To Do the Business of the Church: A Cooperative Paradigm for Examining Gendered Participation Within Church Organizational Structure

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Part I: The Crisis

I will be talking today about how women fit into the functional structure of LDS church governance; but, unlike many of the others speaking today, I do not have advanced degrees in my subject, nor do I consider myself an academic. My credentials as someone qualified to talk about this subject come from: first, a lifetime of personal experience as a woman in the Church and now the mother of three daughters; second, my role as founder, in 2010, of a non-profit organization, the Mormon Women Project, which publishes stories of faithful Latter-day Saint women from around the world; and third, a twelve-year career in marketing and brand

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strategy, including my current role as associate creative director of Church-owned Bonneville Communications, the agency partnered with the Church on Mormon.org and the "I'm a Mormon" campaign.

Today, I will be applying that professional lens to examine the way LDS women are involved in ecclesiastical functions, and also how we talk about that female church involvement to an external, media-informed audience. As a marketer, I know how important it is for what we say we do regarding women in the Church, what we actually do, and what the Lord says we should do to be in triangulated harmony with each other. Today, I will explore how we can improve on our current practice of that triangulation.

As I started my research and was still seeking a solid thesis for my paper, there seemed to be a barrage of articles and blog posts that addressed the gendered division of labor in the Church. At first I was delighted by the breadth and volume of these articles on gendered church work, coming from a wide range of sources and philosophies, from *By Common Consent* to *A Well-Behaved Mormon Woman* to *Feminist Mormon Housewives* to *Times and Seasons.* As part of my research, I sent out my own survey as well, asking friends for their own insight into what the gendered division of labor means for them personally.

What happened was that the more I read, the more I took notes, the more I prayed and studied, the more I realized that my thesis needed to reflect the deeply emotional and sensitive nature of these discussions. Every expression of opinion packs in it feelings rooted in personal experience, in relationships with male leaders and family members, and in one's personal relationship with God. This was a reality which I've understood to be true for many years but which this initial research offered me unfiltered.

I came to rest on a prominent, consistent theme: There is a tremendous amount of pain among our women regarding how they can or cannot contribute to the governance of our ecclesiastical organization, and we need to pay attention to that pain. Listen to these statements, recently gathered across a variety of forums: "My 12-year-old son gets the priesthood and all of a sudden he's got more power and authority than me!"[1] Or another: "I truly wish you could feel the pain I feel as a woman in the Church. I know my potential and worth, and to have it limited to the role of

'presidee' in all areas discredits me as a daughter of God."[2] Or this one: "I feel like if I had been a 'good' Mormon, I wouldn't have gotten my Master's degree. I wouldn't be working now, and I wouldn't WANT to work so much. I'd want to be a mother and have kids and stay home."[3] Lastly: "I have a PhD and am a full-time professor at a university. I am also married and have three children. The only place in my life where I am treated like a lesser human being is at church."[4] I could go on and on.

How is this possible? Why is this happening when you walk into Deseret Book and see shelves of books just for women? What is going wrong when we hear women praised and adored from the pulpit? We have wonderful men in this church who are good husbands, sons, and bishops. If we take off the table the possibility of structural changes and work from an assumption that gendered segregation is divinely mandated, the burden is on us as members to figure out what it is we are doing with our current tools that is not living up to our potential. The pain is real.

Acknowledging the confusion and oft-resulting pain of being a woman in the Church is not something that is relegated to extremist academics or feisty feminist bloggers. In 2011, a comprehensive survey of over 3,000 people who had lost their belief in the gospel revealed that 47 percent of those respondents cited women's issues as a "significant" reason for their loss of faith.[5] The percentage of women who cited this specific issue as being the primary reason for their loss of faith was higher, at 63 percent. Additionally, 70 percent of single women who have lost their faith ranked women's issues as significant. Lest we think that these people who are losing their faith are an aberration or a fringe annoyance, in November of 2011, Elder Marlin Jensen confirmed that church members are "leaving in droves" and that "since Kirtland,"[6] the Church has not seen the exodus which we are now experiencing. Although Elder Jensen did not draw a direct correlation between this exodus and the pain surrounding women's position in the Church, the survey data support the conclusion that tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of women each year are unable to maintain their church activity because they cannot internally reconcile their position within the church organization. We may be tempted to justify the idea that people who leave the Church look for scapegoats for their inactivity, and that blaming

women's issues is just a way to deflect attention away from personal sin or loss of the Spirit. While this may be true in some cases, to use this as a rationalization for claiming that women's pain is overstated is patronizing and naïve. The bottom line is that women's role in church governance is a primary reason many people are telling themselves it is okay to leave, and at the very least we should be distraught that this issue opens the door to the way out.

Part II: The Pain Is Real

Allow me to tell you about my personal history as a further jumping-off point for this discussion.

I was born and raised in New York City as the only child of an eventually single, professional mother. I attended an all-girls' school for twelve years, which, ironically, has made me appreciate the importance of gender-segregated experiences and responsibilities as an adult. From the example of my mother and other exceptional women, I gained an intuitive understanding of the gospel as empowerment; it was the means by which energy and productivity blossomed in each of these influential women.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I was in the Relief Society presidency in my Yale University student ward and our greatest challenge was keeping young freshman girls active at church. Who wouldn't want to go to church, when you were away from home for the first time and feeling unsure of yourself and out of place? Apparently, plenty of girls. I struggled with finding ways to engage them, to make them feel needed, to give them jobs in our church organization that were more appealing to them at 9 A.M. on a Sunday than staying in bed and sleeping off that 3 A.M. dance party. After all, I couldn't ask them to get themselves out of bed to pass the sacrament.

The relationship of women to the Church didn't strike me as a crisis until I moved to San Francisco and served in another Relief Society presidency there under a phenomenal woman and mentor. Immediately after she was released from her calling, she and her husband and their three children had their names removed from the church records, citing her inability to reconcile her role as a woman in the Church. Since that experience, which was traumatic both for me personally and for our whole ward, I have tried

to reflect on what causes pain so deep that a woman will distance herself permanently from her culture, her family, even her entire worldview, to be free from that pain.

It was this experience and several others like it that prompted me to launch the Mormon Women Project, a collection of interviews with LDS women from around the world who exhibit the faith-infused empowerment that my mother and so many of the women I grew up with exemplified to me. The purpose of the Mormon Women Project is to give women models that show our women dealing with complex cultural challenges, family structures, and professional pursuits with the gospel and their church membership as tools of empowerment, not hindrances. But in addition to my constant effort to publish reaffirming narratives of spiritual empowerment, I have positioned myself as a bridge between various camps of thought—which has made me privy to and sympathetic to this pain that I am describing. In 2011, for instance, I helped spearhead a podcast series on Patheos.com called The Round Table, in which the founders of a wide spectrum of Mormon women's organizations—including Segullah, Feminist Mormon Housewives, LDS WAVE and The Power of Moms—met monthly to share our feelings and experiences about being women in the Church. I have spoken with these sisters at a variety of conferences as well. The Savior said, "If ye are not one, ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27). Although my own personal struggle regarding the gendered division of church governance doesn't keep me awake at nights, this scripture does.

Unfortunately, denying this pain or belittling it is an all-too-common occurrence among both our men and our women. Consider this statement from a man in a metropolitan area bishopric: "I don't think that ambition or 'personal growth' of a woman in [the sphere of church governance] has any place in the church and that it is really a disguised form of pride. I'm wary of how impassioned female leaders could . . . play a role in that individual's path towards apostasy."[7]

When my 8-year-old daughter asks me why she'll never be able to pass the sacrament, is she being "prideful"? At work, I make decisions for men and male executives pay me to consult for them on business decisions in which I have expertise, yet as a member of my ward's Primary presidency I have to get approval from my

bishop to join Junior and Senior Primary opening exercises. Am I on the path to apostasy because I wonder why this is so? With the broad sweep of the word "pride," the bishopric member quoted above instantly devalues the pain in both my own daughter's sincere question and the requirement that I suspend my work experience when I interact with male leaders at church.

Similarly insensitive statements come from women, too. Consider this statement from a female blogger: "It's been my experience in speaking to and reading the thoughts of many progressive Mormon women, that they do not have a strong, LDS doctrinal understanding of priesthood and womanhood. . . . Faithful, active Mormon women do not oppose the counsel and inspired direction of living prophets."[8]

This statement leaves absolutely no room for a woman to even wonder why things are the way they are, and it condemns her for opposing the prophet if she does. Are we really going to let *wondering* become a red flag of lack of faith? Are we going to deny any give and take, any room for struggle, for doubt, for weakness, for pain, which often are the tools that bring us to more solid testimonial foundations than we started on? Can this absolutist approach of claiming to know another's depth of doctrinal understanding really represent the inquisitive gospel of love and moral agency that we cherish?

While some too flippantly dismiss or judge the pain, there are others for whom the pain seems to define their spiritual lives and, like my former Relief Society president, they measure every element of their church experience through the lens of that pain. "Women are the support staff to the real work of men. Period," is one woman's statement, as she describes how she understands the division of labor. "It's a patriarchal tradition" is another response I noted in my own personal survey. "There is no such thing as 'good' patriarchy," concludes yet another. Most of our women, however, are somewhere in the middle: not sweeping the issue under the carpet or judging those who struggle, but also not dismissing our ecclesiastical organization as entirely flawed or even abusive to women.

How can we help more in our community find peace in a middle ground, where the pain is acknowledged and we provide doctrinally-sound tools and behavioral guidelines for addressing that

pain? The first step must be to extract exactly what it is about our current rhetoric and practices that is at the source of this crisis among our women.

Part III: Identifying the Sources of Pain

As we start that exercise, allow yourself for a moment to step into the shoes of someone who struggles with finding her place. Consider, for instance, the narratives that define the rights of passage of our youth and the source of this bitterness may become illuminated.

So many of our narratives about our youth involve those moments when a dad ordains his son to the Aaronic priesthood, and then the first Sunday the son gets to pass the sacrament, or bless the sacrament, or go home teaching or collect fast offerings or become an Eagle Scout or receive a mission call. These are times of spiritual outpourings and parental pride, the joy of eternal progression made tangible through the bodily actions taken on by that worthy son. It's not often a mother describes a similarly gripping scene when her daughter graduates from Mia Maids to Laurels.

To illustrate this point even further, there is a narrative that all LDS mothers of young daughters do share. It is the narrative of breaking the news to a young daughter that she will never be able to pass the sacrament, be the bishop, or become the prophet.

Consider this reflection by the mother of a six-year-old:

> The other day I overheard a conversation between my six-year-old daughter and my mother-in-law. They had been talking about how her older brother would become a deacon later this year. My daughter said enthusiastically, "When I turn twelve, I'm going to pass the sacrament too!"
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> You should understand that one of this child's favorite Sunday rituals has been taking the sacrament tray from the administering deacon and distributing it to the rest of the family; when she returns the tray to the deacon and sits back down, she has a big smile on her face and it's clear that she feels she's done something very grown-up and important.
>
> So imagine her disappointment when her grandmother informed her that passing the sacrament is a job only for boys. Crestfallen, and with that childish sense of entitlement, my daughter asked, "But what do I get when I turn twelve?"
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> . . . It made me very sad. My question is not what my daughter

> "gets" when she turns twelve, but what will be asked of her? What messages will she get about her role in the church?
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> On the one hand we want to impress upon young men what a privilege and honor it is to [act in these sacred responsibilities], while on the other hand we insist to our young women (and women of all ages) that it's really no big deal. Seriously, ladies, you don't want [to have to do this stuff]. You shouldn't want [to have to]. Nothing but trouble, that priesthood! And yet, very important. Without it our church would be nothing. Worse than nothing, a fraud. But at the same time, you aren't missing out on anything. Trust us![9]

And here is a second narrative in which former BYU professor Valerie Hudson describes this same moment with her own daughter, Ariel:

> In the spring of 1996, I was driving my then-nine-year-old daughter, Ariel, to judo class. She was unusually quiet and I knew why. For years, when anyone had asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she would answer, "President of the United States, prophet of the Church, a mother, a botanist, a teacher and a ballet dancer." This had been the topic of conversation just before we got in the car and her older brother had cavalierly informed her that there was no way she could be prophet of the Church—that only men could be the prophet. We drove along in silence for several blocks and then she turned to me, her chin quivering, and asked, "Mom, is it true? Is it true women can't be prophet?" I told her it was true. She began to cry in earnest. I realized this was a major turning point in my daughter's life. For the very first time, she saw that her gender constrained who she could be. My heart broke for her, broke for the loss of something she might never regain—the feeling that who Ariel was was more important than the fact that she was a girl. Through my own pain I determined that I could not leave her with this bald, isolated, soul-withering fact when the context in which it was embedded gave her so much richer possibilities.[10]

The sadness expressed in these narratives and in many others that I've heard over the years does not necessarily come from the fact that our daughters won't get to do the same things as our sons. It is rarely driven by the "pride" the bishopric member I quoted earlier describes as power-grubbing or seeking beyond the mark. Rather, the pain simply comes from the disconnect between our identities as women in our day-to-day lives in the external world and our identities as women in the institutional church. We are not a hermetic religion, and so we function in a world where individuality and opportunity are celebrated as the hall-

marks of civilized societies. Valuing the individual's right to aspire to any circumstance or opportunity is practically the mantra of the 21st century. And yet, as women functioning within the ecclesiastical church structure, we are asked to put aside our understanding of how contemporary societies and workplaces ideally should function and instead grasp hold of a very different model. We require that our women suspend their understanding of social equality as it is currently represented in our modern society. This is consistent with our belief that we should be "in the world" but not "of" it, but we members should not flippantly dismiss how difficult this can be in actual practice for a woman whose role in worldly society has changed so swiftly and dramatically over the past hundred years.

Desiring to be used, engaged, recognized, and appreciated for our public contributions is not, for most women, about the glory of public praise or being in the spotlight. It's not about wanting to eradicate the divine differences between women and men. It is simply about a basic human need in every person—man or woman—to be told, "You are needed. You matter. You have a purpose. Your opinions matter. Not just at home behind closed doors, not just with our children, as essential as those influences are, but also in the broadest context of the Lord's kingdom." I was speaking last week with a woman who runs an NGO in Uganda, offering reading and computer literacy classes to men and women who are coming out of the bush after ten-plus years of being child soldiers or sex slaves in Joseph Kony's guerilla regime. She told me that most of her students desperately want to create Facebook accounts. When I expressed surprise, she quoted one of her students as saying, "I want people to know that I *am.* That I have an identity of my own. That I have a personality and can make choices. That I survived the bush, that I am strong." In the face of life's greatest suffering, one need that arises above many others is the need to be recognized as a unique and valued contributor.

Part IV: The Cooperative Paradigm

Having established the magnitude of this crisis and having struck at some of the roots of the pain, I'd like to turn now to what we can do to alleviate this pain. There is a premier rule in public relations that you cannot tell a story that is not true and still have

it resonate or feel authentic to the audience you are trying to convince. PR strategy must reflect how an organization is actually behaving or it can never ring true, and that is true with external audiences as well as internal audiences. The internal audience must be behaving in the way that they say they are behaving, or else they will ultimately be exposed or criticized. Right now regarding our women, there are gaps between what we say we are doing, what the Lord has told us we ideally should be doing, and what we actually are doing. If we bring these three points of triangulation into harmony, we will have greater integrity, stronger convictions, and happier women.

I will first address our rhetoric and communications, or what we say we are doing. In a typical organization that might examine the alignment between their internal behavior and external communications, it would be more common to start scrutinizing the internal behavior and making changes there which would later be communicated externally. But we are not a typical organization. Instead of having two points of alignment that create a straight line—the way we act and the way we say we act—we actually work in a triangular relationship between the way we act, the way we say we act, and the way that the Lord says we should act. Examining our external communications first allows us the opportunity to see how well we are doing in echoing back to the world what the Lord has first spoken to us.

Let's look at one common narrative we share when confronted about our system of gender segregation in this contemporary world. Last year, the *Washington Post* asked Michael Otterson and representatives from nineteen other religious congregations to comment in 500 words on the following prompt: "Former president Jimmy Carter has said, 'The discrimination against women on a global basis is very often attributable to the declaration by religious leaders in Christianity, Islam and other religions that women are inferior in the eyes of God.' Many traditions teach that while both men and women are equal in value, God has ordained specific roles for men and women. Those distinct duties often keep women out of leadership positions in their religious communities. What is religion's role in gender discrimination?"[11]

The title of the response from Otterson was "What Mormon Equality Looks Like," implying that there is a system of equality in

our leadership that simply needs to be revealed to an external audience. Otterson wrote:

> I put this question to three women in my church and asked them for their own insights on how they see their role and life in the Church. . . .
>
> Here are their points about life as a Mormon woman.
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> Women in the Mormon faith regularly preach from the pulpit to the congregation and lead prayers during Sunday services. As a result, today's Latter-day Saint women tend to be well educated and confident. Most have experience in speaking in public, directing or presiding over organizations, teaching and leading by example. Brigham Young University turns out more female than male graduates.

The negative response to Otterson's piece among the Church commentary in the bloggernacle was intense and personally painful to Otterson, who feels that he is usually in tune with the membership. One thing that was misunderstood was that he did not write the title of the piece, which so cavalierly used the big "E" word: Equality. The laudable fact that he reached externally to women to guide his response was overshadowed by one significant disconnect and the disconnect was this: the fact that our women preach from the pulpit and say prayers in sacrament meeting does not make them "equal" to our men, according to any publicly accepted definition of that word.

Why do we do this? Why, when confronted with an intentionally inflammatory accusation like "gender discrimination," do we immediately default to defensive claims that our women are actually just the same as our men because they speak in church, go to school, and get to feel the Spirit the same way? We so often instinctually fall back on earthly paradigms to describe our structure. In an effort to bridge our own experience with the experience of our external audience, we rely on comparisons to hierarchical power structures of fallen world institutions: governments, corporations, and universities in which men and women ideally work side by side to advance to opportunities available to both genders. We talk in terms of opportunity, advancement, visibility, and hierarchical power, which are hallmarks of advanced worldly institutions (in America, at least). We highlight statistical equalities like how many women graduate from college. If you'd like fur-

ther proof of this tendency, go read through some of the answers members have given on Mormon.org to the question, "Why don't women hold the priesthood?" and note how many times those answers cite the fact that our women speak in sacrament meeting or run the Primary.

But I call this the Apples-to-Snapples comparison: leading an auxiliary organization that has influence over a subset of the population is *not* the same as leading the entire organization. According to the world's definition of equality, women's leadership opportunities in the Church organization are a watered-down version of the real thing, with lots of sugar added.

Continuing to rely on the Apples-to-Snapples comparison is not good enough because, in the outside world, when you say men and women have equal leadership opportunities, you mean—at least ideally—that men and women have the same cleared path to advance to the same positions of influence and authority. When the outside world looks at our structure and sees men ecclesiastically responsible for even the highest-ranked women in our organization, the media perceives our claims as being false advertising and we lose our credibility to tell our own story. It then becomes someone else's job to "uncover" the truth for us, leading down a path of exposés and betrayals.

Is there gender discrimination in the Church? If discrimination means separation according to gender, yes. If it means delineation of opportunities based solely on gender, yes. Many argue that having different opportunities based on gender is unfair, adverse, and/or abusive by definition. The Church does not satisfy secular gender-related egalitarian ideals, period; and our institutional behavior fits that definition of gender discrimination in several inescapable ways. We shrink away from accurately representing how we work, thinking it condemns us as a church. And in the eyes of the world it might. But the Church does not, and should not, operate according to secular concepts of power, status, etc.; if we attempt to justify ourselves in this paradigm we will not only fail, but also betray our own ideals.

We need a narrative that doesn't rely on justifications. It shouldn't rely on comparisons to fallen world paradigms. It needs to stand on its own, while acknowledging that it may have little

precedent and little comparison to worldly paradigms that describe gender-related egalitarian ideals.

What is this new narrative? I'd like to take the time to explore a possible option now that is specifically tailored to a marketing or public relations context and also has integrity for an internal audience.

In preparing his response to the *Washington Post's* prompt, Otterson asked three women to share their opinions with him. I was one of the three women that the public affairs team approached to ask for input, but out of respect to the fact that he didn't incorporate any of my specific ideas, he left my name out. I've had the opportunity to speak with Otterson since then, and he and the public affairs team have been exceptionally receptive and sensitive to my ideas. I have been thrilled with the seriousness Public Affairs has shown to the concerns and pain of our women. However, at the time he was writing this response for the *Washington Post,* 500 words in an online panel discussion was not the appropriate place in which to spell out a new paradigm for explaining our gendered structure. I understood these limitations of space and context myself as a marketing professional. I'm grateful to him for the unqualified support and interest he's shown me since then.

To explore what this alternative rhetoric might be, allow me to share with you some of the thoughts I sent to the public affairs team when they first approached me about how I would respond to the *Washington Post's* prompt:

> I do not suggest presenting a blanket claim that women have leadership roles within the organization. While we can certainly point to the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary, the ratio of global female leaders to male leaders is so small that pointing it out only serves to highlight the discrepancy. Also, bringing attention to the fact that our women only lead other women and children is playing into the logic of the prompt because it can then be inferred that women are not considered of high enough value to be more than special-interest figureheads. I also think that taking the "look, women really do lead!" angle sounds inherently patronizing coming from a male author.

The prompt suggests women do not hold leadership positions, therefore women are inferior. I suggest we argue it is true that Mormon women do not hold an equal number of global lead-

ership positions as men, but that is not because they are of lesser value. It is because we believe we are working in an eternal paradigm in which roles and responsibilities are divided up cooperatively rather than hierarchically. Mormonism is a lay church, so the members are the ministers, and this is a completely different organizational structure than traditional Christian priesthood or ministry, which is defined as an exclusive or trained clergy. Thus, when we talk about our ministerial structure to the outside world, we are starting from very different foundational understandings of what ecclesiastical ministry means.

The prompt's logic doesn't adequately leave room for our organization's cooperative structure of service, where no one person is paid for his or her ministry or deemed of greater value than another and where each brings unique resources to his or her responsibilities.

• Working toward a Zionistic cooperation within an earthly paradigm means that we often default to the human ordering with which we are most familiar: that of hierarchy and the currency of power. In an organization such as a church where no one is getting rich off of personal dedication to the cause, hierarchical power is sometimes weighed as the greatest currency because it is the human way of measuring success on the way to a goal. However, in a cooperative structure where people are rotating positions every few years and no one is materialistically rewarded over another person, that hierarchy is a flimsy currency on which to base one's value.

• In the cooperative structure that is the LDS Church's lay ministry, there is a division of roles for the benefit of the organizational order. This division of labor is, we believe, a reflection of divine mandates given to Joseph Smith. The division of labor—not just among men and women but among varying age groups, geographical groups and also among individuals—is a central theme of the Doctrine and Covenants. For example, in March of 1835, Joseph recorded a revelation from the Lord that specified the organizational structure of the church governance: Section 107. Close reading of this revelation shows how abundantly the Lord uses phrases such as, "of necessity" and "it must needs be" and "to do the busi-

ness of the church" in describing how important an ordered approach was to church administration. Similar language is used in the Book of Mormon when congregations of believers are organized in ancient civilizations.[12]

• Nowhere does the Lord intimate that various callings and responsibilities are intended to give one person power over another. In fact, the words "lead" and "leader" appear nowhere in this section, and similarly, the word "leader" appears nowhere in the Book of Mormon. Even that book's most admirable leaders, like Captain Moroni, are described as "servant[s]" and "righteous follower[s] of Christ." This emphasis on organizational stability, on the specific roles and responsibilities of various parties to act as facilitators within the larger community, is, we believe, of divine origin and eternal value.

• Lastly, the world calculates in terms of top-down power; God's calculations are exactly opposite. In the divine kingdom the servant holds the highest status, and in the Church every position is a service position. Given the obvious parallels between the Church's administrative channels and a business organization, it's easy to mistakenly assess the Church as a ladder-climbing corporation with God in a corner office at the top, but in this line of thinking we only reveal our shoddy human understanding of power.

In concluding my thoughts to the Public Affairs team, I finished by saying, "When we claim, as we regularly do, that the Church as an organization gives women and men equal leadership opportunities (which is simply not true), we're using the same paradigm of power that President Carter is implying and the prompt assumes, which is an inadequate paradigm for evaluating power dynamics in an ecclesiastical institution such as ours. The paradigm is the problem, and must be addressed if we're to offer anything beyond hollow excuses for women's status in the Church. To argue, as Carter did, that women have inferior status and inadequate power because they lack hierarchical leadership opportunities is to superimpose a human construct onto a divine one. I—and many women I know—would love to see us moving away from this rhetoric."

This idea of a cooperative paradigm is much harder to explain

in our modern-day, fast-paced, soundbite-oriented news outlets than simply falling back on the Apples-to-Snapples comparison. My own explanation above was considerably more than Otterson's allotted 500 words, and there are theologians and scholars who have produced thoughtful commentary of their own, such as Don Sorenson and Valerie Hudson's *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion,* and Beverly Campbell's *Eve and the Choice Made in Eden.* But whatever rhetoric we move to, it is essential that we rely on a doctrinally-rich explanation that challenges and even confounds fallen world paradigms rather than playing unfavorably right into them.

One of beauties of the cooperative paradigm over the hierarchical paradigm is that the cooperative paradigm more accurately incorporates both ecclesiastical and sacerdotal definitions of priesthood, which seems to be understood generally throughout the Church as being much more gendered than a close reading of scripture suggests. For example, let us return to the organizational language of the Doctrine and Covenants. Section 84 states: "And again, the offices of elder and bishop are necessary appendages belonging unto the high priesthood. And again, the offices of teacher and deacon are necessary appendages belonging to the lesser priesthood" (D&C 84:29–30; see also D&C 107:5). Pay attention to that word "appendages." An appendage is "a thing that is added or attached to something larger or more important." Are not the offices of elder or bishop or teacher or deacon appendages to the priesthood, and not the priesthood itself? Are these so different from the female organizations, which we routinely call "auxiliaries"?

Pulitzer Prizing-winning Harvard professor Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has written about the vocabulary we use to describe our various congregants. She notes that our casual interchange of the words "men" and "priesthood" contributes to our misunderstanding that the men only have the power to do God's work. Have you ever heard a member of the bishopric thank "the priesthood" for passing the sacrament, instead of the "Young Men" or even the "men of the priesthood"? The bishopric in my ward does an admirable job of thanking "the men of the priesthood" rather than the "priesthood" itself, but it's likely that each of us, despite our best intentions, carelessly conflates the power to act in God's name

with the vehicle designed to administrate its use. Professor Ulrich describes the conflation this way: "Because we use the word *priesthood* to refer to both the vehicle and the power, we get into some curious situations, almost like mistaking a utility pole for electricity or a sacrament cup for water."[13] Elder Dallin H. Oaks has spoken on the importance of this clarity of language as well: "We must never forget that the priesthood is not owned by or embodied by those who hold it."[14]

In the survey I sent out to my own network of women, I asked what explanation the respondents would give for why only boys get to pass the sacrament. The number one answer I received was, "Because they have the priesthood." Equating the priesthood with a gendered privilege, like passing the sacrament, reinforces over and over again the understanding that men "get" something the women don't and the women are therefore lacking and lesser. Some in my survey included as part of their answer that if men "get" the priesthood, then women get motherhood, which is an explanation that brings great peace to many. However, it also makes some women extremely uncomfortable. Examining the difficulties in the motherhood-to-priesthood comparison would be the subject of another paper entirely, but the arguments broadly fall into a few points: First of all, saying motherhood is the complementary gift to priesthood again solidifies the gendered assignment of the power to act under God's direction as something only men can do. The complement to motherhood, the argument goes, is actually fatherhood. Secondly, a man's ability to act in the name of the priesthood is something that is earned through worthiness and by personal triumph of character. The only way a man can exercise the power of God effectively is by being sufficiently righteous to represent God. By contrast, personal worthiness is not a prerequisite for a woman's ability to bear children. There are many righteous, worthy women who are not mothers and some of them will never be mothers in this life. Becoming a mother is beyond the control of many women, despite their personal worthiness or triumph over character. In a church where more than half of our women are single, we need to tread carefully when claiming a parallel between motherhood and priesthood.

Returning to the cooperative paradigm, it might feel counter-

intuitive to some to be backing off bold claims of equality in an age when we are striving to be relevant to and more widely respected by the outside world. However, I feel that this alternate paradigm—explained and reiterated thoroughly over time and in the right contexts inside and outside of the Church—actually offers us a much wider platform on which to explore doctrine, bring others along in that exploration, and value each other cooperatively rather than hierarchically. Most importantly, this alternate paradigm gives us the conviction we need to make sure that the currency of power does not dictate our behavior as servant-leaders. For my purposes as a marketer, the cooperative paradigm provides an answer of integrity that opens the door for meaningful external dialogues, as well as internal dialogues, to which I now turn.

Part V: The Internal Shift

This August on the Mormon Women Project, I posted an exclusive historical interview with Maxine Hanks, one of the "September Six" who was excommunicated from the Church in September 1993. Last year, Maxine was personally invited by church leadership to be rebaptized as a member of the Church, an invitation she heartily accepted after a 20-year journey into feminist theology, including periods as a scholar of Gnosticism and a nondenominational chaplain. In her interview, Hanks reflects on why, after studies and experiences that took her as far away from Mormonism as theologically possible, she chose to again bear witness of the truthfulness of Mormonism.

Hanks says, "I don't think gender tensions in Mormonism are due to *inequality* in the religion, but due to *invisibility* of that equality. The equality is embedded, inherent in Mormon theology, history, texts, structures. Gender equality is built into the blueprints of Mormonism, but obscured in the elaborations. . . . The inherent gender equality in Mormonism just needs to be seen by extracting it from other distracting elements and contexts."

What kinds of initiatives could we take as church members to excavate this gender equality that we are currently not taking? Harvard professor Clayton Christiansen, known for his work on disruptive innovation, often speaks to LDS Harvard students

about how many of the standard Church programs—seminary and Family Home Evening, for example—started from the initiative of a small group of church members who saw a need and innovated ways to address that need that didn't compromise doctrine or divinely mandated ecclesiastical practices in any way. How can we apply this same innovative spirit to the arena of women's responsibilities at church? How can we put into practice our desires to see this cooperative community become more of our practiced reality? In essence, while we are reigning in our external claims, we need simultaneously to be broadening the practice of egalitarian ideals in our behavior so that with these opposite pulls we can have both internal and external meet harmoniously in the middle. I ask each man and woman in the audience today: What are you doing to excavate the power of the women in your ward and make their contributions more visible?

Women: We women need to do a better job of claiming the power and direct access that comes from being a child of God and realizing that power in the choices we make in our own lives. Ours is not a gospel of limitation; it is a gospel of empowerment to get the education we want, pursue our dreams, work in partnerships with spouses and friends to raise families, contribute to our communities as our talents dictate, and seek out answers to our deepest questions without intermediaries.

Men: In your ecclesiastical roles, many of you have frequent opportunity to make choices regarding how to use the talents and insights of the women in your ward. To give one example, let me cite a conversation I recently had with a bishop in New York City. This bishop, out of his own awareness of his ward's needs, has been brainstorming how to engage women more in his ward since he was called to his position two years ago. "I'm particularly searching for ways to connect with the Young Women," he told me. He said, "With the Young Men—especially since I was the Young Men's president just before becoming bishop—I can call them up and ask to go on a walk with them or take them out for a soda to talk about their lives. I can't do that with the girls. I struggle with how to make our girls feel a part of sacrament meeting; I can't just call them up like I can the boys and ask them to pass or bless the sacrament to get them cleaned up and to church on Sunday morning. I've been thinking: how can I make our young

women part of the Sacrament Meeting preparation and organization like the Young Men are? I've thought of having one of the Young Women classes responsible for preparing the program each week, and another class be the greeters. That way the ward would see them and they would have a role in preparing the ward for Sacrament Meeting. I've also thought of placing the girls at the doors during the Sacrament to open and close them as the boys go in and out to pass to the people in the hall."

I love this bishop's thought process: first, he has identified for himself as the leader of a congregation the need to have equally meaningful relationships with both the boys and the girls in his ward. He has also identified the need for the girls in his ward to have a more visible role in preparing for their future service in God's kingdom, noting that there is a discrepancy in the ways our girls and boys are trained for service leadership. Lastly, he has identified barriers that make it difficult for him to engage the girls in the same way he does the boys, and he has committed to finding innovative solutions that are still within the purview of his stewardship, as outlined in the Church Handbook.

Allow me to share with you a number of other ideas both men and women can employ to make our women more visible, more engaged, more appreciated, and better trained for service leadership:

Let's make sure the female leaders of the stake—the stake Relief Society president, the stake Primary president, the stake Young Women's president, and their counselors—are known by face and by name just as well as the members of the stake presidency or high council are known. This can be done by inviting these presidents and even their counselors to sit on the stand during stake conference. Those planning stake conference can have the stake Relief Society president be a standard speaker in the meeting, year after year, just as the stake president always speaks, so that the congregation easily recognizes her as a stake leader. The same can be done with the female leadership on a ward level. Have them sit on the stand during ward conference. A variation on this idea could be having the stake's female leadership speak on a monthly planned rotation with high council speakers in wards throughout the stake. Alternatively, the wives of bishops and stake presidents could be regularly highlighted as speakers in

these key gatherings, or could at least sit on the stand with their husbands if not attending small children.

In my ward, I am making a subtle but consistent effort to call the Primary president I serve under "President Snyder" rather than "Sister Snyder." I do the same for my Relief Society president. Titles matter, and ward members will pick up the respect and visibility afforded to the female presidents of these organizations if they are addressed as such.

When either male or female leaders or ward members are talking about women, quote other women. It is so nice to have men talk about how wonderful we are, but let's face it. The experts on who women are and what they are like are women. And we women know this. We want to hear from our own. We want someone who has had a life experience—physically, spiritually, emotionally—closer to our own to tell us what our Heavenly Father thinks of us and how we can best serve Him as women. It is important for the women in our stewardship to hear us value, use quotes from, and tell stories about women. And, you know, men need to hear what women have to say, too. By hearing women quoted, men will become more aware of the wisdom and capability embodied by our women. Admittedly, it has been difficult in the past to find compelling statements by our female leaders because they haven't been as organized and readily published as men's words, but that is changing. The recent publication of *Daughters in My Kingdom* was a huge step in legitimizing the female leadership of the entire church population, and President Julie Beck offered several sermons at the end of her tenure that shone light on the Relief Society's tremendous potential as a leadership organization. Also, the seven-volume "Women of Faith in the Latter Days" series that is now underway sheds light on our wise fore-mothers others. And of course the momentous forthcoming publication of the Relief Society minutes will give us ample material. Did you know the Relief Society minutes are being published? This is huge and should be read as voraciously as any biography of a prophet or the Joseph Smith Papers. Exciting developments are also underway at the Church History Archive under the exceptional care of the Church's first women's historian, Kate Holbrook, who is working to make more accessible the vast repository of women's life writings, sermons and journals.

I will never forget the opportunity I had to sit in a small room on the upper floor of the Lion House about two years ago and hear one of Eliza R. Snow's sermons performed by an actress. The sermon was delivered by Eliza Snow in the Ogden Tabernacle in 1873,[16] and the words of the monologue communicated an understanding of female power and communion with the Spirit that shocked most of us in the room, and this group included several women who themselves have spoken in our general conferences. I recently read my great-great-grandmother's patriarchal blessing from 1870, three years before Snow's sermon in Ogden, and in the blessing my great-great-grandmother is referred to as a "prophetess and revelator." Can you imagine using such language of empowerment to describe the female leaders in your wards? If we grew accustomed to hearing our women leaders speak as authorities, as prophetesses and revelators, and referred to them that way ourselves, perhaps there would be fewer among us who feel the need for a soda or bathroom break when the female speaker comes on the screen during general conference.

One idea for helping include the influence and inspiration of women in sacrament meeting is to call a woman to be a "Sacrament Meeting Coordinator," a position that existed in my Cambridge, Massachusetts, ward. In this calling, a woman worked with the bishopric to identify sacrament meeting topics or to find people in the ward who she felt would be good at speaking on those topics. She also worked with the ward music leader, chorister, and choir director to identify supporting hymns and musical numbers. If a female sacrament meeting coordinator is not used, then male leaders can still seek input from women and female ward leaders on topics and speakers. Find other callings to give specifically to women. For example, in New York, two female CPAs were recently called to be stake auditors.

Avoid having men always speak last in sacrament meeting. Sometimes have all women speakers or at least a woman as the final speaker. As directed in the handbook, avoid having the speakers always be husband/wife combos. If a husband and wife are speaking, ask the wife if she would like to speak last. Let's do away with the expectation that the woman has to tell the cute dating story! Mix up the gender expectations of activities too. The boys don't always have to go camping and the girls don't always have to

sew scripture bags. Invite the Activity Day girls to participate in the Pinewood Derby. Have your Priests make homemade pizza or apple pies. Mix things up on Sundays too: Ask a female president to lead a ward council training or a fifth Sunday lesson. In Alexandria, Virginia, a Relief Society presidency member gave a thoughtful and well-received training in her ward's Elders Quorum about the new church book, *Daughters in My Kingdom*.[17] Ask a sacrament meeting speaker to talk about one of the general conference addresses given by a female leader. Consider how infrequently a young man or adult man in the Church is asked to listen to a woman as a public spiritual authority and find ways to challenge that status quo.

Honor women's requests to be called by the name they desire, whether it be a married woman with a different surname, a divorced woman returning to her maiden name, etc. My husband and I decided I would keep my maiden name when we got married, but the ward clerk in the first ward we lived in together told me it was "illegal" for me not to take my husband's name; and he printed my name as Neylan Smith on all ward lists and publications, despite the fact that Neylan Smith didn't even exist on government documents. Make sure all ward lists and directories reflect the woman's desires on this matter. Ensure that a woman's cell phone or other contact information be included with ward lists and directories. It is inconvenient and disrespectful for a fellow ward member to have to call the husband to reach the wife because her number is not listed.

Bishops, recognize that baby blessings can be hard experiences for some women. They have made huge sacrifices to bring a baby into the world and can feel discouraged that the only public recognition of this fact in the Church is by their husband and male members of the ward or family. My bishop does a fantastic job of recognizing the mother and her sacrifice from the pulpit by having her stand up after the blessing. I've heard of wards where the bishop asks the mother ahead of time if she would like a moment to speak herself after the blessing.

Follow the example of the general Church leaders and use gender inclusive language whenever possible. If a scripture or quote says "man" but means all people, then it is okay to change that to "man and woman," "sons and daughters," "male and fe-

male," etc. We see this kind of emphasis in general conference and in the talks of our Church leaders. On the topic of language, I have heard more than once a male leader talk about how he and other leaders "take care" of the women in their ward. Let us be extremely careful how we use this phrase. There may be times when taking care of a widow or a single mother is vital and deeply appreciated, but I have very few peers who would think it desirable to be "taken care" of by men. Describing the male/female relationship as one of taking care of the women implies that the men have access to resources, skills and spiritual insight that is not available to women, and this plays directly into the hierarchical paradigm of someone being higher on the ladder of power than another.

Let's consider home teaching and visiting teaching for a moment. From the age of twelve, a boy is invited to join his father or older men in the process of home teaching, receiving direct training in how to care for ward members at a young age. Boys also interact regularly in official priesthood meetings with older men, giving them examples of ward ecclesiastical leadership years before they are actually tasked with this duty themselves. Let's contrast this with the experience of our Young Women. They are never included in Relief Society meetings. As women, we are not encouraged to take our daughters or other young women with us when we go visiting teaching. There is a lost opportunity to show the girls what servant leadership looks like, to engage them early on in the caring of the ward. Is there a rule against including a daughter or another young woman in a visiting teaching companionship? Not that I know of. In the spirit of Clayton Christiansen's disruptive innovation, I encourage some of us to try it out.

Here's something for male leaders to try out: Examine the make-up of your Priesthood Executive Committee (PEC). According to the Handbook, this meeting consists exclusively of men, with the ward Relief Society president being included periodically by invitation. One Relief Society president's account of these meetings sheds light on how vital it is that at least some female presence is consistent. She says:

> The PEC meetings I attend are not disorganized or poorly run or irrelevant. The men are gracious and competent, and . . . I enjoy

> working with them. My ward, like most others in the Church, has more active women than men on the rolls. The "priesthood matters" that make up the agendas at these meetings virtually always affect women, either directly or indirectly. Yet the committee officially consists entirely of men. This structure leads to some puzzling administrative arrangements.
>
> For example, seemingly analogous roles turn out to be not at all parallel. The Young Men president is a permanent PEC member, but the Young Women president is not even on the potential guest list. Similarly, the apparent ranking of stewardships is a bit odd. The Young Men president has a very demanding calling but a relatively narrow stewardship. He serves males ages 12–18—in my ward, about eight young men. In contrast, the Primary president serves children of both genders ages 18 months through 11 years—in my ward, about 80 children. She oversees 10 times as many people as the Young Men president, including the largest staff in the ward, and her organization touches upon a much higher percentage of the ward households. However, like the Young Women president, the Primary president is never part of this executive committee. In the same way, an elders quorum president and high priests group leader divide home teaching and quorum responsibilities for the adult households, while a Relief Society president serves any household that includes a woman over 18—in my ward, virtually everyone. Short of the bishop, the Relief Society president's stewardship is the broadest in the ward. Yet, she is not a permanent member of the executive committee.[18]

If the handbook says the Relief Society president can be included by invitation, by all means, invite her! Always. Every week. The meeting is not called "Men's Executive Committee." If a bishop doesn't feel comfortable inviting the Young Women president and Primary president because the Handbook doesn't mention them, there are opportunities to have those leaders' thoughts and concerns represented in other ways. One solution would be create a Women's Council, an idea I've heard implemented in California, where the female leaders regularly meet with a member of the bishopric to discuss the issues, callings and concerns that are unique to the women of the ward. Or perhaps the ward leaders could work together to make sure that in Ward Council meetings—where all three of these female leaders *are* present—the agenda prioritizes the business of the female organizations. There has been significant attention drawn to the role of the Ward Council meeting in the 2010 Worldwide Leadership Train-

ing, and the essential representation of women on these influential committees has, admirably, been a central point of discussion, but we can still improve.

What else can we do? What can we do in our homes? I've been impressed with many of the things my husband has done to include our three daughters in his own servant leadership. For example, my husband takes our oldest daughter with him when he delivers the sacrament to homebound ward members. I've seen my daughter carefully holding the trays on her lap in the car as they go off together. Because my ward, like many others, has a father/son campout but no father/daughter or mother/daughter campout, my husband has taken my daughters with him to the campout, and at least in our experience no one has seemed to mind.

As a mother, my language and attitude can make a difference with my daughter as she asks the hard questions about why she can't pass the sacrament or receive the priesthood authority. The time will come when she and I will study the cooperative paradigm together, or the Two Trees theory,[19] or when she will work for a testimony of gender division for herself. But in the meantime, when my daughter asked me why only boys passed the sacrament, I answered her, "Esme, who *really* hands you the bread and water every week?" She thought, and said, "Well, actually you do." It's me, her mother. Inevitably, I'm the one sitting next to her. Or maybe it's her sister. Maybe it's her dad, but whoever it is, whatever gender that person is, whether she's related to them or has never seen them before, by them handing that tray to her, she is joining her family and her ward community in gaining equal access to the cleansing power of the Atonement. This will not always be a satisfactory answer for her, but while she is young and before we study more doctrinally-rich answers, I hope I am modeling for her an example of finding power in my own sphere of responsibility.

Part VI: Conclusion

Lest you leave today unconvinced that examining the involvement of our women in church governance is something that demands our intent consideration, let me offer one final data point: there was a woman involved in almost every one of Jesus Christ's

mortal milestones. From his very first miracle facilitated by his mother, to revealing Himself as the "living water," to being the subject of numerous parables, to being anointed by a woman hours before his death, to being the first witness of the resurrection, women were not just bystanders but were engaged contributors to his ministry. They were symbols of the extent to which the Savior was willing to challenge the conventions of his culture and usher in a new social ideal. Compared to the way women were treated in the Savior's own time and place, His treatment of them was radical. By involving not just his mother and female friends in his ministry, but by also embracing the fallen woman, the daughter of a Gentile, the sick woman, the Samaritan woman, Jesus, through his example, challenged us as His followers to engage all women, trust them, lead with them, and lean on their spiritual power. Let us meet that challenge.

Notes

1. Don Sorenson and Valerie Hudson Cassler, *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion* (Cedar Fort, 2004), 11.

2. Mormon Research Foundation, "Understanding Mormon Disbelief," March 2012, survey.

3. Personal correspondence.

4. Mormon Research Foundation, "Understanding Mormon Disbelief."

5. Ibid.

6. Peter Henderson and Kristina Cooks, "Mormons Besieged by the Modern Age," *Reuters*, January 31, 2012, http://reuters.com/article/2012/01/31/us-mormonchurch-idUSTRE80TICM210120131 (accessed August 7, 2012).

7. Personal correspondence.

8. Kathryn Skaggs, "Mormon Women, Priesthood and Equality," *A Well-Behaved Mormon Woman*, May 31, 2012, http://wellbehavedmormonwoman.blogspot.com/2012/05/mormon-women-priesthood-and-equality.html (accessed August 7, 2012).

9. Rebecca J, "My Feelings about Not Holding the Priesthood," *By Common Consent*, May 30, 2012, http://bycommonconsent.com/2012/05/30/my-feelings-about-not-holding-the-priesthood-part-two-of-a-million-parts (accessed August 7, 2012).

10. Sorenson and Cassler, *Women in Eternity, Women in Zion*, 141.

11. On Faith, "A Woman's Role?" *The Washington Post*, April 13,

2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/faith-and-feminism/2011/04/11/AFlcBqWD_blog.html (accessed August 7, 2012).

12. See Alma 1:26-28 and Mosiah 26:37.

13. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "On Appendages," *Exponent II*, winter 1985, http://www.the-exponent.com/on-appendages (accessed August 7, 2012).

14. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Relief Society and the Church," *Ensign*, May 1992, 36.

15. For a more complete exploration of the priesthood/motherhood comparison, see http://bycommonconsent.com/2012/04/30/why-i-dont-like-the-priesthood-motherhood-analogy/ (accessed August 7, 2012).

16. Eliza R. Snow, "An Address," *Woman's Exponent,* Sept. 15, 1873, 62.

17. This and several of the other ideas in this section are from a forthcoming pamphlet from LDS WAVE called "Increasing Women's Contributions." Many thanks to Chelsea Shields Strayer and others for sharing their draft with me.

18. Dana Haight Cattani, "To PEC or Not to PEC?" *Exponent II*, summer 2012, 33.

19. Valerie Hudson Cassler, "The Two Trees," http://www. fairlds.org/fair-conferences/2010-fairconference/2010-the-two-trees (accessed August 7, 2012).