist spaces does not constitute racial reconciliation. We have much work left to do.

One form of this work is to teach ourselves to be persistently mindful of the intersectional character of oppression. *Intersectionality* is a word feminists have used to acknowledge that systems of oppression and inequality—whether they operate through race, class, sexuality, or nationality—are distinct yet deeply interconnected. We experience inequality in ways particular to our individual social location. For example, as a white woman, I am marked for sexual appropriation and violence in some ways that are like, and some ways that are unlike, what indigenous and black women may experience. At the same time, by virtue of my whiteness I am heir to a system of racial privilege that gives me, in exchange for my cooperation, forms of advantage and even opportunities—if I choose them—to exploit women of color. For these reasons it is hazardous to generalize about histories of oppression or to draw broad comparisons between one form of oppression and another. This has become especially clear within the context of Mormonism as renewed attention to women's ordination has yielded many casual comparisons between the 1978 end of the racist priesthood and temple ban and the situation of women in

the LDS Church. These casual comparisons—sometimes made by Mormon feminists, sometimes casually by people outside our movement—have provoked a significant reaction from African-American Mormons. Black Mormon women have been especially frustrated with the use of Jane Manning James, an early black LDS pioneer, as an emblem for the women’s ordination struggle. They have voiced their deep frustration with having Jane’s story appropriated—that is, put to work for another movement without having been understood and honored on its own terms, changed to serve our purposes without our having been changed by the story. These reactions from our sisters should not be minimized. They should be heard and felt and respected. It is very important that we recognize the intersectional character of racial experience and not simply appropriate African-American experience in Mormonism as a legend for feminist struggles. As black Mormon feminist theorist Janan Graham has observed, doing so renders invisible the specific histories and realities of black Mormon women who have lived at the intersection of Mormonism’s racism and sexism.

A second point of work we must undertake is to be willing to take a critical look at the Mormon feminist movement, its methods, and its priorities, even if this critical reflection feels uncomfortable. The concept of “safe space” has been of paramount importance to Mormon feminists because few of us have access to spaces where both our Mormonism and our feminism are welcomed and affirmed. Our home congregations and even sometimes our own families and homes may not be “safe” places to express feminist sentiments without facing overt and covert reprisals. But whether or not we intend them to, even our “safe” feminist spaces have their own social fabric, their own embedded histories of exclusion, and their own customs of conduct. These must come in for examination. The dominant operating assumption in Mormon feminism seems to have been that a “safe space” is one where women can articulate personal experiences and perspectives without being confronted or asked to confront their own limitations and blind spots. The problem is that allowing those limitations and blind spots—which are so often the product of structures and forces much larger than the individual, like race, socioeconomic class,

sexuality, or nationality—to persist without being identified and challenged can make shared spaces presumed “safe” by some, but feel distinctly “unsafe” to others. This is particularly the case for women of color who may have learned through historical experience that their ability to coexist with white women (including white women occupying positions of economic, political, religious, and social power as teachers, employers, or workplace supervisors) has been premised on their willingness to silence their critiques of racism. Unfortunately, our shared Mormonism does not negate the long history of misunderstanding, silence, and strain between white women and women of color. It gives that history a particular context and particular nuances. But our shared Mormonism also gives us a shared resource and motive for working through our limitations and blind spots, through our fears and reticence, toward the dream of Zion we share as Mormon women.

I saw this history of strain and promise of reconciliation materialize this summer at Feminist Mormon Girls Camp, where we held a session on race and Mormonism. Several women of color attended, including one prominent black Mormon blogger who is not openly identified as a feminist but has friends within our community. (Another prominent black Mormon blogger had attended the whole camp the year before.) Both of these black women demonstrated incredible commitment and respect in giving up their time to travel to us and be in our space: it was not necessarily a safe space for them. The dialogue we had in that session was honest, productive, and deeply positive. White women were told that we needed to do a much better job of creating allies with women of color in the church, a much better job of showing up for other people’s struggles as if they were our own, and calling out injustice in any form, even when we are not the victims. White women in attendance listened hard and began to sense the outlines of our own lack of knowledge. We realized that Mormon feminism has done what the LDS Church has, centering around white North American members and their concerns. We realized that there are whole other cultural systems of gender hierarchy that intersect with Mormonism in its diverse communities. Women of color gently challenged us on the way we try to

keep our spaces “safe” by minimizing disagreement. *Safe for whom?* they asked. *We have to be uncomfortable all the time. If your being a bit uncomfortable makes it safer for us, are you willing to go there?* they asked. They also challenged us gently on the methods of the priesthood ordination movement. “I was baptized by my grandma who was a Pentecostal minister. And I carry my own oil. I don’t . . . ask. Why do you ask for permission? It only allows them to say no.” They conveyed that, to women of color, much of our movement looks like white women asking for something from white men. What is the stake for women of color in this fight? By having the courage to offer and accept this kind of feedback and rigorous engagement, to articulate and hear the limitations of our personal understanding and our collective movement, and to sit with the discomfort honest engagement can bring, all of the women gathered that morning took a step toward redefining “safe space” for Mormon feminism as the space where we pledge to have enough faith in one another to work patiently from individual experience, through and across difference, toward a Zion community.

As we are willing to reflect on, and be critical about, our own movement, a third kind of work we can undertake is to deepen our critique of inequality within Mormonism and broaden our agenda. As brilliant Maori Mormon womanist blogger Gina Colvin has observed, the ordination movement has not gone far enough until it is as willing to criticize the exclusionary and unjust quality of church hierarchy as it is eager to join that hierarchy. Advocacy of greater leadership roles for Mormon women must be joined with an open critique of racism, classism, and colonialism within Mormonism and in the world around us. As we develop new, safer—albeit less comfortable—spaces, as we learn each other’s histories, we can identify the places where the needs of our respective communities align. At Feminist Mormon Girls Camp, we found one such place in a common concern shared by women of all races with the interviewing of young women by solo bishops. Domestic violence within Mormon communities, a problem noted by Mormon feminists of color Anya Tinajero Vega and Lani Wendt Young, is another potential point of alignment. What if our Mormon feminist agendas featured a drive toward

both remedying inequality in LDS Church operations and among the Mormon people in general?

4. We need to develop our personal and collective financial independence.

Self-sacrifice and righteous suffering have been powerful currencies for Mormon women, but there are other pathways to power. Similarly, relieving Mormon women's "pain" over inequality is often cited as the most important reason to advocate for change within the church, but surely (and without minimizing the reality of that pain) there are more powerful places to take our stand. We will find new sources of power as we develop our personal and collective independence—even in very pragmatic ways.

First, we need to seek and complete the educations that prepare us to maximize our impact within Mormonism and in the broader world. Over the last two years, I have become aware of how many women in our community have not completed their college degrees and how many desperately need a bit more education to connect to work opportunities they hunger for or truly need. We have not yet outlived the shadow of President Ezra Taft Benson's "To the Mothers in Zion" talk of 1987, a talk that had a profound impact on me when I first heard it at age sixteen. I try to explain to non-Mormon people who know me now how very few role models I had in my ward and my community growing up, how the first professional Mormon women I knew were Mormon feminist literature professors at BYU. Those of us who have created our own career paths know not only the satisfaction that work can bring but also the confidence, independence, and freedom of conscience that come when you have your own professional footing. Education and work can also transform the way we experience gender, especially if we have been brought up in the very specifically gendered world of Mormonism and find ourselves in spaces where our authority is connected to ability. We need more women to experience this independence.

We also need the resources to fund our own movement. Given that many Mormon women do not have their own incomes

because they have absorbed religious and cultural pressures keeping them out of the paid professional workforce, ours is a largely unfunded movement. Thrift, self-reliance, resourcefulness, generosity, personal hospitality, and volunteerism are the lifebloods of our movement. Since pioneer times many generations of Mormon women have managed the challenges of raising large families (or caring for entire congregations or building religious traditions) with limited resources. We are used to doing much with little, and the Mormon feminist movement has continued this tradition. Rejected by mainstream publishers, some of our most important books, like *Mormon Sisters* (1976) and *Mother Wove the Morning* (1992), have begun as self-published efforts.⁴ We run blogs and maintain online movements from our kitchen tables after our households are asleep. I am proud of this Mormon feminist tradition, of our hard work, our hardiness, our resilience. But as Lorie Winder Stromberg and Meghan Raynes have reminded us in classic essays about power, there is nothing wrong with wanting power. Our movement needs power.

5. We need to develop our personal and collective spiritual independence as well.

I think back on the letter written by the women of the Alice Louise Reynolds Forum:

We desperately need to know whether, after serious consideration, soul-searching, and prayer, you indeed and in fact find us unworthy, a minority open to attack, and ultimately expendable. If not *can the word get out* that Mormon feminists are not to be subjected to intimidations, rejection for Church assignments, loss of employment, and psychological excommunication?⁵

Then I think of my sister Tamu's gentle challenge: "Why do you ask?"

Sisters, why do we ask? Why do we ask if we are worthy? Why do we ask if we are expendable? Why do we seek approval? Why do we ask for protection? It has not come. It may never come. I wish it were otherwise. I believe we deserve better. I believe God

wants better for us. But the asking orients our movement in particular ways that our own history shows to be of dubious benefit to women's leadership and autonomy. Let us remember the profound lesson of Linda King Newell's essay "A Gift Given, A Gift Taken Away": it was when Mormon women started asking, seeking approval from Church hierarchy to give blessings of healing as well as before labor and childbirth, that the power was lost. We will not find equality by waiting for approval from headquarters. We must find our leadership within ourselves, in our relationship to God, and in taking responsibility for meeting the needs of our people.

I think of Lowell Bennion's favorite saying from the Bhagavad Gita, "To action alone thou has a right, not to its fruits." The fruits of our feminist labors must not be measured in terms of our ability to move a few powerful men in the Church Office Building, or gather information about them, or work our privileged connections to them, or make them in any way the object of our focus. They have their work to do; let us do ours. Let us turn instead to our sisters, our mothers, our daughters—worldwide, of every color. What are the issues that connect Mormon women across class and continent? Where are we vulnerable? Where are lives precarious? What are our needs? There is leadership to be claimed in naming and organizing around those needs and identifying and criticizing the exclusionary power structures that have created them. That independence of vision, that resilience in the face of what will surely be continuing cycles of retrenchment—that must be our charge for the next forty years. That is prophetic leadership. With or without approval. With or without ordination.

I would like to see us all take lessons from these historical cycles and deepen our resilience, becoming more shockproof, less innocent about Mormon history or about how powerful institutions work and what they will do. Mormon feminism has needed, created, and guarded safe spaces defined by loyalty and mutual protection. Perhaps in our maturity our safe spaces can also become places where we cultivate a wisdom borne of critical reflection on ourselves, our movement, and our methods.

We must continue to build—our theology, our institutions, our alliances with women of color, our personal and collective independence—because we know that our work will be needed in years to come. This beautiful and powerful faith will continue to generate young women of strength, vision, and moral courage, young women who are passionately attached to the truths we find in Mormon theology, the Book of Mormon, and the examples of our ancestors, and to the unabashedly improbable beauty of our angels, our pioneers, our desert Zion. And yet those young women will also crash headlong into Mormonism’s unresolved gender conflicts, its inexcusable narrowness, and the contemptible poverty of spirit with which it often treats its most powerful women. I am proud that we have acted with such resilience in the face of another round of excommunications. I know that if we continue to reflect on our own writings, our own history, our own lessons, we will have a strong foundation for forty years to come. I’ll close by sharing with you an unpublished poem I wrote in 2003.

Where Have All the Mormon Feminists Gone

The mob came for our writers first,
for holy books written in blood, milk, tears.

We gathered pages from the dusty streets
and ran for the cornfields.

Some of us are still lying face down in the fields,
our damp bodies covering revelations.

Some of us are still hiding in the poplar swamps,
shivering in wet clothes, mud in our throats.

Some of us vowed not to let them finish their job.
We set out in dissolving boots, singing, seeking our next vision.

We know that the challenges of faith—encountered from without and within—put us each on different paths. Some of us stay,

covering what we know until it is safe to acknowledge it once again. Some of us find ourselves infiltrated with a sense of sadness or loss that is hard to relieve. Some of us move on, seeking new ways to express our faith. The strength of our movement is that, as Mormon feminists, we have a bond, a personal sense of solidarity and affection that holds us through all the challenges a life of faith can bring and can hold us even as we reflect critically on who we have been and who we must become. I feel that bond here with you all tonight. Forty years in and forty years out, this may be our movement's greatest legacy.

Notes

1. Amy Bentley, "Comforting the Motherless Children: The Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23.3 (1990): 50.

2. Susa Young Gates, "The Open Door for Woman: Opened the 17th of March, 1842, by the Prophet Joseph Smith," *The Young Woman's Journal* 16.3 (1905): 117.

3. Amy Hoyt, "Beyond the Victim/Empowerment Paradigm: The Gendered Cosmology of Mormon Women," *Feminist Theology* 16.1 (2007): 89–100.

4. Lorie Winder Stromberg, "Power Hungry," *Sunstone* (December 2004): 60 – 61; Marybeth Raynes, "Now I Have the Power," *The Exponent Blog* (November 6, 2011): www.the-exponent.com/now-i-have-the-power/ (accessed October 25, 2014).

5. Amy Bentley, "Comforting the Motherless Children: The Alice Louise Reynolds Women's Forum," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23.3 (1990): 50.