DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.

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Mormon Feminism: The Next Forty Years

Joanna Brooks

From remarks delivered at the Exponent II Retreat, September 13, 2014, in Greenfield, N.H.

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.

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A Swelling Tide: Nineteen-Year-Old Sister Missionaries in the Twenty-First Century

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> *"It was not a self-consistent ideology but a movement—a tremor in the earth, a lift in the wind, a swelling tide . . . an exhilarating sense of discovery, a utopian hope that women might change the world."*
>
> —*Laurel Thatcher Ulrich*[1]

With the recent momentous reduction of the minimum age for female missionaries, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may very well be at a crossroads the likes of which it has not seen since the renunciation of polygamy in 1890 or the extension of the priesthood to black male members in 1978. Senior Church leaders have called this "the most remarkable era in the history of the Church," favorably comparing the modern missionary effort to "the great events that have happened in past history, like the First Vision, like the gift of the Book of Mormon, like the Restoration of the Gospel."[2] The executive director of the Church's Missionary Department, Elder David Evans, has often characterized the age reduction as "an invitation . . . to this entire generation." He also stated that "the scriptures make it clear, and I think the First Presidency and the [Quorum of the Twelve Apostles] have made it clear . . . that we are all equal before God."[3] This is significant language from a church that has sometimes been criticized for its patriarchal, hierarchical nature.

But is the invitation truly extended equally to women? The age reduction and the creation of new leadership positions for

women will go a long way toward making sister missionaries feel more welcome, but continued emphasis on missionary service being a priesthood duty, explicit statements about optional versus expected service, and subtle verbal and visual cues may indicate otherwise. Furthermore, the large numbers of returning sisters may be "welcomed back from their missions and expected to be exactly the same as they were before they left."[4] Of course, this is impossible. Not only will these young women mature and grow in the same ways that their male counterparts do, but because of the essential fact that tens of thousands of them responded, they are now part of something that is bigger and more influential than any individual experience. Intentional or not, the swelling tide of sister missionaries constitutes a movement which ensures that these young women and their church will never be the same.

Announcement and Response

On Saturday, October 6, 2012, President Thomas S. Monson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints made the historic announcement "that able, worthy young women who have the desire to serve may be recommended for missionary service beginning at age nineteen, instead of age twenty-one," while young men could now serve one year earlier at age eighteen.[5] To say that the response has been overwhelming is an understatement. Within two weeks of the announcement, missionary applications jumped from an average of 700 per week to 4,000, a stunning 471 percent increase.[6] Since the initial surge, the Church has continued to receive an average of 1,400 applications per week.[7] Within six months of the announcement, the number of missionaries in the field rose eleven percent to reach 65,634 (at that point, the highest number in Church history) and swelled to over 85,000 by early 2014.[8] Most noteworthy, however, is that within that time, slightly more than half of the new applicants, and a full thirty-six percent of the missionaries called to serve since the age change, were young women.[9] Prior to the announcement, sister missionaries constituted only fifteen percent of the total.[10]

If comments made by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve are any indication, the deluge of applications was largely unexpected. A few hours after President Monson's announcement, Elder Holland indicated that the Church was uncertain how this change would impact the number of full-time missionaries, stating, "Right now we don't know how big this is going to be."[11] To accommodate the massive influx of new missionaries, the Church quickly created fifty-eight new missions around the world (in areas already served by missionaries), shortened the missionary training course by one-third, expanded its facilities in Utah to house and train additional missionaries, and converted a Church-owned boarding school in Mexico into a new Missionary Training Center (MTC).

In addition to these logistical changes, the Church has also modified the structure of the mission leadership. Before these changes, zone leader councils consisted of the male mission president, male assistants to the president, and male zone leaders. These have been replaced by the Mission Leadership Council, which includes all of the above positions as well as the mission presidents' wives and the newly created leadership position of sister training leaders.[12]

Given the unprecedented number of sisters now serving or training for missions and the creation of new leadership positions for women in the mission field, it is not difficult to view this moment as the genesis of a change with far-reaching implications for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Relationships and Leadership

The two-year shift in age makes the decision to serve a mission significantly easier for young women in a number of ways. At age nineteen, those in college have likely completed only one or two years, so they can avoid interrupting their major coursework and/or the process of interviewing for post-graduation jobs; some may even take a "gap year" after high school in order to raise funds for their mission and delay beginning college until their return. Women who opt to work rather than go to college may also find it easier to serve missions since the time invested in a job or career is lessened to only one or two years.

More important is the fact that the lower minimum age allows young women to make the decision outside the context of romantic relationships and marriage, which is often a deciding factor for women considering a mission. It has long been, and continues to be, the stance of LDS Church leaders, as stated by then-Apostle Monson in 1977, that they "do not wish to create a program that would prevent [women] from finding . . . a proper companion in marriage, because that is their foremost responsibility if such is able to happen."[13] Numerous statements from past and current Church leaders have focused on recommending sister missionaries only if "those young women . . . do not have reasonable marriage prospects."[14] These statements not only explicitly encourage young women to choose marriage rather than serve a mission, but they also help perpetuate the stereotype that "no matter what the age of the woman deciding on going on missions, they [are] . . . old maids."[15] This stereotype will undoubtedly abate as more women become sister missionaries at an earlier age, thus returning before reaching "prime" marrying age. It will also likely alleviate the uncertainty felt by young women who were inclined to serve at age twenty-one but worried that their boyfriends, who are sometimes just getting home from their own missions as the young women are leaving, would not wait for them to return.

The LDS Church's strong pro-marriage stance will certainly persist—marriage and family are fundamental to salvation and exaltation for Mormons, after all—but the pressure for women to choose between a mission and marriage will be greatly lessened. Interestingly, it has long been the Church's view that a woman's missionary experience will help her in many ways once she is ready to marry. According to a 1978 *New Era* article, a returned sister missionary will "become a better wife, a better mother, a better Relief Society president."[16] Additionally, as one Missionary Area Presidency counselor stated more recently, "Missionary service typically leads to temple marriage and the establishment of loving eternal family relationships. Couples sealed in the temple place greater importance on eternal families. They tend to have more children, and those children are more likely to become faithful adult members in the Church."[17] A study of LDS returned missionaries by Richard

McClendon and Bruce Chadwick states, "The divorce rate among returned missionary women is much lower than the national rate. . . . Nearly all returned missionaries who were married had a spouse who is a member of the Church, and ninety-six percent either had married in the temple or had been sealed later."[18] Another recent national study shows that people who marry later in life are more likely to stay married.[19] When the evidence is aggregated, it is possible to conclude that lowering the missionary age for women will actually lead to more, and stronger, Mormon marriages and families.

In a church led primarily by men, the creation of additional leadership positions for women is also noteworthy. With the Church leadership determining that both men and women will participate in Mission Leadership Councils—specifically that "full expression from all participants is invited in council settings, unifying the efforts of both male and female council members"—women have been given a seat at the table.[20] Of course, mission leadership councils are not autonomous, as they serve under a male mission president, and all missionaries, male and female, will continue to report to male district and zone leaders. Nevertheless, the creation of these councils is a significant step toward equality in the mission field, which could open the door to more opportunities for women outside the mission organizations by giving sister missionaries important opportunities for increased experience, confidence, and informal cultural and spiritual authority. It is interesting to note that while there is some precedent for women holding leadership positions in the mission structure, particularly in foreign countries, these assignments were always due to necessity, tailored to a specific situation or considered experimental, rather than an institutionalized standard.[21]

The Church has also created the position of Sister Training Leader to instruct and support incoming sister missionaries. As a full member of the Mission Leadership Council and directly reporting to the mission president, this position is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is giving a voice to the young women serving in the mission fields. It also creates a corresponding office to the highly coveted, male-only Assistant to the President position, and allows the women who hold these

jobs to take on increased responsibilities and develop leadership skills. Additionally, male missionaries will observe and interact with women in positions of ecclesiastical authority, perhaps for the first time outside their families. Simply seeing women exercise formal Church leadership outside the home may help actualize a shift toward greater gender egalitarianism in young men that they will then carry forward into their lives both inside and outside of the mission experience. When one considers, as Margaret Merrill Toscano points out, that "the fact that women's roles and input in the Church are entirely dependent on the way male leaders allow them to participate, [and that] whether male leaders solicit women's input or not, either on a local or Church-wide level, is *entirely* in the discretionary power of men," the consequences of young men working, even indirectly, with women in these leadership capacities could be profound.[22]

Finally, sister training leaders may be able to influence the content of mission- and zone-wide conferences, which one sister missionary, Allison Stimmler, described as "unfulfilling [because] the rhetoric we heard was male-oriented and appealed to a masculine sense of competitiveness to encourage and inspire us. . . . [It was] the rhetoric of numbers, the rhetoric of sports, and the rhetoric of war."[23] The difference between what generally motivates young men and young women is important, as are the outcomes of that division: women more often internalize an issue and assume there is something wrong with them, rather than externalize the problem and assume there is a fault in the system.[24] As Stimmler states, "The conclusion I always came to was that I didn't have enough faith."[25] She finally came to realize "that depression and serious feelings of discouragement were common among the sisters even though we rarely talked about them publicly. Nothing we heard in our regular conferences addressed these issues," yet they *were* addressed in her annual sisters' conferences.[26] Some of the feelings of "isolation, estrangement, alienation, [and] fragmentation," as described by Kathleen Flake, will surely dissipate as more sister missionaries enter the field and become a more "natural part of the mission rather than an exception to it," but young women will likely respond better to motivational messages that use more

gender-neutral themes.[27] It will be important for co-ed conferences to galvanize missionaries of both genders, and the involvement of sister training leaders will encourage messages that include and help *all* attendees.

Not Invited, But Welcome?[28]

The points discussed so far indicate that LDS authorities are taking steps to remedy the gender inequalities within the Church, and are setting the stage for a far more inclusive future. One prominent Mormon scholar, Armand Mauss, agrees: "There is a sincere effort by this group of new and emerging male church leaders, from apostles on down, to do everything possible and feasible . . . to show how much they value the contributions of women in the church short of actually giving them the priesthood."[29] However, as mentioned above, the LDS Church is historically and doctrinally patriarchal, and it continues to send mixed messages regarding the place of sister missionaries within the Church's wider theology and institution.

For a prime example of the conflicting information dispensed by the Church, one need look no further than the remainder of President Monson's speech in which he made the announcement of the age reduction:

> We affirm that missionary work is a priesthood duty—and we encourage all young men who are worthy and who are physically able and mentally capable to respond to the call to serve. Many young women also serve, but they are not under the same mandate to serve as are the young men. We assure the young sisters of the Church, however, that they make a valuable contribution as missionaries, and we welcome their service.[30]

This is an idea expressed often by both past and current leaders of the Church. With one hand they have welcomed and praised sister missionaries—"Almost without exception, the women [missionaries] have proven to be not only equal but superior to the men"[31]—while with the other hand they have pushed women away from missionary service toward marriage

and motherhood—"The finest mission a young woman can perform is to marry a good young man in the Lord's house and stand as the mother of a good family."[32]

An examination of LDS periodicals and online materials also reveals mixed messages, making it difficult to determine the precise stance of the Church regarding sister missionaries. A 2003 study by Tania Rands Lyon and Mary Ann Shumway McFarland found significant gender bias in the Church rhetoric, printed materials, and visuals, but today the language on the LDS.org websites and in conference speeches is usually either gender neutral or inclusive.[33] For example, an LDS Newsroom Missionary Program infographic features a conspicuous alteration to the following quote from Elder Russell M. Nelson: "For 18 to 24 months [young men and women of the Church] put it all on hold because of their deep desire to serve the Lord."[34] The original quote read "they."

However, verbal and visual cues within two of the official Church publications, the *New Era* and the *Ensign* (for young adult and adult members, respectively), point to a continued bias against sister missionaries.[35] In the November 2012 issue of the *New Era*, published immediately after the age-change announcement, the very first article quotes President Monson's affirmation "that missionary work is a priesthood duty," but the full story regarding the new minimum ages for male and female missionaries is not reported until five pages later.[36] Another example can be drawn from the *New Era*'s recurring feature entitled "From the Mission Field." Since the age-reduction announcement was made, the magazine has published the column eleven times. Ten of the missionaries featured are male and only one is female. When human figures are shown in the artwork accompanying these articles, male missionaries are depicted seven times and women once.[37] In the October 2013 issue of the *New Era*, which is largely devoted to mission preparation, thirty-one of the photos or graphics regarding missionary service depict males, while only eleven show females.[38] Additionally, on three separate occasions in this issue, references are made to missionary service being a priesthood duty while women are not under the same mandate; one of these instances literally puts the message in parenthses that women are

welcome to serve as missionaries.[39] When viewed individually or read over an extended period of time, these examples may seem inconsequential, but when aggregated they point to the LDS Church's systematic preference of male over female missionaries, even after Church leaders have explicitly stated that young women are equally welcome in the mission field.

Additional examples from both magazines are more pointed in their exclusion of sister missionaries. The October 2013 issue of the *Ensign* includes an article entitled "My Teachers Quorum Is an MTC." Though it mentions changes to the missionary training program due to the influx of missionaries, as the title indicates, it focuses solely on the male-only teachers quorum as a venue for preparing missionaries. Given that the article primarily discusses how the new youth curriculum manual, *Come, Follow Me,* helps young people begin preparing for missionary service much earlier, and the fact that this manual is used by both young men and women, it is certainly possible that the same information could have been presented in a way that did not exclude prospective sister missionaries.[40] In the same issue, "Our Great Missionary Heritage" highlights missionaries from the Old Testament's Jonah to the 1851 Mormon missionaries to the Sandwich Islands, and encourages readers to "draw courage and inspiration from these examples."[41] The article is heavy on photos and artwork and includes one painting of two generic female "member missionaries" (rather than full-time missionaries) from the Church in Taiwan, but all other artwork—including that of actual missionaries from the Church's history—depicts men. Historic sister missionaries such as Harriet Maria Horsepool Nye, wife of the California mission president and the first woman called as an official missionary in March 1898, or Inez Knight and Lucy Jane Brimhall, who were set apart in April 1898 as "the first single, official proselyting lady missionaries," are absent, even though incorporating any of these three women would at least implicitly include today's young women as part of the Church's great missionary legacy and help them feel as if they were truly invited to serve.[42] Two stories from the *New Era* are also noteworthy for their exclusion of sister missionaries. The

July 2013 cover story, "Prepare, Covenant and Serve," about a camp for Aaronic priesthood holders (young men ages twelve to seventeen), emphasizes how the camp and activities serve as mission preparation, and highlights that "worthy Aaronic priesthood holders of today are the mighty missionaries of tomorrow." However, the article makes no mention of similar preparation opportunities for young women, and sister missionaries are not mentioned anywhere in the rest of the magazine.[43] In the October 2013 issue, the article "Missionary Preparation and Duty to God" explores a booklet entitled *Fulfilling My Duty to God*, which is written specifically for, and given only to, Aaronic priesthood holders.[44] Though not explicitly a preparation tool for full-time missionary service, the article exhorts [male] readers to use it for that purpose. Similarly, the July article states that the young men at the Aaronic priesthood camp "realized that the principles taught in *[Fulfilling My] Duty to God* are the same as those of a missionary."[45] Interestingly, both articles are written with a tone that assumes young men will serve full-time missions.

Three articles written specifically for, or prominently featuring, young women present a very different message, and are indicative of the continuing gender bias surrounding sister missionaries. The *Ensign*'s January 2013 article, "Young Women and the Mission Decision," begins with President Monson's statement from General Conference that young women do not have the same mandate to serve as male members of the Church.[46] It then continues to tell five women's stories of how they "were guided by the Spirit in deciding what path was right for them." In one, Cassie relates how she received her call, but "ten days before I was to leave, my friend proposed. I postponed my mission to give myself time to think. When I decided to get engaged, the Spirit confirmed to my fiancé and me that it was right. . . . My mission [is to be] a wife and mother."[47] Cassie's story reminds Mormon women of the Church's view that their primary calling is marriage and motherhood, and the use of the phrase "my mission" in describing her decision is conspicuous. In another story, Amy states, "The desire never came; I never felt I needed to serve." Though hardly remarkable on its surface, it is striking for the simple fact that a

comparable article about male missionaries would almost certainly never include a profile of a young man who simply did not feel the need to serve. An article from the October 2013 issue of the *New Era*, "For Young Women: Making the Mission Decision," presents similar themes. Female readers are advised that they "shouldn't worry about deciding now whether to serve a full-time mission in the future," but should wait until they turn nineteen to consider a full-time mission, since "a lot can change . . . to influence your choice, including opportunities for marriage and motherhood."[48] They are encouraged to consider their motivations for serving and ponder the question, "Would I even make a good missionary?"[49] A sidebar highlights the various answers a young woman might receive when praying for guidance on whether or not to serve a mission, ranging from being called to serve immediately, to maybe serving later, to "No, you don't want to serve a full-time mission, and you don't need to."[50] One section of the article asks "Do I Need to Serve a Mission?" and the answer is an unequivocal "no." It states, "There is no requirement for young women to serve a mission, so you don't need to feel guilty for choosing not to be a full-time missionary."[51]

Again, this is a starkly different answer than the one given to young men, and other articles in the same issue indicate strongly that young men should not only consider missionary service a duty—one even states, "It wasn't a question of *if* I would go—it was only a question of *when*"—but that they should begin preparing years in advance.[52] In the July 2013 the *New Era* article "A Sincere Heart and Real Intent," Elder James Martino, who converted as a teenager, describes how he began to consider serving a full-time mission while at college. Martino does not contemplate his motivations or wonder if he'll be a good missionary (in the article, at least). He prays and receives his answer: "You already know you're supposed to go."[53] The expectation to serve a full-time mission is again assumed and definitive.

The only article in the missionary-focused October 2013 issue of the *Ensign* to depict female missionaries, "How Can I Be a Successful Missionary?" by Lauren Bangerter Wilde, recounts her difficulties in the mission field.[54] Wilde describes her "sour

attitude," her realization that her "faith was lacking" and had been weakened by her feelings of discouragement, and her jealousy at the success of other missionaries. The article is not all negative; Wilde goes on to describe how she was able to turn things around, gain a better perspective, and avoid disappointment. It is almost certain that all missionaries experience similar difficulties and feelings in the field, yet the article is written in the first person by a female author, and only women are depicted in the photos that accompany the article. It is also noteworthy that this type of article was not written by (or for) returned male missionaries in either publication in the fourteen months of issues reviewed for this article, which insinuates that the issues described in Wilde's article are limited to female missionaries. Though subtle, these types of conflicting messages, exclusions, and omissions strongly reinforce the message that the Church not only has very different expectations for its young men and women, but that it actually favors male over female missionaries.

A final example from the April 2013 General Conference is perhaps the most telling. President Monson gave a speech about preparing to serve as full-time missionaries in which he delivered his four-part formula for success: "First, search the scriptures with diligence; second, plan your life with purpose . . . ; third, teach the truth with testimony; and fourth, serve the Lord with love."[55] This is good advice for anyone looking forward to his or her call to serve—but he was speaking exclusively to men. President Monson's advice, in a talk entitled "Come, All Ye *Sons* of God" (emphasis mine), came in the priesthood session, which is closed to female members of the Church (though women are now welcome to watch or read the talks online). One cannot help but conclude that if sister missionaries were genuinely "invited" instead of just "welcome" to serve full-time missions, President Monson would have given his speech to an audience that included both men and women, and, consequently, all potential missionaries. It is also interesting to note that no comparable speech, nor any speech specific to full-time missionary service, was given at the annual Young Women's Conference held in March 2013.

The Problem of Separate but Equal

The continued preference, subtle or overt, of male over female missionaries is a symptom of a larger matter of gender (in)equality within Mormonism, which is an extraordinarily complex issue that inevitably leads to questions about priesthood authority and conventional gender roles as espoused by the LDS Church. (Though these points are certainly relevant to the current discourse, they are, for the most part, beyond the purview of this article and will be discussed only briefly.) However, it is an issue that will only grow more pressing as the Church navigates the new landscape created by the tremendous influx—and later, the return—of sister missionaries. For now, this issue can be at least partially explained by the vastly different ways in which young men and women experience their missionary service inside the larger context of their ongoing status within the Church.

Sister missionaries' experiences in the field are "their moment of greatest authority in the Church. While these women do not claim to have functioned as priesthood holders in the Church, they do claim to have been enlightened."[56] Women often feel liberated by the work, and it allows them to find more equal footing with male members of the Church, both during and after their mission service.[57] On the other hand, young men usually experience mission service as a rite of passage into adulthood. While it is obviously a very important milestone in their lives, it is typically not their "moment of greatest authority," as most go on to hold various priesthood leadership callings. A male's missionary service is viewed as the beginning of, and "the 'turning point' . . . in[,] the development of their religious careers," in a church that believes "the Mormon ideal is for all members . . . to pursue careers of lay religious involvement, resulting in time in an extensive repertoire of church assignments and advancements," as characterized by Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd.[58] While a small number of women can and do hold positions of responsibility at the ward, stake, and general level, their ability to advance is necessarily restricted by the Church's requirement of priesthood authority in all of its highest call-

ings, so there is "no equivalent experience for a [woman] . . . to progress through a visible course of greater responsibility."[59] This is particularly problematic because, as Shepherd and Shepherd explain, "within Mormon society the successful lay career is taken as an indicator of the individual's enduring moral character."[60] This emphasis on continued Church assignments, the institutional and moral authority they imbue, and the exclusion of women from these callings perpetuates gender inequality throughout the LDS Church.

The issue is compounded by the fact that continued service for all returning missionaries is believed to be crucial to the well-being of members and the Church overall, as indicated in a statement by former President Gordon B. Hinckley: "I am satisfied that if every returning missionary had a meaningful responsibility the day he or she came home, we'd have fewer of them grow cold in their faith. I wish that [the bishops] would make an effort to see that every returned missionary receives a meaningful assignment. Activity is the nurturing process of faithfulness."[61] McClendon and Chadwick's study found evidence to support this idea. They asked how the Church could best help missionaries adjust when they returned from the field, and the most frequent response, from both male and female missionaries, was to "receive a call to a responsible position as soon as possible."[62] It is clear that returning women are just as eager to continue serving their church as their male counterparts, but their opportunities to do so are limited. In theory, it appears that the Church leaders and LDS women are on the same page about women's continued and growing involvement, but there are significant discrepancies in practice. So where is the disconnect?

Ultimately, the answer lies in the distinction between giving a woman "meaningful responsibility" and involving her in "decision-making" within the LDS Church at both the local and institutional level. Though a woman may be given responsibilities within her ward, many decisions that affect her ability to complete them are out of her hands and are often made without her input. One might consider this in terms of typical organizational hierarchy, but as mentioned above, the issue is significantly more complex when

religious ideology and theology play a part, and key to Mormon theology is the understanding of priesthood.

Like many religious traditions, the LDS Church is not just institutionally patriarchal, but is also theologically so. Grounded in their four books of scripture and formal proclamations, Mormons believe that God is corporeal and male, that gender is eternal, and that the priesthood—generally defined as "the authority to act in God's name"—is exclusive to male members of the Church.[63] Included in this prerogative is the administration of the Church at its highest levels. As such, the Church's institutional structure "promotes the assumption that gender disqualifies women from most Church leadership and management roles," Toscano states.[64] Subsequently, the Church "den[ies] women full agency to participate in defining and authorizing doctrines and policies that shape cultural and personal identity and practice. Because most decisions about Church management and the direction of spiritual affairs are made by priesthood council, women do not have a full voice or 'vote' in the Church."[65] Sometimes these decisions are small-scale and local, but the greater institutional LDS Church has, on more than one occasion, made major decisions that significantly impacted its female members without involving them in the process.[66]

The patriarchal nature of the Church and the influence of the priesthood also extend into family structures, as outlined in the official Church document, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." The document states that men are called to preside over, provide for, and protect their families; women are responsible for childrearing; and "fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners."[67] Mormon women interpret the Proclamation in diverse ways, but according to Toscano, most understand the language to mean that "while the genders may not be equal in condition, they are equally valued and fairly treated."[68]

Though there are probably as many interpretations as there are Mormon women, generally most make a relatively strong distinction among gender roles, patriarchy, and priesthood within the home and within the institutional Church. It is not uncommon to hear Mormon women state, "I can't do much to make the Church

organization and structure more inclusive, but what I can do is take control of my marriage and my life here in my house."[69] The line between the Church and home is clearly drawn, and according to Caroline Kline, women tend to understand and interact with these roles in four ways. First, while they may affirm the priesthood, many women "have little problem asserting women as equals [within the home], since they have either defanged the concept of presiding to mean little more than service, involvement, and guidance, or they see priesthood as raising men up to be equals with women."[70] Second, some downplay gender distinctions, "and focus on ideas of fundamental equality that the gospel teaches."[71] Third, women may dismiss problematic teachings of the institutional Church: "These women who occasionally disagree with Church policy, teachings, or male leaders reconcile their disagreement by attributing [them] to human leaders who are doing their best, working according to their understanding, but falling short."[72] Fourth, women may retreat spiritually and emotionally. Kline states, "This seemed to happen most often when the Church was grappling with serious social issues of the day, and in the minds of some, coming up short." Women who reacted by retreating often "believed the Church to be violating its own core teachings about equality, compassion, or agency."[73] An earlier study by Lori Beaman found similarly varied responses among Mormon women on the topics of male headship, the priesthood, and the institutional Church. Some accepted the Church's rhetoric and views regarding male headship and priesthood, some interpreted doctrine as a vehicle for equality, and others rejected it outright or separated Church authorities from its teachings.[74] Most, however, "interpret[ed] the teachings of the church in a manner that maximiz[ed] their agency while remaining within the boundaries of church doctrine."[75]

Both Kline's and Beaman's work show that Mormon women are quite comfortable applying their own personal lenses to the issues of gender and priesthood authority, and that their various interpretations do not necessarily indicate dissatisfaction with the Church or its leaders. A 2007 study showed that up to seventy percent of LDS women were content with their role in the Church.[76] The Pew Research Center's 2011 "Mormons

in America" report found similar satisfaction among Mormon women regarding gender roles: fifty-six percent believe that a marriage in which the husband provides for the family while the wife stays home is more satisfying than if both spouses work, and only eight percent believed Mormon women should be ordained to the priesthood.[77]

On the other hand, "the Church's own studies have shown that not simply a handful, but a majority of women in the Church desires to be more involved in the decision-making councils of the church at all levels."[78] Given that these two seemingly contradictory responses—the desire for more authority, but not for the priesthood that gives men their authority—are both coming from Mormon women, they seem to point toward a middle ground where it would somehow be possible to grant women a more authoritative position in their own church without necessarily giving them the priesthood. This solution could certainly simplify the matter of equality between Mormon men and women by sidelining a potentially difficult theological barrier. However, it could also further complicate any resolution, because even with a more pervasive official presence women still would not possess the priestly authority "to act in God's name"–they would simply have greater institutional authority.[79] Though this middle ground would be a strong step toward equality, the Church would still have to contend with what Toscano calls "a gender-based policy of 'separate but equal,'" and whether separate can actually be equal is a matter of great debate.[80]

What Will the Future Bring?

When the average number of sister missionaries was a relatively small fifteen percent, the lack of continued empowerment and growth opportunities for women within the Church could be viewed as a minority issue and given little attention, if discussed at all. As the number of young women going on and returning from missionary service grows exponentially, the questions of gender inequity that are manifest in the missionary program will likely receive increased notice. And though only time will tell the

true effects of the age reduction and the subsequent influx of sister missionaries, it is possible to anticipate some of the potential consequences for the Mormon Church.

First, it is conceivable that the Church will continue mostly unchanged. As mentioned above, many Mormon women are content with the Church's current positions on gender roles and its differing expectations for male and female members. Many returning sister missionaries will likely expect to marry and start families within a few years of their return, and will happily fulfill their prescribed responsibility of nurturing as wives and mothers. Without impetus to change, Church policies regarding women's roles will remain unmodified and the continuation of the status quo is a distinct possibility.

However, there is at least some anecdotal evidence that the patriarchal nature of the Church is less acceptable to younger generations of women. Taunalyn Ford Rutherford relates the following example given by one oral history subject: "The priesthood is the ruling power. . . . Even though you've got a Relief Society president it is still under the authority of priesthood. It doesn't bother me in the least. My eldest daughter is horrified at that sort of thing. But I'm not."[81] It is possible that many returning sister missionaries will feel the weight of their church's institutional patriarchy more heavily, especially if they have felt empowered by and during their mission service. Rather than comfortably inhabiting the Church's definitive gender roles, these young women could begin to experience a sense of disquiet or dissatisfaction and a yearning for more opportunities, much like the "feminine mystique" described at the beginning of second-wave feminism. These feelings could be magnified if sister missionaries begin to see themselves as part of a movement that deserves a special place in—or at least overt recognition by—the Church.

And there are indications that they do, as shown by one young woman quoted in the *Deseret News*, who states, "Years from now I'm going to be able to say I was a part of this huge army of missionaries who are responding to a call from our prophet."[82] One can easily imagine these young women becoming more involved

and vocal about the changes they would like to see within the Church, which could lead to higher levels of inclusion at the local level, and perhaps even trickle up to the institutional level. However, if ignored, or without institutional changes that address the lack of continued empowerment, this may lead to ongoing (and possibly widespread) dissatisfaction with the Church, and perhaps even cause some returned sister missionaries to become inactive or to leave the Church altogether.[83]

A third possibility is that the Church grants women the priesthood, opening all positions of authority equally to men and women. The recent excommunication of Kate Kelly, founder of Ordain Women, makes it clear that Mormon priesthood for women is a virtual impossibility at the moment, but given the Church's belief in a living prophet and continuing revelation, it cannot be dismissed altogether.[84] Grassroots efforts to extend priesthood continue to gain momentum: 175 new supporters posted profiles on the Ordain Women website in the two weeks following Kelly's excommunication, and only five members asked to have their materials removed from the site.[85] The question is not going away. Support for women's ordination could increase exponentially if a large number of sister missionaries feel displaced, neglected, and/or disaffected after they return.

A thorough consideration of the implications of Mormon women holding the priesthood is beyond the scope of this article. It is important to note, however, that even if women were given the priesthood tomorrow, there is no guarantee that they would be called to positions of greater authority by current male leadership. As Anne Clifford points out, "Access to ordination [in the Episcopal Church] has not necessarily resulted in women gaining equal access to positions of authority in their churches. Ordained women tend to engage in more specialized ministries, rather than become pastors, rectors, or vicars of parishes. They are likely to serve as assistants or associates."[86] Though the lay priesthood of the LDS Church differentiates it from other denominations, there is little reason to think access to positions for Mormon women would be significantly different, at least initially. It would also take many years for women to move up through the institutional

hierarchy to positions among the Church's General Authorities, who dictate official Church-wide policy and doctrine.

It is perhaps most likely that the seeds that have been planted with the creation of female leadership positions within the missionary leadership councils will bear fruit that enhances women's roles within their church. Neylan McBaine, founder of The Mormon Women Project, has suggested honoring girls in front of their congregations at key ages, involving women in baby blessings, and quoting female sources in Church materials.[87] These seeds could also lead to greater autonomy within the Relief Society. Though it is improbable that an organization with leadership as streamlined and invested in correlation as the LDS Church would substantially divest itself of the running of its women's organization, a shift toward more involvement and greater responsibility for women is easily imagined. If successful, this transition could lead to a higher level of inclusion of women within the decision-making processes of the General Authorities and perhaps even to the growth of a parallel authority structure made up of women. As discussed above, this may simply be a band-aid that perpetuates the Church's stance of "separate but equal," but it would also satisfy that majority of Mormon women who desire to be involved in decision-making at both the local and institutional levels. It would not only allow women's voices to be heard and their perspectives to be included, but it would allow them to directly influence the Church's positions and its future.

By virtue of their participation and experiences in the mission field, sister missionaries are already shaping the Church's future. They will almost certainly view their church through a lens colored by their service; the greater responsibility, higher level of inclusion, and sense of equality—not to mention stronger knowledge of scripture and doctrine—will begin to shape their interactions and decisions regarding their faith and their lives as they return home. Giving them the room to grow and opportunities for continued, equal participation will only benefit the Church in the long run. As Lawrence Foster points out:

> If the [organization] is to work well, women, as well as other elements in the church, need to be actively and effectively involved in every issue that directly affects them. Otherwise, blunders and policy mistakes are almost inevitable. . . . Not to involve half the church in creating the policies that affect them is not only ethically questionable but organizationally dysfunctional as well.[88]

While this may seem like common sense, it is uncharted territory for the LDS Church and its leadership. If the Church's new policy on sister missionaries and its (mostly) graceful reaction to the enthusiastic response on the part of young women are any indication, the men at the highest levels of the Mormon institution are now seriously considering issues of gender equality in the Church. The prospect for real strides toward equality seems greater now than ever before, because one outcome is certain: a new generation of experienced, independent, empowered, twenty-first century women will be coming home after eighteen months of service transformed and eager to continue serving their faith and their church.

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Mormon Feminist Perspectives on the Mormon Digital Awakening: A Study of Identity and Personal Narratives

Nancy Ross and Jessica Finnigan

Abstract

This study examines online Mormon feminists' identities and beliefs and their responses to the Mormon Digital Awakening. This is the first published survey of online Mormon feminists, which gathered quantitative and qualitative data from 1,862 self-identified Mormon feminists. The findings show that Mormon feminists are predominantly believing and engaged in their local religious communities but, are frustrated with the position of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on gender. Many Mormon feminists participate in activist movements to raise awareness of gender issues in the Church, and this study records their responses to these recent events. It is argued that Mormon feminists play a significant role in the LDS Church as they bridge the gap between orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy and between orthopraxy and non-orthopraxy.

Keywords: Mormon feminism, activism, LDS Church, identity

Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS Church), whose members are referred to as Mormons,[1] officially claims a membership of over 15 million individuals worldwide.[2]

Mormon women are sometimes falsely represented as a homogeneous, orthodox, and conservative group.[3] Some of the literature brings this diversity to light, but only in a limited way. Although the contemporary Mormon feminist movement has been around since the 1970s, nowadays the internet and social media bring together large numbers of men and women who self-identify as Mormon feminists and who challenge traditional perspectives and roles of Mormon women.[4] Online Mormon feminism is a growing, internet-based movement that saw an explosion of activity in 2012. Recent social media campaigns initiated by Mormon feminists have sought to create greater equality in LDS Church policy and practice. The study described in this paper asked Mormon feminists about their identity and their responses to the Mormon Digital Awakening, including their opinions on current changes in Church policy and their internet-based Church member activities.

Previous scholarship often references the oxymoronic dilemma of being Mormon and feminist but has rarely probed the public identity of Mormon feminists as individuals or as a group.[5] Recent activist campaigns reflect a significant new development in Mormon feminist public identity, and Mormon feminists express a variety of opinions on the campaigns and recent changes in Church policy, but none of the literature has yet addressed these issues.

Few articles refer to Mormon feminists. One study divides Mormon women into three groups but does not allow the subjects to self-identify to which group they belong.[6] Mormon feminists become Mormon feminists when they self-identify as Mormon feminists, and not by any other measure. Mormons with feminist leanings who do not identify as Mormon feminists are not Mormon feminists, even if they hold the same views and religious beliefs as Mormon feminists. Identifying as a Mormon feminist may bring social and religious risks, as feminists were once viewed as a "danger" to the Church.[7] Studies on Mormon women, Mormon feminists, or any sub-group of these categories should allow individuals to speak for themselves in order to gain insights into their lived experiences as Mormons.[8]

Mormon feminists, male and female, are gaining visibility within the LDS Church and the public sphere.[9] The internet and

social media are bringing together existing feminist groups and previously-isolated individuals in new ways. Some scholarship hints at the effects of the internet and social media on Mormon feminism as a movement,[10] and new research details the role of social media in the creation of Mormon feminist activism.[11]

This study addresses the identity and responses of women and men who call themselves Mormon feminists. The qualitative data collected from open-ended responses in the survey explore a central question: how are Mormon feminists responding to the Mormon Digital Awakening? In order to understand this question, four related sub-questions are addressed:

Who are Mormon feminists?

What do Mormon feminists believe?

How do Mormon feminists feel about Mormon feminist activism?

How do Mormon feminists feel about recent changes in LDS Church policy?

Literature Review

Previous scholarship has addressed the internet-based Mormon feminist movement that emerged in 2004 and continues to grow.[12] Most scholarly discussions of contemporary Mormon feminism and its role on the internet occur during conferences, and while some are audio-recorded, they remain unpublished.

Several articles address the existence of Mormon feminism, which many see as an oxymoron.[13] Hoyt explores Mormon theology and identifies room for feminism while acknowledging that certain types of feminism set religious Mormon women at odds with some of their fundamental beliefs, such as rigid gender roles.[14] Vance traces the evolution of gender roles in LDS Church periodicals, showing that Mormon ideas about women were more expansive—encouraging participation in education, politics, and professional work—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but had moved away from that position by the 1940s.[15] Mihelich and Storrs[16] examine how Mormon women navigate

the perceived conflict between education and traditional gender roles in the LDS Church, while Merrill, Lyon, and Jensen[17] find that higher education does not act as a secularizing influence on LDS men and women. Avance[18] addresses official LDS Church language and rhetoric in discussions of modesty.

Anderson[19] investigates the place of women in scripture, specifically in uniquely Mormon scripture such as the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. She states that the lack of women in such scriptures is a hindrance to women feeling fully integrated in the Church. In a separate article, Anderson[20] outlines feminist problems associated with a lack of understanding about Heavenly Mother, the eternal companion of God the Father in Mormon cosmology, emphasizing that this makes many LDS women unsure of their own eternal fates.

Young[21] addresses the LDS Church's role in the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, while Bradley[22] exhaustively chronicles the same subject in a lengthy book, which Vance[23] describes as "[the] most significant examination of recent Mormon women and history."

Chadwick and Garrett[24] look for patterns of employment and religiosity among Mormon women, concluding that full-time work negatively affects religiosity and that "[s]tronger religious beliefs were related to lower labor force participation." Chadwick, Top, and McClendon's[25] extensive, multi-staged study on teenage and young adult Mormons spanning seventeen years and three countries is the largest study of its kind with more than 5,000 participants. It includes interviews with unmarried mothers in Utah and a survey of former LDS Church missionaries in the United States. Beaman's interviews with twenty-eight Mormon women reveal diversity among that group, which includes feminists.[26]

McBaine's interview transcripts show the diversity of Mormon women living outside the United States.[27] Bushman and Kline's collected essays focus on themes gathered from a large body of interviews with Mormon women,[28] while Hanks's compilation and analysis of Mormon feminist voices reveal their self-confessed or asserted feminist identity from Mormon origins to the 1990s.[29] These studies, as well as the Beaman article, allow Mormon women to speak for themselves.[30]

Methods

Data collection for this study was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, the investigators created an online survey using Google Forms and invited Mormon feminists aged eighteen and older to participate. For the purposes of this study, a Mormon feminist is anyone who identifies as such or who considers him- or herself to be both a feminist and a Mormon. Links to the survey were posted on social media sites associated with Mormons and Mormon feminism, including blogs and Facebook groups. Owing to the hidden nature of the Mormon feminist population, this study employed snowball sampling. The survey was posted on July 7, 2013, at 5:00 p.m. MDT and closed on July 14, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. MDT. The following blogs posted links to the survey: Feminist Mormon Housewives, The Exponent, Mormon Women Scholars' Network, Nickel on the 'Nacle, and Modern Mormon Men. The investigators posted a link to the survey on the following Facebook groups on July 7, 2013: Young Mormon Feminists, Feminist Mormon Housewives, fMh in the Academy, MoFAB, All Enlisted, Exponent II group, Mormon Stories Sunday School Discussion, The Mormon Hub, A Thoughtful Faith Support Group (Mormon / LDS), Supporters of Ordain Women, Mormon Feminists in Transition, MO 2.0, Exploring Sainthood Community | Mormon/LDS, and Mormon Stories Podcast Community. Tracking of social media was not possible in this study.

The purpose of this survey was to gather a broad range of data unavailable in other studies, including the size of the online Mormon feminist community, demographic information, reports of public and private religiosity, feelings about current gender roles, and reactions to recent Mormon feminist activism and policy changes in the LDS Church. Owing to the complex interaction of feminism and religion, this survey contained both open-ended and closed questions, allowing for a more complete understanding of the quantitative data sets. The investigators reviewed the survey (n=1,862) to ensure that respondents understood the bounds of the study and removed three individuals who were too young to participate. Google Forms provided an analytic tool for the closed questions. The open-ended questions were analyzed in order to

identify common themes, tone, and depth of responses. This information was used to create a qualitative codebook to ensure inter-coder agreement. The spreadsheet results were converted to a database and queried using SQLite.

Analysis of the data led to the creation of a second survey to reach a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of Mormon feminist identity and experience. One hundred of the initial respondents participated in follow-up interviews via email. Selection of these respondents was based on the diversity of their responses in order to counter the potential bias of snowball sampling. The interviews consisted of twelve open-ended questions relating to respondents' personal definitions of Mormon feminism, feminist awakening, interactions with other Mormon feminists online, Church background and activity, further responses to the Mormon Digital Awakening, consequences of participating in Mormon feminism, and hopes for the future. Fifty-four follow-up responses were received, which were examined for quality, reliability, and consistency. Five were removed due to duplication and two for blank responses. The remaining forty-seven responses were analyzed, and primary and secondary codes were developed to ensure inter-coder agreement, allowing for the identification of recurrent themes and patterns.

Findings

Demographics

The existing literature does not provide an estimate of the size of the Mormon feminist population. This survey specifically targeted Mormon feminists who use social media. The respondents were overwhelmingly female (81 percent) with a significant minority of males (19 percent). They ranged in age from eighteen to seventy-seven, with 79 percent aged forty or younger. Ninety-five percent resided in the USA and the remainder in nineteen other countries. Ninety-one percent identified as white/Caucasian. Mormon feminists are highly educated, with 79 percent of respondents holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Their pre-tax household income

levels were spread relatively evenly across all brackets, except that 24 percent report a yearly income above $100,000.

Forty-two percent of respondents work full-time and 16 percent work part-time. Nineteen percent were stay-at-home parents, of whom 98 percent were female and 2 percent male. Sixty-two percent of respondents were parents, with numbers of children ranging from one to eleven. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported that they were married and have been sealed in an LDS temple (see Table 1), compared with 45 percent of Utah-based Mormons.[31] Mormons believe that the sealing ceremony binds couples for eternity together with their children or future children. Being married and sealed in a temple reflects a Mormon ideal.

Marital Status (n=1,813)	Percentage
Single	20%
Married (sealed in the temple)	65%
Married (not sealed in the temple)	6%
Separated	0%
Divorced	3%
Divorced (remarried and sealed in the temple)	1%
Divorced (remarried, not sealed in the temple)	1%
Cohabiting	1%
Widowed	1%
Other	1%

Table 1

Religiosity

Eighty-seven percent of respondents were baptized at the age of eight, the typical age for baptism in the LDS Church, and likely grew up in LDS families. Several previous studies have suggested, directly or indirectly, that Mormon feminists are inactive Mormons.[32] This was found to be untrue. Eighty-one percent of respondents attended church at least two or three times per month

(see Table 2), compared with 77 percent of US-based Mormons, who reported attending church once a week,[33] though it is important to note that people often over-report church attendance.[34] Seventy-one percent held current callings, and 97 percent have held a calling in the last ten years. Rather than simply attending church, a majority of respondents was engaged with their local Church communities.

Church Attendance (n=1,858)	Percentage
I attend church every week	55%
I attend church nearly every week	19%
I attend church 2–3 times a month	7%
I attend church once a month	3%
I attend church a few times a year	6%
I attend church church once a year	1%
I do not attend church	8%

Table 2

The survey asked respondents about their beliefs, requesting them to check boxes next to statements with which they agreed. These questions were drawn from Chadwick and Garrett's study,[35] which found that three-quarters of women strongly agreed with all of the belief statements and that the remaining quarter fell into a category which they labeled "less than very strong belief."

Mormon feminists who use social media today have a different belief profile. Fifty-six percent of respondents checked all of the boxes, indicating that they have a very high degree of belief (see Table 3). Eight percent did not check any box, indicating that they do not have beliefs associated with the core tenets of the LDS Church. This group included 152 respondents, of whom 32 percent were male and 67 percent female, with one percent not reporting their gender. Surprisingly, 43 percent of those with no belief attended church at least two to three times per month. This may be an indication of social pressure

to conform to Mormonism or of the benefits of belonging to a religious community.

Level of Belief (n=1862)	Percentage
None	8%
Low	15%
Moderate	10%
High	11%
Very High	56%

Table 3

Belief (n=1,710, excludes respondents with no belief)	Percentage
There is a God	98%
There is life after death	97%
Jesus is the divine son of God	90%
I have the opportunity to be exalted in the celestial kingdom (heaven)	78%
Joseph Smith Jr. was a true prophet	75%
The Book of Mormon is the word of God	75%
The Doctine & Covenants contains revelations from God	73%
The Church today is guided by prophet/revelation	70%
Thomas S. Monson is a true prophet of God	70%
The LDS Church is the restored church	69%

Table 4

Another way to view the data is to examine the percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement (see Table 4). The three statements of belief held in common with many other Christian denominations received much higher percentages of agreement than the other statements. The three statements with

the lowest agreement are uniquely Mormon beliefs associated with how respondents perceive the Church's actions today.

Issues of Mormon Feminism

Mormon feminism is not clearly defined in the literature. When asked, the respondents repeatedly defined Mormon feminism as an active and faithful search for equality inside the LDS Church. One respondent offered this definition:

> Finding nobility, beauty, and empowerment in uniquely LDS doctrines about gender: the existence of a Heavenly Mother, godhood as a partnership between men and women, the body (both male and female) as a gift from God that is necessary for eternal progress, and an interpretation of the Fall in which Eve plays the role of a courageous risk-taker who chose to sacrifice paradise for her family. . . .

Beyond the definition of Mormon feminism, the investigators explored the personal narratives of the individuals regarding how they had come to identify themselves as Mormon feminists. The personal stories of Mormon feminists are compelling because their journeys into feminism typically begin with the orthodox practice of Mormonism. These individuals express tension between Mormon belief and the practice of gender in the LDS Church. The following are samples of selected responses by women:

> It was a process. Two years ago, I would have regarded someone who believed in female ordination [as] an apostate. As I continued on in my personal study of scripture and Church history, some things just didn't make sense to me. I felt the Lord directing me to questions and conversations that made me really think about my place in the Church. As I moved into a family ward from a student ward, I was called as a 2nd counselor in the Young Women's presidency. I started experiencing negative effects of gender inequality and the Church. As I considered these experiences and brought them in prayer to my Heavenly Father, I felt very strongly that He did not regard me differently as a female. I felt the church leadership as a whole did, though. That struck

> me as off. The more I discussed my questions and feelings, the more I realized that the LDS church, for all it's [sic] restored truths, was missing feminism.
>
> What really got me asking questions was one day when my husband and I had an argument in which he insisted that I didn't respect his Priesthood authority and that since he was the man, I had to do whatever he said. On a separate occasion, a man treated me to a discourse about how women are less capable of spiritual growth than men because they don't have the Priesthood. I defended myself by saying that I made the exact same covenants in the temple that he did, but when I took a closer look I realized that this is not entirely true, and doubt crept in. I know in my heart that what they said can't be true, but it was shocking to encounter men in the church who felt that way.

The respondents have other concerns regarding the treatment of women in the LDS Church. These include the fact that the Relief Society, the LDS Church's women's organization, lacks autonomy, and respondents feel their potential is undervalued. Many respondents observed similar problems in the youth organizations, noting a funding disparity between the Young Men and Young Women programs. Their reported observations included a lack of leadership training and meaningful service opportunities for young women and rhetoric about modesty that respondents felt was shaming and objectifying. Others noted problems such as equating womanhood with motherhood but without support or respect for the challenges of motherhood, including public breastfeeding, the absence of infant changing tables in men's bathrooms, the poor quality of nursing facilities in Church buildings, and not emphasizing or preparing men for fatherhood.

LDS temple ceremonies also cause difficulties for many respondents. Problematic policies mentioned include: prohibiting women from remarrying and having a new sealing unless they receive a cancellation of their previous sealing from the First Presidency (the highest governing body in the Church), no possibility of civil marriages immediately preceding a temple

sealing in the US and Canada, and the placement of men as intermediaries between women and God in temple ceremonies. As they do not hold the priesthood, women are excluded from some Church councils and many leadership positions. Even when the Church makes policy changes that seek to restore a gender balance, the conservative nature of local leadership may prevent these changes from being enacted. Some respondents reported that Church teaching does not emphasize the mission and message of Christ. Others expressed concerns about the lack of transparency regarding Church finances and history, specifically regarding greater roles for women in the past.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is unusual in that it does not have a professionally-trained leadership. Since 1978, all men aged twelve and older have had the opportunity of being ordained to the priesthood,[36] which confers administrative and ritual authority. In 2006, an American religious survey reported that only nine percent of Mormon women and 53 percent of men were in favor of women holding ecclesiastical office in the LDS Church.[37] The current study tried to capture the prevailing opinions of Mormon feminists and asked a similar question. Eighty-four percent of respondents reported a belief that women would, at some point, hold the priesthood (see Table 5). Mormon feminists, at much higher rates than a random sample of Mormon women, believe that women will be ordained.

Whether in this life or the next life, do you believe that women will some day hold the priesthood?	Percentage
Yes, in this life and in the next life	43%
Yes, but only in the next life	14%
Yes, but only in this life	2%
No, I do not think that women will some day hold the priesthood	16%
I feel that women already hold the priesthood	26%

Table 5

Identifying as a Mormon feminist often imposes a heavy social cost, and 56 percent of respondents reported that they have experienced negative consequences as a result of expressing feminist views. The most common are social ostracism, loss of callings, loss of friendships, exclusion from the temple, and family pressure. Several respondents shared the various consequences they have experienced.

> The most negative experiences that I have faced deal with [M]ormon men being taught that women who are educated and pursuing careers do not want to get married or would not be good mothers. I've been told by over 50 men who I dated that my PhD from Harvard was a selfish pursuit. I've been told that "You are the most Christ-like person I have met, but you don't know your role as a woman. I could never marry a woman who doesn't follow her role." I served a mission. I kept the rules. I also followed my talents and directives of my blessings. I believe God is pleased with my efforts. But the Proclamation on the Family has been used to hurt me countless times. The way that the Church has stressed gender roles has hurt me badly enough that it challenges my belief in the organization. (female respondent)

> I was taken off the program to speak at church and pulled into my bishop's office for a meeting. While he expressed a desire to understand, his demeanor and comments were anything but understanding. I felt belittled and very small in that room. I have struggled with not wanting to attend church since this happened. The views I expressed were simple concerns about some things that I experienced in the Young Women's program and hopes that these things would not happen to my daughters. (female respondent)

> I was in a student ward at BYU. As a result of my comments, the bishopric refused to speak with me about anything. (male respondent)

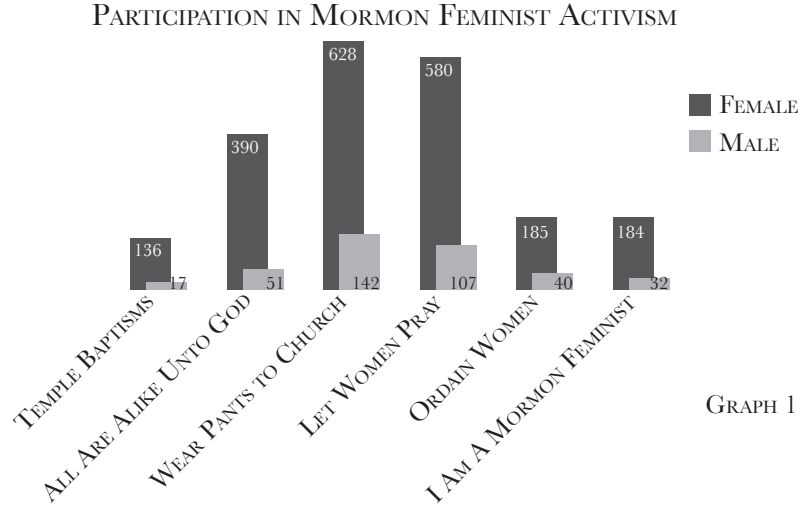
> My non-feminist wife is upset with me. (male respondent)

Activism

Blogs emerged in the mid-2000s, and Mormon feminists created new spaces in which to discuss feminism semi-anonymously, helping assuage some of their fear. It would take eight years of blogging and using social media before Mormon feminists engaged in their first activist movement (see Graph 1). This was simple in its aim: to attempt to document the various policies regarding menstruating young women and their participation in temple baptisms. When asked why individuals participated, many women shared personal experiences of feeling humiliated, dirty, confused, and seen as unworthy as a result of these policies.

> I had a negative experience nearly 30 years ago as a Young Woman at the Salt Lake Temple, where a matron asked any menstruating girls to step out of the baptism line. We were told they were "unclean" and couldn't do baptisms. I was already having a hard enough time emotionally and physically dealing with my new cycles. I didn't need being told I was spiritually unfit thrown on top of that. (female respondent)

> I have 4 daughters, the oldest of which is 13. I never want her to experience the public shaming perceived by others I've heard of on FMH (Feminist Mormon Housewives), Facebook and elsewhere (male respondent).



Graph 1

Readers of the blog Feminist Mormon Housewives contacted temple officials at a large number of LDS temples. They requested information regarding specific policies on the participation of menstruating women and girls in temple baptisms, which are performed by immersion in pools of chlorinated water. The LDS Church responded with an official statement clarifying the policy: "The decision of whether or not to participate in baptisms during a menstrual cycle is personal and left up to the individual."[38] Eighty-two percent of those who were aware of the temple baptism action regarded it as successful.

On the heels of the temple baptisms, a petition was started, titled "All are Alike unto God" from a scripture found in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 26:33). It called for a series of changes similar to those identified in the issues of Mormon feminism in this paper, allowing people to sign their names in support. The following is a response about why this supporter chose to sign the petition.

> I have [a] very strong feeling that the Church needs to make changes in regards to gender equality and with inclusion as a whole. I agree with all the goals set by the petition and the realization of these would make the Church a nicer place to be. My heart and spirit tells [sic] me that I am equal to any man. I was ready to leave the church and remember crying my heart out to my Heavenly Parents. I asked them to let me know if I really was unequal to the men in my life, if that was my destiny—to not have the ability to lead and make decisions that were important to my family. My heart was flooded with such comfort and reassurance that any cultural inequality in the church did not reflect my actual standing as one of God's children and that I should be patient as things changed. I feel like every step we make toward giving women a greater voice make [sic] our church continually more inclusive and better for women and families. So, I was happy to add my voice to ask for more voice for women in the church.

The petition received 1,035 signatures. Forty percent of participants in the current survey reported feeling that it had been a successful campaign and 24 percent had participated.

On December 5, 2012, Stephanie Lauritzen responded to two recent articles questioning the logic of Mormon feminists.[39] Four days later, the group All Enlisted launched a Facebook page, Wear Pants to Church Day, scheduling an event for Sunday, December 16, 2012.[40] There is no official prohibition against women wearing pants to church. In 1971 the First Presidency issued a statement specifically permitting the wearing of pants and admonishing members not to be judgmental.[41] In response to Wear Pants to Church Day, Scott Trotter, an official LDS Church spokesman, stated that members are simply encouraged to wear their best to Sunday meetings.[42]

However, there are strong cultural expectations in many LDS communities that women should wear skirts or dresses to Sunday meetings.[43] The intention of Wear Pants to Church Day was to encourage a small push against Mormon culture. The public backlash included insults, the questioning of faithfulness, and death threats.[44] Many respondents stated that they had previously been unsure about participating but that the hateful comments moved them to action. The first response below expresses one woman's powerfully conflicting experience of Mormon feminist action. The second response is from a man who wants his daughter to be treated equally.

> This is the one event I participated in openly, and it scared me to death. I participated mostly in response to the vitriol I read from members of the church against the movement online. I could not believe what I read. It is sickening and terrifying to know that people in your ward—maybe even people you think of as friends—might see you as unworthy or a tool in Satan's hand, might wish you gone from the church if they knew you had unorthodox views about women's position in the church. I had mixed feelings about the efficacy of the campaign, but I felt it important to stand up to such violent expressions of hatred. I wanted to be sure that if any women in my ward had been reading the things I had been reading or had doubts about women's role in the church and wondered if anyone at all was on their side, that they had at least one person in the ward they could talk to.

> I had 3 boys, but when our daughter was born, I started to see the world in a whole new light. I tried to see the world through the eyes of this little girl, and it seemed like there were so many things that were so blatantly unequal and unfair to her, just because she is female. And to see what she is going to walk through as a girl growing in and through Mormonism . . . there's just a lot that is so un-Christlike. I can't change all this, I can't change the situation, but I'm aware and I see it and I'm going to try to make it better for her.

Forty-two percent of respondents to the survey said that they had participated in Wear Pants to Church Day. Forty percent of the survey respondents thought that Wear Pants to Church Day had been successful. Of those who participated, 80 percent felt that the action was successful.

After Pants, a letter-writing campaign called Let Women Pray sought to address the lack of women praying at General Conference, the semi-annual Church-wide meeting. The 2010 revisions of the *Church Handbook of Instructions 2* specifically permits women and men to say opening and closing prayers in church meetings.[45] The letters were addressed to members of the First Presidency, the Twelve Apostles, the Relief Society General President, and the Young Women General President. Women speak at General Conference, though their numbers are small; however, a woman had never prayed in 182 years of General Conference proceedings.[46]

Thirty-seven percent of survey respondents participated in Let Women Pray. The following are examples of why people chose to participate.

> I participated because it breaks my heart that so many people hadn't noticed, and even more people got upset at the idea of asking for women to pray. (female respondent)

> Because sisters—especially our young sisters—needed to know that they, too, can call up God for the good of the church. And not feel like being a woman in God's church is to be a second-class citizen. (female respondent)

> My teenage daughters were embarrassed by my Pants to Church [sic] participation, so the Pray campaign was a good way to show them why I had done so. (male respondent)

Ninety-eight percent of those who participated in Let Women Pray felt that it had been successful, and two women did pray during General Conference in April 2013.[47]

The Ordain Women movement strikes at the heart of Mormon theology: the priesthood. Although the Mormon priesthood has a long history of adaptation, it is seen as the backbone of Mormon male identity.[48] The issue of ordination is highly contentious even within the Mormon feminist community. The Ordain Women movement began with a website allowing individuals to post profiles stating why they support female ordination. Only 12 percent of respondents had participated in Ordain Women. The following are two examples of respondents' reasons for participating.

> There was an elderly woman in a previous ward I was in who, whenever the 1978 revelation about black members was mentioned in class, she would always comment about how happy she and her neighbors were when they heard about it. She said they ran out into the streets. She proudly told this story many times in that ward and I silently swore to myself that I would share the same story when I am old: that my neighbors and I ran and shouted and danced in the streets when women received the priesthood. So when the opportunity came to participate in Ordain Women, I made sure I was there with the first 16 profiles. I am all in. (female respondent)

> Performing priesthood ordinances for my children is the pinnacle of my religious experience. There is nothing I desire more than for my wife to join me in those experiences and for my daughters to grow up having the same spiritual experiences that are available to their brothers. I also see significant additional good that will come to church by including women within leadership roles that require priesthood authority. For example, I currently serve as a bishop. My ability to guide the ward would be greatly improved if I had one or more female counselors. (male respondent)

The reasons stated for not participating were similar to those for previous actions: fear, social cost, incomplete formation of opinions, discomfort with petitioning the LDS Church, and discomfort with the inherent inequality in a priesthood in contrast to a priestesshood. Nineteen percent judged it a success, but many respondents stated that it was too soon to determine success.

"I'm a Mormon Feminist" was inspired by the LDS Church's "I'm a Mormon" television and social media campaign. It was similar in that it provided a webpage for individuals to post personal profiles explaining why they are Mormon feminists. Within the LDS Church, feminism has negative connotations and is seen as anti-family and anti-motherhood,[49] but this campaign tried to combat such ideas. One participant stated his motivation:

> I wanted to show solidarity with other similar-minded people who believe that cultural practices limiting the roles and behaviors of males and females solely on the basis of sex are harmful to all. As a male Mormon feminist, I also wanted to highlight how gendered cultural practices harm males and females, and participating in the "I'm a Mormon Feminist" campaign was a way to help highlight this.

Fewer survey participants (59 percent) were aware of the "I'm a Mormon Feminist" campaign than any other Mormon feminist campaign.

Responses to Changes in the LDS Church

In recent years the LDS Church has altered Church policy and procedures to reduce some of the inequality. The survey participants were asked whether local leaders include women in their wards, with 58 percent selecting "Yes, they feel that their local leaders include women in ward-level decisions." The survey then asked participants specifically about their interactions with local Church leaders in expressing feminist concerns. Sixty-two percent of respondents said that they had shared their concerns with local leaders. Of these, 37 percent said that they had been heard and that their leader had made changes.

Several respondents reported transformational experiences as a result of participating in Mormon feminist activism. They describe their decision to participate or their actual participation using the same language employed by many Mormons to describe faith experiences.

> I was very conflicted even up until the night before about whether to wear trousers or purple. My daughter was aware of the campaign however; it was only when I climbed into bed the night before that a feeling of calm came over me. I knew I was going to wear trousers, needed to wear trousers. Both for myself, to break out of the constraints I felt binding me, and had been chafing under for years, and especially for my daughter, who needed to see me break out, and not continue as [a] partner in my own imprisonment. I've pretty much been wearing trousers ever since, and it's like I'm a different person. More outgoing, happier, more confident. Not so crushed. And I'm really surprised that's the case.
>
> This has been a problem for me since I came to activity in the church at age 14. This campaign was an answer to prayer for me. As a woman, I have always felt unequal in the church, and this was a way to step out and become actively involved in what I believe is the crucial means for women achieving equality.
>
> It was a really special experience to write letters directly to people who had indirectly played a significant role in my religious experience. People whose talks I had read and read frequently throughout high school and hard times in college. It was meaningful for me to make my case to them and prayerfully ask them to let women pray.
>
> I initially didn't want to do it, because I thought it brought an element of triviality to legitimate pain and hurt that many Mormons and Mormon Feminists feel every Sunday. But, after seeing the backlash on the Facebook event page I decided to participate not only to stand in solidarity with other Mormon Feminists but also

> to demonstrate to anyone in my own ward who may have had similar feelings as those who were actively attacking the event that there are Mormon Feminists everywhere, and that we are normal, faithful Latter-day Saints.

The first respondent describes conflicting feelings and then a resolution that brings freedom and happiness. The second describes activism as an answer to prayer. The third felt a positive connection with religious leaders as she petitioned them. The fourth felt strength as she stood up for what she believed. These kinds of narratives appear throughout Mormon scripture, conference talks, and literature. It is important to note that these women are not describing their activism in rebellious terms but in faithful terms, as an extension of their religious belief.

LDS Church Policy Changes

In February 2010 the Church issued new *General Church Handbooks of Instructions*, the codified policy of the Church and its leaders. The new edition explicitly states that women are allowed to give opening and closing prayers in any meeting.[50] Some local congregations had previously applied a rule that only those who held the priesthood could give opening prayers. Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed responded positively to this change and nine percent were unaware of it. Another change to the *Handbook* was a formal invitation to Relief Society presidents, the women in charge of the local women's organization, to attend meetings of the Priesthood Executive Committee, previously reserved for men.[51] Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that this was a positive change and 15 percent were unaware of it.

During the October 2012 General Conference, missionary ages were lowered from twenty-one to nineteen for women and from nineteen to eighteen for men. The respondents were surveyed on their feelings about the recent age change. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive (85 percent) regarding the reduction of the missionary age for women. Only 47 percent felt positively about the age reduction for men. With these changes, the LDS Church also created leadership positions for female missionaries.[52]

In March 2013 the LDS Church released a new edition of the scriptures exclusively online.[53] These add context to improve the headings in the Doctrine and Covenants and Official Declarations, which are part of the canon of LDS scripture. The new headings give greater historical context and nuance to issues of Church history, especially polygamy. Forty-seven percent of respondents reported feeling positive about the changes.[54]

In January 2013 the LDS Church released new teaching manuals for the youth, incorporating a new format intended to create more conversation. The Church removed gendered material, but the Young Women manuals still use passive language.[55] Forty-five percent of respondents were positive about the changes and another 25 percent were unsure.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents agreed that women's praying in General Conference was the most positive recent change in the LDS Church. The Church has created the website www.mormonsandgays.org in an attempt to clarify its stance on homosexuality. Of those who responded, 48 percent had positive feelings about the website. The LDS Church has also created the website Revelations in Context (history.lds.org). The official LDS Sunday School curriculum for 2013 focuses on Church history, and the new website adds context and transparency to the historical narratives found in printed manuals. Surprisingly, 68 percent of those surveyed were unaware of the website.

The survey asked respondents how they feel about recent LDS Church changes as a whole. Fifty-four percent of respondents felt positive about the changes, 43 percent have mixed feelings, and only three percent had negative feelings. This is an unexpectedly positive result. Seventy-four percent of respondents felt positive about future changes that they believe the LDS Church will make regarding gender inclusiveness. However, a large number of respondents was unaware of recent changes, perhaps showing that the LDS Church does not publicize changes effectively or does not want to be perceived as caving to social pressure.

The respondents were asked what they would like to see in the Church. They reported the same concerns raised in the Issues of Mormon Feminism section above and wanted changes related

to those issues. When asked which event of the Mormon Digital Awakening was most meaningful, the respondents cited Let Women Pray and Wear Pants to Church Day with a few references to LDS Church policy changes. The only meaningful policy change identified was the lowering of the missionary age for men and women. Policy changes in the LDS Church require the consensus of its two top governing bodies, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a total of 15 individuals.[56] The difficulty in achieving consensus perpetuates the conservative nature and slow pace of change in the LDS Church. Mormon feminists and outsiders may perceive the rate of change as being to be too slow,[57] but the LDS Church is changing and appears to be moving in a more moderate direction.

Conclusion

In December 2012, *Jezebel* ran an article by Katie J. M. Baker titled "Mormon Women are 'Admired' But Still Not Equal."[58] Baker asks, "So how can self-described feminists also be Mormon?" The problem with this question is that it makes several assumptions and lacks nuance, ignoring the great diversity present in Mormonism and feminism and the role of the internet. Perhaps Baker is suggesting that Mormon women, who participate in a rigid patriarchal system, do not have agency, a notion refuted by Hoyt in her chapter on the subject.[59] The question also shows a lack of familiarity with the doctrines and history of Mormonism, which contain many examples of feminism in action and illustrate that there is plenty of room for feminism in Mormon theology. It ignores the fact that many men and women are living out answers to this question and that their numbers appear to be growing.

This study challenges typical views of Mormon feminists and shows them to be believing and active in their local Church communities. Mormon feminists are caught in a difficult situation. Orthodox Mormons are telling them that their position is not authentic and mainstream feminists are telling them that their position is not valid. Mormon feminists are not a problem to be solved but a solution to a problem that is being addressed too slowly.

Numerous reports indicate that people are leaving the LDS Church in increasing numbers,[60] and evidence suggests that gender issues play a role.[61] Structures and attitudes in the LDS Church mainly serve orthodox believers. Mormons are encountering material online that challenges traditional ideas of LDS history, practice, and culture, causing some to doubt or abandon their faith.

Current Mormon culture emphasizes a black-and-white, all-or-nothing approach to belief. When orthodox Mormons encounter challenges to their faith, they may end up leaving as a result of finding a flaw within the teachings or current practices of the LDS Church. Mormon feminists are used to living with questions of faith and Church practice, have experience in navigating this territory, and tolerate a diversity of belief. They have the tools to help others who are experiencing these tensions and feelings of ambivalence and are able to serve as missionaries for the middle ground of Mormonism.

When organizations are new, they are quite open and engage in building bridges and welcoming outsiders.[62] As time goes by, organizations fall into an in-group/out-group bonded structure, which is often necessary for survival. They need to begin building bridges again as they mature. Unfortunately, organizations often create systems that slow the bridging process.[63] Without bridging, they become brittle and bureaucratic.[64] The solution lies in adaptation. Groups of ordinary people are adept at restructuring well-established paradigms, creating diversity, and fostering dialogue within their communities.[65] Mormon feminists fulfill these roles by addressing issues of belief and patriarchy that are taboo in orthodox Mormon circles. This study shows that Mormon feminists are well-positioned to assist the LDS Church in ministering to both orthodox and unorthodox members.

Notes

1. Some other groups also refer to themselves as Mormons, but this paper will use the term only to refer to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or those closely associated with the Church and its members.

2. Deseret News, *Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013).

3. Bruce A. Chadwick and H. Dean Garrett, "Women's Religiosity and Employment: The LDS Experience," in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, edited by James T. Duke (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 401–24; Amy Hoyt, "Beyond the Victim/Empowerment Paradigm: The Gendered Cosmology of Mormon Women," *Feminist Theology* 16, no.1 (2007): 89–100.

4. Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

5. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, "Reproducing Patriarchy and Erasing Feminism: The Selective Construction of History within the Mormon Community," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17, no. 2 (2001): 5–37; Elouise Bell, "The Implications of Feminism for BYU," in *BYU Studies* 16, no. 4 (1976): 527–39; Karen Dodwell, "Marketing and Teaching a Women's Literature Course to Culturally Conservative Students," in *Feminist Teacher* 14, no. 3 (2003): 234–47; Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Mormonism and Feminism?" in *Wilson Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1991): 30–32; Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women*; Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

6. Lori G. Beaman, "Molly Mormons, Mormon Feminists and Moderates: Religious Diversity and the Latter Day Saints Church," in *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 1 (2001): 65–86.

7. Boyd K. Packer, *Talk to the All-Church Coordinating Council* (May 18, 1993), www.lds-mormon.com/face.shtml (accessed August 30, 2013).

8. Claudia Lauper Bushman and Caroline Kline, eds., *Mormon Women Have Their Say: Essays from the Claremont Oral History Collection* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013); Neylan McBaine and Silvia H. Allred, *Sisters Abroad: Interviews from The Mormon Women Project* (Englewood, CO: Patheos Press, 2013).

9. Jessica Finnigan and Nancy Ross, "'I'm a Mormon Feminist': How Social Media Revitalized and Enlarged a Movement," in *International Journal of Research on Religion* 9 (2013): art. 12.

10. Dodwell, "Marketing and Teaching."

11. Finnigan and Ross, "'I'm a Mormon Feminist.'"

12. Ibid.

13. Basquiat, "Reproducing Patriarchy"; Bell, "Implications of Feminism"; Dodwell, "Marketing and Teaching"; Stack, "Mormonism and Feminism?"; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Border Crossings," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (2003): 1–7.

14. Hoyt, "Beyond the Victim/Empowerment Paradigm."

15. Laura Vance, "Evolution of Ideas for Women in Mormon Periodicals, 1897–1999," in *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 1 (2002): 91–112.

16. John Mihelich and Debbie Storrs, "Higher Education and the Negotiated Process of Hegemony: Embedded Resistance among Mormon Women," in *Gender and Society* 17, no. 3 (2003): 404–22.

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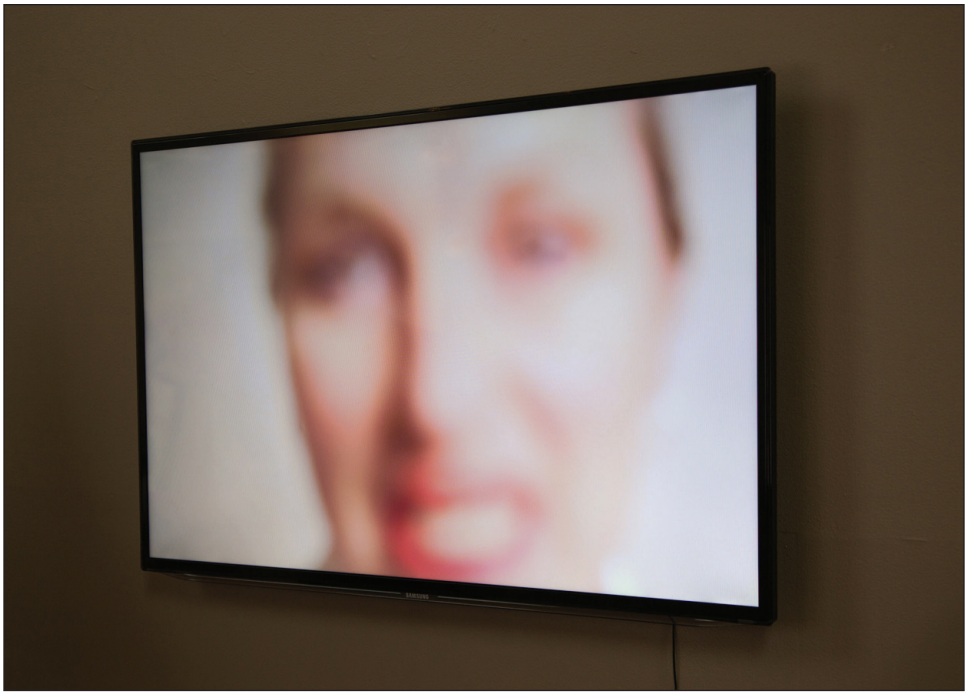
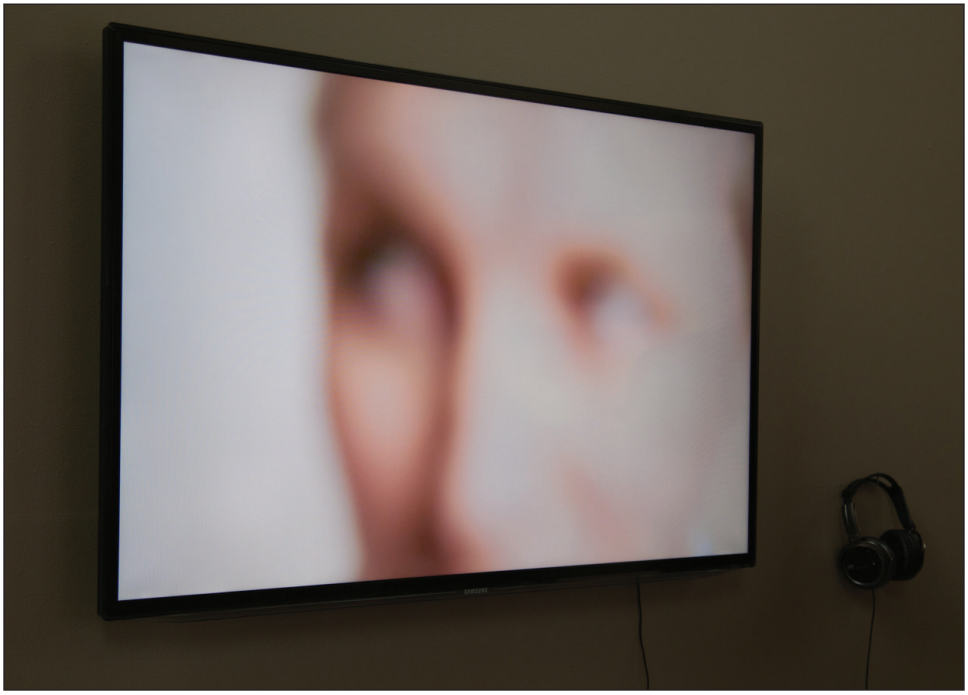


Well Behaved Women
Amy Jorgensen
5:00 minutes, 2 channel HD video
2014

In *Well Behaved Women*, Jorgensen juxtaposes two well-known phrases. "The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain" and "Well behaved women seldom make history." The first phrase, annunciated loudly, is a phonetic exercise used in the film My Fair Lady to teach Eliza Doolittle to transform her once Cockney speech to that of a well-spoken and pleasing lady.

Yet, echoing underneath this confident march of repetition is the haunting whisper of words, "Well behaved women seldom make history." Although a phrase now championed by feminists, it was originally written by Harvard University historian, Laurel



Well Behaved Women
Amy Jorgensen
5:00 minutes, 2 channel HD video
2014

Thatcher Ulrich, a Mormon, to address the lives of colonial women. In this context, the whisper functions as a type of consciousness that references Jorgensen's suffragette ancestor, Edna Berg, undermining the clear public obedience found in Eliza.

The dual monitors facing each other are, in fact, mirror images of Jorgensen herself. But the images are fuzzy, unclear, and the continual repetition of voices over and over, with the vocal intonations shifting, reflects the struggle to balance (or to topple) the learned and performed behaviors women inherit with actions that could inform new identities.

—Laura Hurtado, curator

A Letter to My Mormon Daughters

Courtney J. Kendrick

Dear Ever, Erin, and Iris Eve,

I am writing to you tonight because I think you deserve an explanation from me. The three of you are upstairs asleep, and Daddy is putting Anson to bed by telling him stories about living in the flat canyonlands of southwest Idaho. I hope they will read this letter too, but I am directing this to you. And I am going to publish it before you ever get a chance to read it, but I think you'll know why.

One day you'll probably hear the name Kate Kelly. And you'll probably ask me my thoughts about her and her work with Ordain Women and her subsequent excommunication. Because this is a conversation we'll have some time in the future, I want to write my feelings now as this event is current. Kate's work with Ordain Women started two years ago, her excommunication came last month—its effects are being felt in a huge way tonight as I write this letter.

First, you should know I did my homework. I researched and asked questions and showed up at events so that I could be informed. And this is how it happened.

I met Kate in a funny way. At the very first Ordain Women gathering, I decided to go and check it out. I had several experiences I would call spiritual that led me to believe that ordaining women would be a beautiful, wonderful thing for our church—both for women and men. So when I heard about this group from a media email they sent me, I decided to attend. Aunt Page was really great, and offered to watch you (well, not you Iris because Heaven was watching you) while I drove up to the University of Utah for the gathering. I happened to get there really early (and

you know, I'm never early) and anyway, I found myself in the room with Kate Kelly almost alone before anyone else showed up. We introduced ourselves and I said to her, "You're really brave" and she looked around at all the empty seats and said, "Thanks. I have butterflies." And that was it really, then a flood of people started coming into the room until it was standing room only.

I loved the meeting. There was revival and rejoicing but it had those Mormon pioneer vibes about it. I found myself wishing Relief Society were more like that meeting. Women stood up and bore testimony while expressing genuine emotions and human reaction. There was a lot of love in that room. We sang songs and said prayers and talked about foremothers reaching as far back as the Old Testament.

But I decided not to post a profile on their website, mostly because I wasn't ready to be public with my feelings. And I didn't know how I wanted to portray those feelings. It felt good to me to keep them in my heart.

Six months later my friend Sarah talked me into going to the Relief Society General Meeting with her; we took Frontrunner up to Salt Lake City. Our tickets put us in the balcony in the conference center full of twenty thousand women. Twenty thousand! When I sat down my nose started running and as I rummaged through my purse for a tissue a nice sister two seats away from me handed me a tiny little bit of a napkin. She said she was a reader of my blog and said some really sweet things to me. She was there with her mom (seated next to me) and as I introduced myself I felt like there was something going on that was bigger than I understood.

And then sometime during the meeting, as her mother was taking vigorous notes and she was watching the speaker intently, I knew what was gong on. They were Kate Kelly's sister and mother. Isn't that weird? I just knew them, like I had always known them, even though I didn't know them at all! Then, during the rest hymn I asked, "Are you Kate Kelly's mother and sister?" And they said, yes. I had so much love for them.

This may seem a little silly, the emphasis I am putting into this meeting, but it was really mind-blowing to me—that out of all

those women I was seated next to them. At the time I really felt like it was a sign from a loving God—not a sign to do anything, but a sign that he put us together that night so we could love and encourage one another—which we did after the meeting.

Two years later, I went up to a vigil in Salt Lake City for Kate as her disciplinary council was being held in Virginia. Iris, you came with me this time. It was like a huge family reunion. So many people I loved were there—and we were lucky to meet many new people to love as well. We sang and prayed and supported one another. Like that first meeting, Kate was there (probably with butterflies) and many of us talked about hope. A lot of hope.

The next day I was at Costco when I found out that Kate Kelly had been excommunicated. It felt like someone had kicked me in the stomach. And then I started sobbing—the news made me sad and angry and confused. And Ever, I was late to pick you up from your first day of summer preschool because I was trying to stop crying. You were in the office waiting for me. That made me feel even worse. I am sincerely sorry about that. I'll probably never forget it. (I hope you'll forgive me.)

Second, I want you to know I have a soft spot in my heart for people who bravely live what they feel is ethical and moral, even when it isn›t shared by most of their religious community.

I have known many powerfully spiritual women in my lifetime and most of them are Mormon feminists. Many of these women I met after I had you, Erin. I have been taught by them and loved by them. The closest I ever felt to Jesus was when sweet Joanna Brooks cupped my face in her hands and kissed my cheeks. Some day I will share with you some of the deep, beautiful experiences I have shared with my Mormon feminist friends. I owe them much—they awakened me and brought me out of my stupor of thought. Through them I learned how to heal what made me angry. I learned to feel peace through being proactive.

I want you to know that through the same channels that I felt I should go on a mission, or marry your dad, I also felt like I should pray and hope for women's ordination. I do hope for it. For me and for you and for our favorite person (and neighbor) Jessica and Maya and Mac and even Umi. I pray for it all the

time. I pray for it because God asked me to pray for it. I pray for it because I think ordaining women is a wonderful, progressive, positive, inclusive idea.

I pray for it because it will give women AND men more opportunities to serve in more capacities. Right now, women can't marry people in the temple and men are not Primary presidents. But I know some women who would make poetic temple sealers and I know men who would make the best Primary Presidents. I know women who would be incredibly insightful patriarchs (but we'd have to change that name!) and men who would be amazing compassionate service leaders (hint: your father).

While at the same time, I DO think it's important for men and women (and young men and young women) to have their own time of gathering together with their leaders. I don't want all of the church to disregard to gender entirely. There is a great benefit to being together as women and as men. I feel that every week in Relief Society. One of the joys of my life right now is to conduct our Relief Society meetings and look at the faces of the women I get to know, serve and love. I look forward to it every single week.

Third, it is my belief that Mormon women will not be ordained until Mormon women want to be ordained. Right now, according to at least one poll, Mormon women don't want to be ordained. In the course of my lifetime, I've heard all sorts of reasons—and I've said a lot of them myself—as to why female ordination is a bad idea. Many of the reasons are plausible, some of them are illogical, but I want you three to know I've worked through most of them and they no longer sit right in my heart. The only reason why I think God wouldn't want to ordain women is because the majority of women do not want it.

Many women say they've never felt ill effects of gender inequality in the church. I have a lot of thoughts about this sentiment, but mostly I hope we have many more conversations about this topic. To me, it's very obvious that regardless of how women feel in this organization, the truth is we don't have equal opportunities as women. And having gone through years of infertility, I believe we can do better by women in giving them more opportunities to serve using their skills and talents than relying on biology-based

gender roles and circumstantial relationship statuses. But again, that won't happen until the women are ready to have those conversations. And the miracle of it is that we *are* starting to have those conversations more and more. We do have people like Kate and Ordain Women to thank for that.

But I don't believe God doesn't intend for women to be ordained. There is no scriptural or doctrinal declaration or proof of this concept. And certainly there is no harm in asking and praying for what is in your heart. After all, this is what led to the beginnings of our church—and a pattern we often repeat—ask God for what you desire. Ask, knock, ponder, pray, have faith, have hope. There is no punishment in these things. If all three of you came to me unified in asking for something that you desired—and it was something that was inherently good and safe—I wouldn't turn you down. I think God is the same way.

And for those of us who do want to be ordained, we will carry on in hope. We will practice charity for others and for ourselves. I want you to know where I sit with this issue tonight. It is my desire that by the time you read this letter, and we are talking about this history, you will have the opportunity to be ordained in our church. I want you to know that your mother was one of those who hoped and waited (not always with patience, to be honest, but I'm trying) for that day.

And perhaps if this is the case, you will know that your mother made it public and will probably hear back from many disappointed people, but she couldn't put you to bed one more night without wondering if she were brave enough to write this post. Just like Kate wondered if she could get through that first meeting with all those butterflies fluttering around in her stomach. Just like all the women who came before you who had to step up and say something when they had the option to keep quiet.

One more thing: I decided to tell my ward sisters in a Relief Society lesson I gave that I was struggling with this issue. Afterward, ninety-year-old Nina came up to me and said she didn't get it. Why would these Ordain Women want to be just like men? I told her that wasn't the case—it's a hope for more opportunities for women. She left me by saying, "I guess I need to open my

mind." The next week in Sunday School as we were talking about the Old Testament, she probed the teacher on why women were not allowed into King Solomon's temple. And in that moment I hoped maybe something about our conversation the week before sparked Nina's thoughts toward the plight of women—from past until present. Of course, maybe I am just drawing my own conclusions. But it gave me courage to speak up more often.

Mormonism is our heritage—it's in our bedtime stories and our daily rituals. It's in the way we worship and the way we hope. I am choosing to raise you in this belief system (albeit somewhat non-traditionally) because it can be empowering and enlightening. And I believe we're still shaping our doctrine. Perhaps we've known for quite some time exactly what we want for the men of the church . . . and as for the women? It's my belief that we're just getting started.

Join me?

Love,
Your mom

Mormon Priesthood Against the Meritocracy

Rosalynde Welch

Defenses of the male-only LDS priesthood generally pursue a combination of three approaches: ground the practice in ancient scripture, secure it in Restoration history and tradition, or justify it through its sociological effects on gender culture and family formation in the present day. I think this is probably as it should be. If one is going to mount a reasoned defense of male priesthood beyond a basic appeal to prophetic authority, then scripture, tradition, and gender culture are the right places to begin.

I want to suggest another approach to the question, not primarily to defend our gendered ordination practices—though I am not opposed to such defenses, and find some of them persuasive—but rather to point out one way in which our male priesthood structure organizes the meaning of Mormonism in the present day, and the surprising analytical value that meaning may hold.

The hierarchical, authoritarian nature of the church, with its illiberal orientation toward group roles and obedience over individual right, equality, and freedom—that is to say, everything about the Church that rankles in the context of modern liberal democracy—can provide a set of emotional and intellectual tools with which to examine the buried assumptions of that liberal democracy. The structures of liberalism are so firmly entrenched in the common sense that governs everyday experience in modern America as to become invisible. Indeed, the very project of liberalism is built around the proposition that the public sphere it governs is transparent, objective, and impartial—that is, it conceals no hidden assumptions at all, though this idea is itself a hidden

assumption. Thus even when objections to the "commonsense" tenets of liberal modernity are felt keenly, it can be difficult to find a vocabulary from within liberalism itself to express them. (The contemporary challenges of articulating a comprehensive sexual ethic based on the concept of consent alone—the only concept available from within liberalism to do so—illustrate this difficulty.) Churches that maintain one foot outside the dominant paradigms of modernity can provide the resources for this kind of criticism. Our male priesthood exemplifies this dynamic, by which the apparently illiberal features of a conservative church can usefully destabilize the silently-encroaching paradigms of liberal modernity. Specifically I want to float the idea that the all-male LDS priesthood enacts a critique of the notion of meritocracy that vibrates at the center of the American dream. The notion that equal opportunity will allow the best and brightest from all backgrounds to rise to the top by virtue of hard work has energized the American psyche in forms as various as the Horatio Alger novel and the Oprah Winfrey show. The meritocratic promise has unfolded unevenly, to be sure, and in many ways remains incomplete in the face of intractable race- and class-based inequalities. In many ways, the overarching march of American social history can be seen as the unfinished work of drawing all groups into the meritocracy.

Some contemporary observers, however, are worrying not so much about the incomplete reach of the meritocracy but, on the contrary, about the effects of meritocracy itself. Social mobility is notoriously difficult to assess, but by some measures it has actually decreased in American society since the nation's great institutions flung wide their doors to people of any color, creed, or sex. At best, the new elite simply perpetuates a different kind of family privilege than did the old WASP establishment; at worst, meritocracy may, in fact, reinforce the heartless lottery of inherited genetic advantage that defines the deep history of our species. Whereas the old elite was always vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy and illegitimacy—it was this critique that ultimately brought it down after the second World War, after all—the new elite is more or less secure from critiques leveled in the language of virtuous liberal citizenship: whatever else can be said about them, they probably

do represent the brightest of their generation, and heaven knows that they are trained from over-scheduled childhood to work hard.

Against this backdrop of meritocracy ascendant, an institution like the LDS Church, governed by a priesthood to which women are not admitted solely on the basis of their sex, stands as a puzzle, an affront, or a curiosity. From some perspectives, an all-male priesthood is nothing more than an atavistic institutional carryover from the days of hard patriarchy, sexism pure and simple; from other perspectives, it's a divinely-ordained reflection of the deep cosmic order that secures and connects individuals in a harmonious chain. Either way, a male priesthood is difficult to explain, much less justify, in the language of liberal meritocracy. Indeed, an organization in which an arbitrary half of its membership has no access to institutional authority is the opposite of meritocracy. Leadership and status are not rewards for ability, hard work, or worthiness—they can't be, since many of the most able, dedicated, and worthy members of the church will never hold positions of executive leadership simply by virtue of their female condition. (It's worth noting that earlier rationales for male headship relied on the idea that the curse of Eve rendered women inferior and submissive to men, and thus leadership was indeed a kind of meritocratic reward for men's superior ability and worthiness. But this logic is largely absent from contemporary LDS discourse.)

A male priesthood, then, stands as an enacted rebuttal to the idea that meritocracy is natural, inevitable, or necessary. The encroachment of merit-based thinking into a Christian community would be disastrously corrosive to gospel teachings on humility, love, dignity, and status; one can never win one's mansion above or compete for salvation. There are no merit-based scholarships to heaven. This lesson is especially important for Latter-day Saints, given our own history with tragically mistaken thinking on this topic: Black Saints were once denied access to the priesthood on the false and immoral premise that they did not merit it. This terrible error has had lasting negative consequences for both the good Black Saints who were spiritually injured by the teaching and for the reputation and credibility of the institutional church as a whole. Spiritual meritocracy is poison. The all-male LDS

priesthood, for which no merit-based justification can be offered, reminds us that the kingdom of God is not a meritocracy.

Some readers might see this as an apologia for the LDS priesthood policy, but that's not my intention here. It's neither my job nor my inclination to defend the policy. And even if it were, what a poor justification this would be! I don't believe that the male priesthood was originally established or persists in the present day for the purpose of criticizing notions of inherent spiritual merit; that cultural work, even if what I'm arguing here is right, is a distant second concern to the primary pastoral and administrative functions of priesthood. And even if important social good does come of anti-meritocratic critique embodied in a patriarchal priesthood, who is to judge whether that good offsets the pain and confusion that some women feel as they try to make sense of their own identity in a patriarchal institution? Merely to think in terms of social costs and benefits is to stray back into the technocratic realm of democratic liberalism, and thus into a vocabulary that can't make sense of patriarchy except as illegitimate and abusive.

Instead, I simply want to point out that over time institutional practices can evolve to perform new kinds of cultural work, functions that are often hidden or overlooked. To borrow a word from evolutionary biology, which borrowed it in turn from architecture, the meritocratic critique embodied in a male priesthood is a *spandrel*, a function or feature created indirectly by the interaction of other, more primary functions. Spandrels may be evolutionarily or originally incidental, but over time they can come to perform important work as environments change. If the LDS Church were to go the way of liberal Protestant denominations in ordaining women, so that both women and men could be called to executive leadership positions on their spiritual or administrative merits, a great many sociological, theological, and personal difficulties would be resolved, and this is certainly a development that I would welcome with the bigger half of my heart—though it is not one that I expect or for which I advocate. But such an accommodation would also deprive us of one more intellectual lens that might otherwise provide useful critical views of liberalism's unfinished or unfounded projects. How costly that loss, I can't say.

In Light

Ashley Mae Hoiland

The day the missionaries came to our house in 1988, a rainbow fell across the sky in our neighborhood on the hill. I stood on the ledge of the bathtub and curled my fingers on the windowsill to pull my scrawny body up to see. I could hear their voices, fresh as orange juice, through the open window. The way I see it now, the rainbow is brighter than any rainbow I've seen since. The sky more orange and small. The fresh puddles on asphalt reflect two shimmering missionaries, pressed shirts and black pants, my mom, my dad, my little white-haired brother between them, and somewhere in the background, me, watching it all. Documenting the magic, cataloguing it for some future time. Surely they all came in to eat dinner then, and I reached up on tiptoes and pulled down my best dress, because I always did when the missionaries came, and we must have all celebrated my mom. After so long, she'd decided to be baptized.

The other image that has come back to me recently, and replayed itself like a marionette show, or a little puppet on a string moving forward across the stage, then backwards to start again is this: I am running to the church two blocks away and across a street. My grandparents, who pulled an RV full of poker cards and whiskey into our driveway, were visiting Provo, Utah, for the week. They had no idea where they'd come to. My mom said I didn't need to go to church that week, that it was okay, but as I stood at the front window watching my neighbors click past in heels, swinging scripture bags, something compelled my whole body to the church building. I don't know if I told my parents, or at this point, how much of this story is actually true, but I remember so distinctly the feeling of running a few minutes behind everyone to get where I

was supposed to be. I picture my dress to be yellow. And so I am forever running with blonde hair and a yellow dress. A miniature body housing a gigantic child heart that just wanted to do the right thing. Whether I stopped to put on my shoes in the hurry to love God is something I can't remember. I am still compelled to love God in this inexplicable, even irrational way.

The most difficult words to write are the ones that are my compass. For so long they have been the direction, the movement, however subtle, I trusted. So what to do when you have to step back and articulate north? My husband, a geologist, still uses the glassy compass of his grandfather. I picture both men during their long and solo excursions, under the white spotted, black Nevada sky looking into the cupped object in their hand. Across the span of two generations, they'd both known so many times exactly where to go, where to find safety, how to get home. But my husband says that there are times when you're out in the desert as alone as you might ever be and even a compass cannot assure you that you're going the right way. He says that it's both unnerving and humbling to admit that although you believe in this object pointing you one way, you could be totally lost. It is at these times when you sit in the red sand and pray. You don't necessarily expect an answer, but the call of a night bird, the distant blinking of a star, a warm desert breeze. These are your articulations now: they are hardly words, but symbols of hope nonetheless.

I go to church every Sunday because I love the people and I love the things I grew up knowing. So much of my heart believes what Mormons believe. I practice it. I am awed by it. I am faithful in almost every sense and duty. I love the unintentional community that brings me lasagna when I have a baby and watches my children when I am sick. I love that I can do the same for them. I started to tell my son about Joseph Smith and then stopped at least a dozen times because I didn't know how to rectify the contradictions in my head into a story for a three-year-old. I felt that I should do something though: not rectify, perhaps, but rather tell my son as I could. I did tell him the story of Joseph Smith, as much as he needed to know. I told him because I believe that he deserves a space in this wild world where he can ask for miracles and know they are his for the taking. I will tell my daughter the same.

Leaving the church I grew up in is almost an indigestible thought; it gets caught up somewhere in the space between my ribs and stays there heavy. I don't want to go, and I don't plan to. I love this gospel. Not because I believe every detail of Mormonism, and I don't believe with every fiber of my being, or beyond a shadow of a doubt, but . . . my children, my children, my children. If you were sitting next to me, those words would accompany near tears glistening on the rims of my tired mother eyes. If I did leave, I'd miss it terribly. I would feel sorrow because I believe in promises between myself and a God that I cannot un-know. But I'd find my place because I have thirty years to build from. But my children, how will they know the sacred space that belongs only to a form of consecration, the belief in the impractical and spiritual that serves one so well in all other things, the unique sense of identity that comes from a concrete God who knows you, a prayer on your knees in the deep night, the chance to be obedient because you love someone more than yourself? I know these things surely exist in similar forms elsewhere, but I'm too old, and not sure where to find them.

As a twenty-one-year-old missionary in Uruguay, for eighteen months I was positive that every family I saw on the street, or in a front yard, or on a bus, was the golden family I'd been called to Uruguay to teach the gospel to. So I stopped them, doggedly, and asked if we could come over and share a message, or cut their lawn, or anything, please. I never converted a family to the church and most often they gave me a wrong house number or pretended they didn't hear me. For so long I wondered why I'd felt strongly to talk to each of them, partially looking nothing more than a naive child for a year and a half, but the more I look back on it, the more I realize what a glorious thing to have the chance to love and love and love again with a heart maybe more pure and hopeful than I'll ever have again.

In Sweden we ride the subway and then the train an hour across town to get to the church. We are greeted by old men with firm handshakes, warbling around the lobby. Some of them pull my husband aside later and ask how he reconciles his work as a geologist with the fact that the earth is only 7,000 years old. Absurd stories are sometimes told at testimony meeting and once, in Uruguay, a

woman got so worked up, she fainted and fell backwards into the arms of the bishop who'd jumped up to catch her. I am tired of the mystification of motherhood and the priesthood and I want to talk about Heavenly Mother. I think there is room for improvement in the way we live the gospel. But none of these things seem to matter much when I see my little boy perched on his metal folding chair near the window in his primary class. He is beaming and his legs are swinging and Jesus is there.

When I find him again he has drawn a picture of me, dad, himself and Thea, and one figure I don't know. We have tall lines for legs, big round heads, and more circles for ears. At the top of the page his teacher has written, *I have an eternal family*. And so this world is rife with contradictions of the heart and mind. I am out, then I am in, and so on for weeks, months, and now years. But I never speak much of this to anyone but my husband because I love these people, and I love singing hymns together, and playing the prelude music in Relief Society. I love the missionaries coming for dinner and the deep rich space for divine thought. I'm so grateful to these people, I would cry if I stood up to talk about it.

It is very real, and most honest, this well of feeling and thought from which I pull both glorious senses about this world and what lies beyond, and things I once felt sure of but no longer do. I know, this is no surprise for organized religion; we all go through our dismantling, our terrifying and liberating deconstruction, but then in the aftermath, the reality of staying 100 percent becomes real. The sacrifices are not imagined, they refine at times and bruise at others. When will you tell your children about the questions you have? Belief is no longer a simple, "of course," no matter how long you demand it to be. People are leaving and asking if you will stay. People who hardly know you are asking how you can stay. And you are left standing in a beautiful meadow, staring at your children, praying *what is it you would have me do?* And then a warm rain starts to fall and you stand still because you remember vibrant rainbows from so long ago. You believe in them still, that they were so bright. And the rain falls down your hair, and into your eyes until the whole world shimmers and dances. You stand, thinking of your children and waiting for an answer.

Pornographic

Maren Christiansen

I get up in the morning to go to church. I pull a dress out of my closet, deciding between this or my regular pants, shirt, and tie combination. It's short, six inches above the knees, riding up higher when I sit. It's sleeveless, shows the edges of my shoulders and doesn't cover my armpits. It's striped, black and white, makes me feel curvy and feminine. I wear bicycle shorts underneath it so I don't have to worry about flashing my underwear at anyone. A boy in Young Men's confessed to the bishop last week that he saw a girl's underpants and now our leaders have been trying to correct the way we sit.

I stand by the door, ready to leave. "Your denim jacket is on your bed," my mother says. She wears a skirt that reaches her calves and a shirt that appropriately covers her shoulders.

"I'm not going to wear it," I pull my hair up to show off my hoop earrings.

"You should," she says. Outside it's in the nineties. "It's just a little too much."

I don't argue today and pull on the jacket to cover my arms. Sweat drips down my forehead on the way to the car taking my makeup with it. The many zits that burst up through my meticulously scrubbed face shed their concealment and the red swollen skin now matches my lipstick.

I tug at my jacket.

If you really didn't want to wear the denim, then you should have chosen a different outfit.

The voice in my head is that of my Young Women's teacher, Sister Carlton, from last year. I push the thought away and keep my jacket on. All through Sunday School I sweat, skin itching underneath the fabric. In the hallway on my walk to the Young Women's room, I flap open the denim to cool off.

I sit down among the rows of teenage girls and teachers who wear white tank tops under blouses to hide any crease between breasts, t-shirts under sundresses, leggings under skirts. Layers upon layers, leaving me staring at the only exposed skin in the room: my legs, elongated by wedged heels.

The Young Women's leader teaches an object lesson, as usual, representing some of the most complicated theological questions using a cake plate and a ping-pong ball. "How hard is it to balance the ball on the platter?" she asks a Mia Maid as the girl is instructed to hop on one foot while rocking the plate. The ball bounces off and rolls across the stained carpeting.

"The platter represents the world. And the ping-pong ball is you," chimes our enthusiastic leader. "So what did the jumping symbolize?"

"Earthquakes?"

"No. Sins, earthly temptations." She hands us markers and strips of paper. "I want you to write down a temptation that can rock people from their firm foundations."

"Right," I hold the pen in my hand but don't feel like participating.

The girls all tape the temptations to the cake plate. Five times written in five different handwritings are three words:

NOT DRESSING MODESTLY

Shit.

Then four times written in four different handwritings are two words:

FOUL LANGUAGE

I sigh. My young women's leader jumps on the m-word with a familiar exuberance. Dressing immodestly sends a *bad* message to the Savior and sets a *bad* example for the women around you. And biggest of all, it distracts and tempts righteous young men.

"Hold it," I say. "We're not responsible for the thoughts of boys. Why should they dictate our feelings about our bodies?" The jacket clings to my arms.

"Because, you never know what they're struggling with."

"But that doesn't concern us!" My voice shakes like it always does when confronting someone about something I care about. I regret putting on mascara. Several other girls in the room voice their agreement.

"Yes it does," says Sister Carlton from the back of the room, cutting through the sudden stir. I force myself to turn around and meet her eyes. "I don't like telling stories about people but this is a very appropriate example and I want you to understand . . ." I hate that phrase. Oh, how I hate that phrase, because it has nothing to do with understanding. What it really means is "I want you to conform and stop making a scene."

She goes on, "There was a boy in my old ward. Very sweet boy, but he developed a terrible pornography addiction. His parents established rules to keep him away from it, one of which involved locking up the computer in a glass cabinet when they left him home alone. One night, while his parents were gone, he broke into the glass cabinet because his addiction was so strong. He knew his parents would come home and see it, but he did it anyway."

My face burns. How dare she tell this story! This boy's personal struggle blatantly brandished in front of a group of girls hiding their faces and giggles.

"So you see, showing your body in an immodest way might lead to more inappropriate thoughts for people like that young man." Sister Carlton leans back in her chair and the leader takes over the lesson.

I stare down at my body, the body I haven't ever been able to love. Never skinny enough, never pretty enough, never strong enough. I see it in terms of how I've just been told others see it: calves, thighs, breasts, waist, shoulders, hips, neck, butt, crotch. Every inch dangerous and sinful.

I sit here in this room, sweating because I have to wear a jacket over a dress that doesn't completely cover my shoulders but I can't take it off because some day someone will use me as an example of what not to be, of what a fallen soul looks like, a contrast to the goodness that is those who are "in the world, not of the world."

Why am I consumed by this overwhelming guilt for being born with a body that can never be shown? Why do I feel as if it were me who was individually responsible for that "very sweet boy" breaking the glass cabinet? Why is it my own skin doesn't belong to me?

I hold the marker and instead of naming sins and pointing fingers, draw intricate flowers all over my exposed thighs. When church ends I pull off my jacket and walk outside, feel the cooling breeze on my arms. I begin to take back bits of my skin in these small acts of defiance against an idea that has been ingrained in my head every Sunday of my life. Yet, whenever someone glances at me, I cringe. The paranoia, thinking everyone who looks does so because of either shame or lust, makes me feel sick. At school whenever a boy speaks to me, I unconsciously check to see if it's because my shirt has slid. I'm told that some day I'll marry one such boy. Some day I'll lose my precious, most sacred virginity because it is a "beautifully wrapped present we give our husbands on our wedding night." And what do I become then when it's gone, when I stand exposed in every sense of the word? Less of a person, less loved by God?

Genesis tells that when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge they saw their nakedness and felt ashamed. Something pure in the eyes of God appeared suddenly wicked to man. They covered themselves. We cover ourselves. And we look down on those who don't, make assumptions about how they live, judge their hearts by the skin that they expose, blame them for atrocities that happen to them in back alleys or at parties or college campuses. We fear the addictions caused by the sight of unwholesome flesh and blame our daughters for being born no physically different from the women on the internet who bare their breasts and spread their legs. So we make them hide their similarities. We instill in them the idea that when a patch of skin becomes visible it's vulgar, but when the same area is covered it's "sacred" and "holy." We teach them to have a deep sense of shame and holier-than-thou reasoning to protect them from ever discovering that we women are all still women underneath our clothes.

Today, when I look in the mirror, my body is torn apart into individual weapons of seduction, so much so that I can't see my own shoulders without feeling pornographic.

Standards Night

Ann Cannon

This talk was given at the Canyon Rim Stake, Salt Lake City Standards Night meeting, held on April 23, 2014.

Last spring the daughter of my best friend from graduate school asked if I would speak at her Stake Standards Night. Sophie (whom her mother and I used to call "the Queen of the World" when she was a child) made one request: my talk could NOT be the standard Standards Night talk. She wanted all those young women to walk away from the evening feeling—you know—*upbeat.*

I could relate. I had wonderful Mutual teachers (including my own mother) when I was a teenager, but I hated anything that devolved into another dreaded "chastity talk," even though (truth be told) I was pretty much a straight arrow who wasn't overburdened with guilt on that front. It's just that I wanted to know *why* everybody was so interested in my virginity. And why was it always up to the girl to set boundaries? And please, please, please, why couldn't we just talk about something else for a change? Like the story of Jacob and Esau, for instance.

Just kidding.

No teenage girl is dying to hear a story about a large hairy redhead who loses his birthright. Frankly, I never did like that story because I have issues with mothers who have favorites and with wives who trick blind husbands. I've also never liked the way we interpret the story, i.e. that Esau was a moral pygmy—a very *hungry* moral pygmy—who squandered his future on a bowl of soup (which probably wasn't even good soup, not unlike those just-add-water soups you buy at the soup bar in a grocery store because you don't feel like cooking dinner).

Maybe there's another way to read this story. Could it be that Esau undervalued himself? Maybe he didn't think he was worth more than a bowl of mediocre soup. Who knows? Having a mother who clearly prefers your brother can have that effect.

The point is that it's difficult to value yourself when you're young under the best of circumstances—I certainly didn't—and I would have appreciated some practical information about how to honor myself more as a daughter of God beyond the obvious advice about remaining chaste. Thanks to Sophie, I was able to give a talk I might have paid attention to when I was in high school.

Or not.

I was never very good at listening.

But I did appreciate the opportunity to hand out the following completely unsolicited advice to a group of radiant young women.

1. Do something you're good at.

A few years ago I read a book called *What Happy People Know* by Dan Baker about "the science of happiness." I know. Only in America would we a) study "happiness," and b) call it science. Still, Baker makes the case that happy people lead with their strengths. Painters paint. Engineers engineer. Dancers dance. Too often we focus on the ways we fall short and because we're all about self-improvement as Mormons, we set goals to improve our penmanship or learn how to throw a baseball, just like Heber J. Grant did. (After our Sunday School teacher told us this story, one of the boys asked if Heber J. Grant autographed baseballs when he grew up. The teacher was not amused.)

This impulse is admirable, of course, but do we sometimes stress it at the expense of encouraging one another to embrace our talents and run like crazy with them? I don't know. On the other hand, we all know that it's tremendously satisfying to do those things that we do well.

2. And as long as we're talking about leading with our strengths, why not notice what other people are good at and praise them.

The trick here, of course, is not to let jealousy take over if someone excels at something you'd like to be good at, too. I remember

hearing Shannon Hale (author of *The Goose Girl* and *Princess Academy)* talk about her grandmother who always said that indulging in jealousy was like drinking poison and expecting it to hurt the other person.

I used to say that jealousy isn't my besetting sin. I still don't think it is. HOWEVER. I have come to recognize that the green-eyed monster dogs my footsteps more often than it should. And to that end, I've made a conscious effort to celebrate other people's successes with phone calls, notes, flowers, chocolate. This makes them feel good, of course, and it makes me feel good, too.

3. Don't let others define who you are—especially if that definition is a negative one.

I have a friend whose interests weren't academic when he was growing up. They still aren't. The problem is that both of his parents were professors, and the message he received from them (unintentionally, I'm sure) is that his gifts were inferior. It's hard to avoid labels when we're growing up. It's hard to resist labeling others. But embracing the idea at a young age that we don't have to accept those labels seems like a positive move.

4. Exercise.

I'll never forget the day one of my boys asked me which position I played when I was a kid. Catcher? Pitcher? Third baseman? I told him that I never played on a team while I was growing up. Girls didn't play on teams in those days, especially not a boys' team. My son was dumbfounded because he'd gown up playing baseball, soccer, basketball, and even football with girls. If you were an athletic girl in the days before Title IX like I was, you just tried out for cheerleader.

I am so grateful that girls now have more opportunities to engage in athletic opportunities because regular exercise, I believe, is one of those things that can make you feel better about yourself. Notice how I didn't say "look better"? Exercise may well lead to a lovely physical appearance, but I'm far more interested in what it does for a girl's psyche.

Here's the deal. Crazy runs in my family. Good crazy (Hey! My people and I are always up for a good time!) and sad crazy. Depression. OCD. Anxiety. Over the years I've been grateful for medications that do their work, but I also learned early on that regular exercise works wonders if not exactly miracles. Swimming, running, biking, hitting a tennis ball—movement makes you feel alive in the moment. And strong enough to dwell in that moment, too.

5. If you have a boyfriend, make sure he treats you well.

And by this I don't mean, "if you have a boyfriend, make sure he gives you expensive gifts." Don't get me wrong. I love gifts. In fact, feel free to send them to me if you have some spare ones lying around. But the best gift of all is a boyfriend who thinks you're smart, who listens to what you say, who laughs at your jokes. My own father treated me this way, so that by the time I dated, I expected the same consideration from the boys I knew, as well.

By the same token, girls should respect their boyfriends, too—listen to and encourage their dreams. As the mother of (many, many) sons, I appreciate girlfriends and wives who treat those boys with kindness and respect.

6. Cultivate the ability to laugh at yourself.

We all do stupid things. The other day, for example, I tried to order a KFC lunch box with a special promotion KFC coupon. The only problem is that I was at Burger King. Oh, oops! Being able to laugh at yourself in such moments instead of hiding in shame (and vowing never to eat at KFC again) displays a certain kind of self-confidence. The person who can laugh is, in effect, saying, "Hey, don't worry about me. I've got this."

People sometimes ask where I get my ideas from—I've been writing a personal column for nearly thirty years now—and I always tell them my best pieces always come out of those moments when I was either angry or frustrated or sad or embarrassed. Oddly, uncomfortable experiences (recollected in tranquility) are often HILARIOUS.

7. Serve others.

A friend of ours who's left the church recently told my husband that one of the things he misses about the Mormon world is the opportunities it provides for people to serve—especially those people who aren't particularly adept at seeking out those opportunities for themselves. I think our youth programs do an excellent job of instilling service as a virtue, and I'm grateful for this, because service (to paraphrase some Shakespeare) "blesseth him who gives and him who takes." I firmly believe that service is soul food. For one thing, it can help us develop empathy.

I remember when I was asked by our Relief Society to help watch the children of a young mother suffering with rheumatoid arthritis. Because I was so young myself, I was full of ideas about how this woman—of whom I was somewhat critical—could better run her life in spite of her illness.

I know. I can't believe it either.

Suffice it to say that spending real time with this woman and her family helped me better understand what all of them faced. And yes. The experience made me a little less judgmental, a little more compassionate.

8. Don't feel like you have to be like everybody else.

So my flower garden, which takes up my entire front yard, is pretty much a hot mess. There is a jumble of daffodils and tulips in the spring, daisies and daylilies in the summer, asters and phlox in the fall. Plus more. Way, way, way more. Nasturtiums. Cosmos. Lenten roses. Perennial geraniums. Lambs ear. Hostas. Roses. So on. So forth.

You get the picture.

No one is ever going to give me a ribbon for "design," let alone "restraint." I'm pretty much a Big Tent Gardener. I want one of every kind of plant known to man to join in all the garden reindeer games at my house. Why? Because I love them. All of them. (Except for creeping myrtle.)

I love crocuses because they're so optimistic, peeking their little heads out of the snow as if to say Hey! Spring's coming! I

love pansies because (in spite of their names) they're the toughest flowers around. I love peonies because COME ON! They're soft and sexy, and they smell good, too.

And roses.

Roses!

The point is that I love my flowers for their differences as much as for their similarities. And if a human being without very much imagination (like me, for instance) can feel that way, why wouldn't Heavenly Father?

In fact, I think the whole wide shimmering world speaks of Heavenly Father's affection for variety. You see it everywhere from the fish of the sea to the fowl of the air to every living thing that moves.

Including us.

And that's something worth hearing on a Standards Night. Or any night.

Developing Integrity in an Uncertain World: An Interview with Dr. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife

Kristine Haglund

This interview was conducted on August 23, 2014 in Winnetka, IL.

Kristine Haglund is the Editor of Dialogue. *She lives in Belmont, MA, with her three children.*

Jennifer Finlayson-Fife is an LDS, licensed psychotherapist specializing in relationship and sexuality counseling. In addition to her dissertation research on women's sexuality and desire in long-term relationships, she has taught college level human sexuality courses, as well as community and internet based relationship and sexuality workshops. Her clinical work focuses primarily on helping individuals and couples achieve greater satisfaction and passion in their emotional and sexual relationships.

JFF: I grew up in Vermont, went to BYU, and got my degree in psychology and women's studies. I was at BYU during a pivotal time, when there was a lot of discussion around women's issues on campus. That period pressured my thinking around the position of women in the Church. I deeply loved the Church, but women's issues were a source of genuine pain and confusion for me, as well. So being exposed to the questions and discussions was formative in my thinking. After that, in 1993, I went to Boston, where I earned master's and doctoral degrees in Counseling Psychology at Boston College. I decided to write my dissertation on Mormon women and sexuality. I was being educated in feminism, but at the same time, I knew my own experiences as a Mormon woman, and recognized the many ways in which the Church had blessed my life and blessed the lives of my female

friends. I could identify with some feminist critiques and how they might apply to Mormonism, but my Mormon experiences also gave me enough distance from contemporary American culture to look critically at how it has dealt with female sexuality. In particular, I looked at whether the feminist critique that patriarchy oppresses and represses women's sexuality was an appropriate one for understanding the experiences of Mormon women. Or was Mormonism actually protective of women's sexuality because the Law of Chastity expected more of men in terms of commitment and loyalty than was expected of men in the larger culture? It was an interesting study, and I enjoyed writing it and learned a lot from it. I put it away for a while and was home with my young kids for several years.

Then about seven years ago, I opened a private counseling practice, and I work primarily with Mormon couples. It's kind of a niche practice—I do a lot of online work with Mormons who have relationship and sexuality issues.

KH: Has your practice been mostly working with Mormons since the beginning?

JFF: In the beginning, it was about half Mormon and half non-Mormon, but soon there was enough demand on my practice that I stopped advertising. Now referrals are all by word of mouth. The LDS network is a strong one, and Mormons often prefer to see a Mormon because of the shared framework in which therapy can take place. So now my practice is about 90 percent LDS. It's great work and I love it.

KH: When we were talking about this interview, you mentioned that your work has led you to think about how Mormons approach the idea of integrity. Say more about how you have been thinking through that concept.

JFF: Sure. I think one reason I think about it a lot is that we talk a lot about obedience (for instance, tomorrow the Relief Society lesson is going to be about obedience), and we talk about integrity,

too, sometimes, but we often link it pretty directly with obedience. I'm going to be so bold as to suggest that obedience is not inherently a divine principle. Well, maybe I shouldn't start there . . .

KH: Well, it *is* bold!

JFF: Choosing to conform to something that you believe or sacrificing what you want immediately for something you believe is more important is a divine principle—I absolutely believe it is. But we use the word "obedience" to talk about those kinds of moral actions—actions based in our integrity—and I don't like the word because it obscures personal responsibility and also elevates obedience in and of itself—which I think is problematic. Many times in my life, I have deferred to a principle or a person I trusted, and it was a smart choice to do it. For example, heeding the wisdom of a doctor, or the wisdom of a parent—there's clearly moral value in being willing to borrow wisdom, and conform to that wisdom. You learn in the process of doing it and you can avoid costly mistakes; you develop your moral thinking in the process. However, what I find problematic is when we value obedience, as though obedience were *in and of itself* a moral good. The problem is that we put responsibility onto someone else for our moral choosing; we frame it as if God values "just doing what you're told" and if your leaders get it wrong, they are responsible for your wrong action. I'm not sure that is true.

KH: Yeah, I think of it in terms of obedience to God, or obedience to principle. It might be obedience to God's word, as delivered by prophetic authority, but it is not obedience to another human being that is extolled in scripture.

JFF: Right. This is where it gets problematic. We say that the prophet is speaking for God, so if he gets it wrong, I'm not responsible. I think that is absolutely not doctrinally supported, because alongside our notion of obedience, we have the stronger principles of agency and personal revelation, which are the fundamental reasons we believe we came to earth. In my experience,

we encourage the idea of dependence in the Church far beyond what our theology supports. We elevate deference to authority, and want to link it with inherent goodness. I can understand how it happens in the Church. As a parent, I've certainly come to value obedience more than I did before, now that getting my children to do what I want makes my job easier, and I can see how, for those in leadership positions, it makes the job so much easier if people will just go along.

KH: It's amazing how much obedience suddenly seems like a very, very important principle once you have a toddler!

JFF: Yes! I understand why we value obedience, but I think we can hyper-value it at the expense of our moral development. I don't believe in a god who would let us obey our way into godhood. Instead, God gives us a world in which we may borrow wisdom from others, but we also must learn through the exercise of free will, through mistake-making, through the earnest seeking of truth based in our own thinking, discerning, and seeking. As moral agents, we have to assert imperfect choices amid imperfect realities. That process is fundamental to our personal and spiritual development, but we often don't want the responsibility that comes with that imperfect process. And because of our fear of responsibility, I think we take comfort in the idea of obedience. We can act but have it be on an authority's shoulders—we can escape some of the anxiety of figuring out what is really right. But this pseudo escape from responsibility is to our own detriment, and to the detriment of the group, if compliance is valued over discerning and asserting what you *really* believe is right.

KH: Say a little bit more about how you think over-valuing obedience distorts the understanding of integrity—make that connection a little more explicit for me.

JFF: Take, for example, the Kate Kelly fiasco. There was this idea that if she would obey, just do what she was asked to do, that she would somehow have integrity; she would then be aligned with

Christ. There was this idea that if she would repent and obey, that's the way she'd have her integrity and spiritual well-being restored. And, of course, what she is saying is, "My integrity does not allow me to do that. My integrity insists that I must stand up for something that the group does not currently accept." And her bishop's response was not to tell her that her idea was wrong, or doctrinally incorrect, but just to demand that she obey as an expression of goodness. And that seems like an organizational immaturity to me—we can't tolerate members with integrity unless we redefine integrity as obedience. It's very human; I can forgive it, but it's not Godlike, in my opinion. As uncomfortable as it is for Kate Kelly to speak up about what she believes is right—and even if she is mistaken or wrong—just the process of speaking up for what she genuinely believes is true, I think is fundamental not just to her development as a person, but for the development of the group. To tolerate and grapple with alternative and varying points of view is part of the process of coming to truth. Even Joseph Smith said, "It is by proving contraries that truth is made manifest." The process of grappling with contradictory ideas is very important to development. But in Church, we sometimes just want to know Elder So-and-So said this about a topic, and we're done talking about it—I think we like that; it's comforting; we love certainty and we want very much to believe that leaders never get things wrong.

I have a beloved cousin who doesn't even put up wallpaper without praying about it first, because she wants the reassurance that it's going to be the *right* wallpaper. And, don't get me wrong, she has great wallpaper! So maybe the Spirit really is confirming her decision! But that characteristic of not daring to make a move without somehow being certain that there's divine approval for the choice—often passed down through a predictable chain of authority… In some ways, that's denying what the gospel tells us is the point of earth life, which is that we're in the lone and dreary world, and there's limited divine intervention, and we have to tolerate the anxiety of discerning and asserting what we believe is right, even with limited information and limited strength.

KH: You're using the words "development," "process," "grappling"—it sounds as if you think of integrity not as a thing that one has, but as a developmental task, part of growing up. In thinking that way, of course I think about watching my children grow up, and I have to say, seriously now, that obedience is a really good first principle, and an essential prelude to self-governance. Maybe when we read in the scriptures that "obedience is the first law of heaven," we should be thinking of "first" in terms of the starting place, not the highest in a hierarchy of laws. Lavina Fielding Anderson once wrote about the necessity of becoming "an adult of God," rather than remaining always children.

JFF: Of course—when a child is born, she doesn't have a framework for asserting moral positions; children are very much borrowing—even their selfhood is a borrowed selfhood for a long time; they're looking to the grownups around them to come to understand themselves and understand the world they function in. In that sense, obedience is the first principle—you are borrowing wisdom, even borrowing a construction of reality. But if you're going to mature into adulthood, or godhood—as our theology suggests—you have to stop borrowing wisdom and start *aligning* yourself with wisdom, and that is a developmental process that is fundamental to earth life.

I remember being in the MTC, and feeling like obedience, obedience, obedience was being drummed into us. My thinking on this was less developed then, but I remember feeling that there were so many things I didn't know, and yet I felt as if I was being told I had to claim to know them, in order to be okay with God. I remember having a bit of an internal crisis during a testimony meeting in the MTC where I was wondering if God would really ask me to pretend? If I just look the part, does that please God? Or, does God want me to be true to myself, as long as my intentions are sincere in pursuing truth. Is that acceptable to God? The entirety of my mission experience ended up confirming to me that my job as a moral being, as a child of God, was to grapple earnestly with what I believed was right and wrong, and to confront the fact that there are false traditions everywhere, including within our

faith, and to struggle with the Spirit and my own honest effort to know what is right, and live accordingly. So I see that process as fundamental to becoming a developed spiritual person—having an anchored internal sense of self and strong sense of what is good that allows you to be a strong presence in a family, in a marriage, in a ward—just complying does not enable any of that. When we think about people we admire most in history, it's people who could stand strongly for what they believe is right, despite the social costs of doing so. These are people with a strong sense of rightness, a strong sense of self, and that is an important spiritual and relational reality.

I talk to my clients about this a lot, because in a more dependent stance relative to their relationships or life, they are often underdeveloped relationally and sexually.

KH: The virtue of having a "strong sense of self" is not an uncomplicated ideal in a context where "selfish" is the worst thing you can possibly be. Do you think that integrity—this strong sense of self—can enrich relationships rather than threaten them?

JFF: You're absolutely right. And women get this with both barrels—womanhood is linked to "selflessness." If you're really a good woman, you're supposed to just love to give up everything for others, and so there's a strong sense that you prove your goodness by not having a self, by not having wants and desires, and *certainly* not letting your desires trump anyone else's wants or desires.

KH: The identities available for Mormon women are pretty much child/sister and then mother. There's not a lot of room for a woman on her own to develop familiarity with her own wants.

JFF: Right. And part of the reason we do that is just practical: women who have divested themselves of desire fit more easily into a patriarchal system that requires their deference. Patriarchies value women who don't have a strong sense of self, economic power, or a well-developed independent life. The ideal of the selfless woman, though, is borne of immaturity and anxiety. *It*

is a false tradition, in my opinion. In my experience of working with people, the bargain they make goes something like this: "I will forsake my own development, but then you have to take care of me." That's the implicit contract in many LDS marriages, as well as in the Church—I will give up my autonomy and the fulfillment of my desires, and I will trust you, but then you owe me a good life. Husbands are expected to manage their sexuality, keep it directed toward their wives (or at least not anywhere else); you need to be the benevolent patriarch who will put me first and manage my anxiety and self-doubt. I'll be the *selfless* one, if you will be the strong one. And it's easy to get enculturated or socialized into this dependent role, what I call glorified under-functioning—it allows you to hand your anxieties off to an (ostensibly) strong other. The problem, of course, is that the strong other is also a flawed human being, who maybe is happy to be needed and glean the privileges of that role, but is filled with anxieties and uncertainties of his own. And he will often disappoint, because people just can't really keep their own lives together and also be responsible for the happiness of a spouse. And so when that disappointing humanity breaks through—he looks at pornography, or he's unfaithful, or he prioritizes himself over her—then there are two problems: One is that dependency just seldom works well. It can't entirely be carried off; resentment and frustration build, and you can't truly be generous with or desire someone that you believe you need. Second, you may put other people's needs first, at least ostensibly, because that's part of the implicit contract, but then one may believe she is owed validation as a good mother or person for her loss of self, expressed through a child's loyalty of success—because my sense of self is dependent upon your connection to me. It means those relationships are constrained by the neediness inherent "to" the dependent role. So, paradoxically, "selflessness" ends up being exceptionally self-centered. Or at least it can be, if one is trying to manage her or his own needs through other people, rather than taking full responsibility for one's own life and one's choices. Perhaps paradoxically, having a strong, healthy self at one's center allows you to truly give from a position of

strength and generosity, not to give as a function of neediness and vulnerability.

If I know who I am, I know what matters to me, and I feel solid in myself, this allows me to not need constant reassurance from my husband, or from my children. If I am clear about myself, it frees me up to think about what my child needs, what's going to help him or her in their development as a person, and it allows me to give to them because it's the right thing to do, not because I need to glean a sense of self from them, or I need their validation of me through their successes, for example.

KH: It seems to me it might free you up to think about what you, as a particular person, have to offer your spouse or children, instead of constantly trying to anticipate what the ideal, non-desiring, selfless Urmutter have to offer her child. I may not have or be whatever that ideal Mormon mother is (in my mind). It's threatening and difficult to realize that I'm not going to be all of that for my child, no matter how hard I try, and to admit that I do have needs and wants that should sometimes take precedence over others' needs and wants, or at least be the subject of a negotiated compromise. But having come to terms with that, having developed a truer sense of what my actual strengths and gifts are makes the relationship richer—it lets me say, "I'm not going to be the mom who sews the prom dress for you, but I can be the mom who doesn't freak out when you ask hard questions," or whatever it is that I can offer truly.

JFF: Yes. So while I think a lot of the rhetoric we hear at church about women and women's roles is sincerely trying to honor women, they often have the paradoxical effect of defining, in a very restrictive way, what a woman is supposed to be. And if your sense of self depends on achieving that pleasing ideal, and you're constantly trying to suppress the things about you that don't fit, it's hard to manage all that anxiety.

KH: And actually, I think that men who speak of women that way are actually trying to honor particular women—often their

own mothers, but memory idealizes and may flatten their real personality—and you'll know the research better than I, but there's a lot that suggests that we borrow from the surrounding culture to construct "memories," and those memories become static, frozen, and we can't let the actual human beings who inhabit them disturb our narratives of who we are, who we have become.

JFF: Consistent with that, if you do have a deep sense of self-acceptance, that comes from having forged a sense of self in the world, through your own development, you can tolerate the idea that "I am not that ideal; I won't ever be it." Then you can be happy facilitating the people you care about getting what they need from other sources, whoever provides it well, because you're not in the business of trying to prove yourself by meeting that ideal; you're in the business of thinking about how to facilitate your child's growth and development.

KH: One of the ways I've confronted this is that my daughter is nothing like me—she's just not similar to me in many ways at all. When she wasn't bookish the way I was as a child, or didn't want to play the violin, I really didn't know if that was ok. My nerdiness, my practicing skills weren't going to help her, so I had to go about figuring out who *she* is. It was really freeing in a way; if I had thought that I needed to turn my children into perfect beings who would do the ridiculous list of "Things Perfect Mormon Children Do" that I had carried around in my head, we would have been locked into an ongoing conflict that would be really ugly by now by the time she is a teenager.

JFF: Yes, and this is why I think marriage and parenthood are divine institutions, because they rub us right there—they push us right where we need to be pushed to grow up. My oldest child is on the autism spectrum, and when he was born, as he developed, there was very little in that process that validated my competency. I was accustomed to control in other realms—I could work hard and make things happen, but with him, I could work really hard and seemingly nothing was happening. It's very

humbling and it pushes you to the point where you have to say, "Ok, this—being a parent to this child—is not going to validate me. So what is my role here?" And then I realized that my role is to love and facilitate the development of this person to the best of my ability—which is limited and finite—and to tolerate my own limitations, and love him without resenting that his life doesn't prove me or my power. I have to accept my responsibility to my child—I gave birth to you, and my responsibility is to be a mentor to the best of my ability. It's not the frantic ideal we sometimes think of; it's a wise sense of how to work with the resources one honestly has. When parents can do that, it's a wonderful gift to give a child—the freedom to be accepted and loved for who they are, and not require them to prop up a parent's wobbly sense of self.

KH: Obedience—either my obedience to an imagined religious ideal or my child's obedience to me—doesn't really seem to have a place in that kind of relationship. My oldest child is also on the autism spectrum, and, in a way, autism grants him a truly fierce sort of integrity: while he's sometimes not able to sense other people's feelings in ways that would be helpful to relational construction of the self, he is also internally self-sufficient and not dependent on other people's feelings about him for a sense of what's right. Confronting that was, for me, an amazing way to grow, because I was not going to be able to impose my will on this child, and his acceptance of my will was clearly not the task that he had, because what kind of God would expect a child who *couldn't* accept that kind of parental input to comply in the ways that another child might. It opens up a huge and terrifying moral and relational territory to explore.

JFF: Obedience can be such a limiting frame. It's a great frame for, say, not running in the street, for not drinking alcohol as a teen—for those rudimentary, basic kinds of guardposts of life. There's legitimacy to saying, "here are the boundaries." There's value in defining boundaries, but you can't obey your way into adulthood or into selfhood. You have to be willing to take risks—

that's how adulthood pressures us into tolerating the anxiety inherent in living life.

KH: Say a little more about what you mean when you talk about "tolerating anxiety"—it has come up a few times.

JFF: Okay. For example, I have a client who has been 99.99 percent obedient to everything in the "For the Strength of Youth" manual. He's now in his late twenties, and he would love to be in an adult relationship, but his sexual development is so inhibited by scrupulous compliance to the rules that he's childlike, and terrified of assuming the responsibilities of grown-up sexuality. He struggles to date, because he's afraid of having sexual feelings and responses that are incongruent with Church ideals. He wants shelter from making any mistakes and from responsibility. He's hoping perfect compliance can give him this. This is an extreme example, of course.

KH: It's sort of enacting the Primary song, "Keep the commandments; in this there is safety and peace."

JFF: Yes, exactly. And he did get safety from mistakes, I suppose, but not peace. How godly is it to not be able to be in a grown-up relationship? To be so terrified of your own body and your own sexuality that you can't risk being close to someone? He interprets the Church's teachings in the narrowest, most literal sense and is terrified to take responsibility for the possibility that he might need to interpret goodness differently as the conditions of real life change in adulthood. So while that's an extreme example of compliance limiting growth, it speaks to the problem. He wants there to be someone telling him what to do so that he never has to make a mistake or be responsible for his choices. Tolerating the anxiety of not having a rule to comply with at every juncture in life is necessary for growth. Whenever you learn anything new, you are anxious—the first day of school, the first time you show up for a piano lesson. You're trying to do something you've never done before. You don't have a pattern. For some people,

that's crippling, for others, they barely notice, but being willing to tolerate the discomfort of functioning in territory you haven't yet mastered is a necessary ingredient in human development.

KH: So what do we call that kind of risk-taking tolerance and learning in Mormon parlance?

JFF: Maybe faith—taking a leap of faith, faith to do what you believe is right—get married, go on a mission, have a child . . . All of these require trusting a process that will stretch me, will be difficult, but I believe is right to do. We can call that obedience, but I think it's more constructive to think of it as integrity. I believe something is right, and therefore I am choosing it, and I'm willing to go through the discomfort of the growth process that will ensue. And yet I choose it: I am responsible for that moral choice.

KH: So it's taking ownership. It's interesting that you mention missions as an example, because the expectation there is so gendered: for a young man, going on a mission is obedience to a cultural norm, really an absolute dictum, but for a young woman, there's much more space to choose. But that's one of not very many places in the church where girls or women actually have *more* room to choose than men.

Say a little bit more about the gendering of this process; we've been speaking as though it's generally more difficult for Mormon women to develop integrity and a sense of self, but the example of the client you mentioned and of sister missionaries complicates that narrative.

JFF: There's definitely a generalized framework in the Church of obedience—obedience being a way to prove your goodness. That's an ideal that both genders share. It's just that what you're asked to comply with is different, and has different consequences. I think women are asked to comply with a narrower sphere, that is primarily focused on nurturing and caregiving—it's a really important part of human experience, but it's only half of human experience. Men are asked to engage in the other half, and, arguably, they miss out

on what women are encouraged to take on as their sphere—the more connected, relational aspects of being.

But men have a little more latitude in how they express themselves. There's more validation for self-development in non-relational realms, for risk-taking, for growth. Men can choose to be doctors, attorneys, teachers—many paths that are expressions of self—and within that, they can grow and evolve. Certainly, there are complications around that; men are shouldered with a lot of responsibility, they're asked not to be dependent, to not show vulnerability—they're supposed to be the strong, benevolent ones. There's just not much room for vulnerability in our notion of what men should be like.

For women, it's the constant pressure to defer to others—to leaders', to men's, to husbands', to children's needs. There's a lot of focus around supporting the priesthood, caring for children—it's noble for a woman to give up a PhD to be a full-time mother—those kinds of examples are what is really valued culturally. It can lead to a kind of stripping of personal development. It makes for a more circumscribed existence. But it limits both men and women. My mother and father, for example, lived this out perfectly: my father got more external validation—he was a stake president, a professor, he did all these things; my mother, on the other hand, was able to create a very rich network of relationships that, for her as an older person now, is still intact, and my father is more on the outside of that. And I think that's been a cultural disservice to him—he lived out what he was expected to be, but now he sees that she has something he doesn't. We'd do better as a church to really value full personhood, development in nurturing and economic roles, for both men and women.

KH: I'm guessing that some of what you do is help people think differently about the concepts of obedience and integrity, giving them a way to reconcile new thinking with a fundamentally Mormon world-view, but you also alluded briefly to the idea that as an institution, our commitment to obedience and loyalty to top-down structures leaves us *institutionally* immature. What would it look like for the Church as an institution to reconcile

our traditional understanding of how people ought to respond to authority with the kind of growth you're talking about? Why should we try when what we've always done seems to work well for a lot of people?

JFF: Well, I would say that if we want people to stay in the Church, if the Church is going to remain relevant in standing for goodness, it has to continue to be a growing, evolving organism. You can't just throw stakes in the ground and demand that people conform to them—some people will stay, but the institution loses a lot of strength if rigidity forces people up against their integrity.

KH: So do you think we might understand some of the current struggle with disaffiliation as part of this dilemma?

JFF: I'm not saying, of course, that divergence is necessarily an issue of maturity, but if you are pressuring people against their own sense of right and wrong, and they have a choice of belonging to the faith community or being true to themselves, you will lose the people who are potentially the strongest members and leaders. (Of course, some people will leave for other reasons—because they just don't like being members, or because it's hard, or for family or other reasons—certainly not all of the current exodus can be explained in terms of growth and integrity.) However, an inflexible institution will lose strength.

Theologically and historically, there are lots of support for the idea of a Mormonism that is less authority-driven, instances where there is more of a reflexive relationship between leaders and member. The separation and protection of the leaders from the general membership make it impossible to engage in dialogue with the leadership around sincere issues, sincerely-held beliefs that cause internal conflict, without it looking as though you're challenging their authority. We could think about the situation in terms of parenting—as a good parent, you can't always understand what the experience of your child is, or what you might be doing wrong, unless you open yourself up to hearing it. If institutionally we won't do that, or can't, we are shooting ourselves in the foot.

One time, my daughter was going through a phase where it seemed as if she was whining and complaining about everything, so I said to her, "Can I just role play what you're doing? And I did an exaggerated version of her whining. She laughed and said, "okay, can I role play you now?" I agreed, and she said, "ok, you be me—say 'Mom?'" So I said, "Mom?" and she imitated me typing and not responding, and then she imitated me saying "yeah," but still not actually listening. She thought she was just playing a game with me, but it was revelatory for me—I thought "no wonder she's whiny!" I could suddenly see in a way I couldn't have seen without her perspective. What I perceived as whining had been her way of trying to tell me that she needed me to be more responsive. That moment of being offered a chance to repent and do something better can only happen when we stay open to seeing our limitations. I think that good leaders make space for feedback institutionally. Given the way we now treat our General Authorities, I think we've made it very, very difficult for them to have moments like that, to hear honest experiences and issues, and have a chance to change things for the better—they are systemically set up to only hear the whining, because there's not a mechanism to have people communicate what's wrong more constructively or legitimately.

KH: Even if they ask directly for criticism, hardly anyone is going to be willing to tell them what they really think. By making deference to authority the ultimate criterion of loyalty to the institution, we have defined anyone who ever disagrees as disloyal, which makes it almost inevitable that criticism will come wrapped in cynicism and vitriol, rather than being loving and constructive.

JFF: Absolutely—and this is that socialized dependency I was talking about, where people want to admire and defer to someone else as a way of avoiding full responsibility for their own choices. We engage in this kind of collusion institutionally—we don't want to see General Authorities' humanity or weaknesses, because then we have to be more responsible for ourselves and our moral reasoning. We prop up the mask of their invulnerability to make ourselves feel more secure.

KH: In practice, it seems as if it must be healthy and normal for the balance of responsibility and strength to shift between people in relationships—sometimes it makes sense to defer to authority, or to an expert, or just to the person in a family who's good at something. The kind of integrity you're describing isn't merely independence.

JFF: I think the paradigm for thinking about this is that the more you progress toward real integrity, the more capacity you have for healthy interdependence. Autonomy and dependence are two sides of the same coin. When you're immature, it can seem as though those two needs are in conflict—that there's a choice to be made between being true to yourself and being connected to others. But as you develop a solid sense of self, you become more willing to make sacrifices for the benefit of others—more willing to yield on something that's important, because it doesn't compromise your sense of self to do so. It is, in fact, an expression of yourself to do what you believe is right for the benefit of others. If you have a solid sense of who you are and what you believe, then acting with integrity for others' sake increases your sense of self.

In a healthy relationship, it's perfectly normal for "niches" to develop—for one person to rely on another's areas of competence or expertise, for people to specialize in what they're good at. What isn't healthy is if one person exploits the other's strength, or undermines her own development in a way that unnecessarily increases her dependency.

KH: So how do we manage that spiritually, in a relationship with God? Clearly, we're always going to be less developed and less skilled—the relationship is inherently and powerfully unequal.

JFF: I don't think of my relationship with God in those terms, really. I think about God as a loving parent, a loving presence, that can see the best in me and support me in reaching for the best in myself. I see God as helping me find courage to do the right thing. I guess there is an inherent dependency, but it's not a dependency that keeps me from growing—it actually facilitates growing. I don't see God as micromanaging my reality or my choices. I don't

wonder "why did God make this happen? What am I supposed to learn from this?" I think more that life is inherently imperfect, sometimes it's really hard. I don't think God makes difficult things happen, they just do happen, because that's how life is. In the face of difficulty, the question that I think is more productive is "how can I make good things happen in this difficult situation? How do I find the moral courage to create goodness even though I'm disappointed, overwhelmed, or grieving?" I see God as a witness and an anchor in that process of reaching for the best in myself.

KH: That word "witness" is striking to me—what does it mean for God to witness our struggles? It seems to me that bearing witness is one of the most difficult things one can do in a relationship; it hurts to watch your child suffer through a choice that maybe you could have spared them, if only they would have been obedient. If you don't force them to obey, you're necessarily cast in the role of witness to their suffering—it's awful!

JFF: That's a really, really hard thing to do, but it's also a humble and a loving thing to do. In that witnessing, you are holding for your child the belief in their ability, their strength. You are keeping their ability to divine what is right for them as they are reaching for goodness in themselves. Sometimes, holding those things present takes the form of setting limits or holding expectations—I'll say to my kids sometimes, "I love you too much to not expect that of you. You are capable of this. It would work against you if I didn't hold the expectation." It is my job to witness, and to care, but not to interfere in a process that necessarily belongs to my child. I see God as a loving presence, who is aware of me, who cares, who holds expectations for me. I have work to do in my own development—I don't think of God as having a step-by-step plan for me, or watching me and being pleased or disappointed in my choices from minute to minute, but instead I think of God as holding up for me the ideal of what I can become.

KH: I love the passage in D&C 130 about God seeing the world as a sea of glass, where things past, present, and future are made

manifest at the same time to him. Maybe as parents, what we're doing is holding the vision of our child's future self in mind, in imagination, even when his current sense of self might be flying apart—we have this idea of who they might be.

JFF: That's a huge gift to give a child—to know they can look into a parent's or a teacher's eyes and feel that even in a crisis there is someone who really sees them and believes in them.

Once when I was going through a bit of a spiritual crisis, I wanted to talk to my mother, but I was worried because she is a strong believer—and I was afraid that maybe witnessing my struggle would undermine her testimony, or undermine her warm regard toward me. So I told her that I didn't want her to worry about me, but wanted her to know what I was struggling with at the time. In my apologizing for my own questions or positions, she stopped me and said, "I want you to know that while I don't struggle with the same questions or challenges as you do, I fully respect what you are trying to work out for yourself and I believe in your ability to do it. You are making a positive difference in the world, and I am in no position to judge you. I have enough to work on in myself. Who am I to spend time worrying about you?" It was a tremendous gift.

It also gave me deeper compassion for her, and for people who believe similarly. Her extending compassion in that way showed me that it is possible for us to love one another in our own journeys toward greater knowledge and living in the Truth.

KH: That may be the only way to make difference not threatening—we talk about unity as an important thing for the Saints to achieve, and that makes difference very frightening unless there's a way to get to that sort of unity in our difference. It's so much more complicated than mere like-mindedness, but also richer and ultimately more satisfying.
JFF: The times I've seen my mom concerned for a child were times when she thought a child was betraying him- or her*self*, which is a very different kind of concern than betraying the specific ideology that she believed and wanted them to believe. I think there is a kind of unity that can come from standing for the very best

in people, even though the process of growing toward the best in ourselves will be diverse and will pressure the development of the group in the process.

KH: It seems difficult even in a family—trying to imagine it in a larger group like the Church is really daunting. It's just barely thinkable.

JFF: I do think, though, that we could do it. We have this theology that is about agency and atonement and repentance—it's so much richer than just checking off the boxes and doing everything right and looking down our noses at people who don't seem obedient.

KH: Well, right. We're glad the atonement is out there for those *other* people, but we really still secretly hope not to need it ourselves.

JFF: And yet that seems to have been the whole point of earthly existence—to get messy, to make mistakes, to tolerate the anxiety of imperfection, to suffer. It's all there in our theology; we're just immature and still attached to obedience and perfectionism. As Elder Uchtdorf said recently, we slam the door shut; we want the security of fixed ideas, not the uncertainty of growth and challenges to our faith. We all hate that, so we try to build a safe institution, but the brittleness of our certainty makes us fragile.

There's nothing abnormal about the pressures we feel in our faith community—these are very human realities, and we're not above them. All groups—families, marriages—struggle with these questions and processes. I deeply love being Mormon, and I believe that Mormonism is part of what gave me a deep sense of identity and self as I grew up. I've come to a place where I believe that I am investing in this group, showing that I really care about it when I stand up for what I believe is right, even if I am wrong. My goal is to be able to stand before God with a clean enough conscience to say I really was challenging myself to do what I believed was right—I had integrity. Integrity is being true to what you believe in, even when it's hard, when it's uncomfortable, when you give up positions or prestige or

privilege in a relationship. I believe that my integrity is a gift to my marriage, to my family, and to my community. I am most believing when I am seeking truth, because that is a fundamental value of the Restoration. That belief gives me courage to seek belonging and strength within my Mormon faith.

Awakening

Mark D. Bennion

After looking at Carl Bloch's Sermon on the Mount

His thumb and forefinger raised in declaratives
Draw initial notice, but it's the hands of those
Near him that pull me back—something almost festive
Yet closer to restrained, in the bowed, worn widow
Resting head on young hands, in the Pharisee's sorrow
Deep behind crossed arms, in the disciple's yearning
That aches from beard to elbows, in the slow turning
Of the man in red hat, in his widow's peak,
The slanted blue shadow that arrives with knowing,
The veins in his forearm tightening
As he weighs what to hold on to, what to let go.

Resonance

Amber Blue

A breath of dark earth;
The moist brown-black humus
Enfolds my body.
Tingling
I lie, careless of time,
Yielding to the pulse from
This beating land.

Bibliography

R. A. Christmas

The Beginning—improbable.
The End—incomprehensible.
Genesis and Revelation,
like wacky bookends.

In between—life itself;
sanctity and sin, together—
a cracked two-way mirror,
reflecting, well, you.

At the center, this Jesus—
incredibly conceived,
killed, resurrected. Summed
in one word: Messiah.

Your job, Reader: Survive
beginnings and endings.
Discover the life you lead—
and the one you must find.

Bring 'Em Young

R. A. Christmas

for the late Leonard J. Arrington

According to one historian, Brigham Young
had "a talent for mimicry"—a talent
the Lord used to convince the Saints that
Brigham was Joseph Smith's successor,
but that Brigham later used to poke fun
at his fellow apostle John Taylor's
elegant voice, dress, and mannerisms.
(Taylor loyally disliked him for that.)

"Brother Brigham" had a habit of
keeping his back turned on folks
who came to his office—which was
rude and intimidating. He also reveled
in telling church members brave enough
to disagree with him that they might
as well "apostasize and go to hell."
(It was either hell or California.)

President Young married several of
Joseph Smith's widows—you know, "to
protect and care for them." But over
the years he tended to neglect them.
Some had to petition him endlessly for
maintenance and simple necessities,
while he traipsed through the territory
(with a favored wife in his carriage).

Note: If you happen to be leading some
difficult people across a figurative

wilderness toward a "promised land,"
it's likely that one day your faults and
flaws—your magnificent weaknesses—
will be "outed" from the page-tops,
perhaps by some pipsqueak poet
(in his private hell, or California).

Putting Up the Blue Light

Simon Peter Eggertsen

As children, we liked our red-carpeted front rooms best

when the Christmas tree tossed the air with the richness of pinyon pine,

when the rust-colored water in Mom's cinnamon and cloves spice pot slowly mulled its own thoughts on the kitchen stove then misted them all the way to the secrets of the ice cream parlor in the attic,

when, if you squinted your eyes in daytime, the tree lights shone through the boughs like a scattered rainbow,

when the blue light appeared about the time of the candles, words and songs of Advent, wrapped its softest tones around the tinsel threads of a thousand icicles, reached for the Bethlehem star atop the tree in the corner of the dining room.

We learned to take in as much of the blue light as we could, rocking for hours, sometimes through the night, curled up in the white leather chair that stared directly into the deep winter shimmering there, the tree cast in slow blue and silver.

We nurtured a child's hope that the hue of the blue light would somehow transform us, too.

Now, at this late age, we know what it took to make the blue light
shine: that someone had to figure out where it would go,
get the wire, get the light, get the mount, get the circle
of blue glass, get the stepladder, and, with a set of most
curious tools, cobble it all together like an *Offret* gumption
trap, wire it just so a little above the paint-cracked moulding
that framed the sliding doors to the sitting room.

Like the majestic hundred-year pine that blew down in our
front yard, the blue light will not stand or shine
where there is too much show, not enough attachment
to hold it firm.

Last year, our father took the blue light to Trinidad to night-flood
the sun-whitened wall of an orchid garden, change
the color on the east side of the Lee Poy house in
the green Maracas Hills, a long way and a long time
from his children in Utah.

Now it's our turn to put up the blue light wherever we are.

Stella Nova

Christian Heftel

From where He kneels,
Bleared with blood,
Still shaking,

Mired in the mud of his making,
He sees a wavering mote of light:
Judas's torch.

This wandering star
Will guide Him westward,
To the place where man will be borne.

A babe no more,
Tonight he is made Mary. But not Mary alone:
He also is Joseph, is Bethlehem, is magus and myrrh
and incense and gold.

He is adoring shepherd and spotless lamb and
triumphant angel chorus,
Reigning monarch and Holy Innocent,
Virgin vessel and siring God.

And above all, above it all,
He is Jacob's star, burning fierce and bright and joyous
Despite the darkness of the earth.

Famine and Scarcity

Robert A. Rees

My grandson, age seven,
head bent over his crustless peanut-
butter and honey sandwich,
small bowl of grapes,
and orange juice,
says these very words:
"Heavenly Father,
bless that there will be no famine
or scarcity in the land."
And I wonder where this
pocket prophet, this junior Jeremiah,
has heard such biblical phrases
and how in his sabbath of years
he seems to understand them.

On the evening news I see

wasted plains
barren trees
bone piles of the vultures of war
and under a tangled bush in Africa
a mother holding her ghost of a child
its body a collapsed puppet.

At night when I pray my usual clichés
for the hungry and hopeless,
the bereaved and brutalized,
the wrecked and wretched of the world,
I add a few words for him
and for all those like him who
open their hearts
into their small clasped hands.

Jesus Enough

Levi Peterson

1886

When Darby turned fifteen, his mother Cora said if he didn't make up his mind to accept Jesus pretty soon, it would be too late. She said he had to make the choice either to make public his profession of faith or to write himself off as a bad debt and go to Hell. So during the spring instead of going out to the ranch to be with Jack on Saturday as usual, he stayed in town and tried to memorize the hundred and fifteen items of the catechism presented to him by the pastor of the Baptist church out on Mullen Road. He never came anywhere near to retaining all of them. What he did retain boiled down to the following:

By praying to God in the name of Jesus, you send mail to God through Jesus. In effect, Jesus and God are one and the same. You don't really die when you die. Your soul is still alive. This is good if you manage to live righteously because your soul will go to Heaven to dwell with Jesus in bliss forever. Also, Jesus will bless you with a long, prosperous sojourn in mortality. But you are in big trouble if you can't live righteously because Jesus will make sure you die young from accident or disease and your soul will go down into the fire that shall never be quenched where its worm dieth not.

When the pastor asked Darby if he felt he had received an effectual calling to shake off sin and ignorance and be enlightened by faith in the Lord Jesus, Darby said yes, and on a bright Saturday in early May he was baptized in Clark's Fork River just below the bridge at the far end of Missoula. Before the ceremony,

he counted on Jesus giving him the same sweet assurance of faith that his mother had, but Jesus didn't live up to his end of the bargain. While his mother was very pleased by his baptism, Darby still didn't believe and now he had twice as much to worry about, having added deceit to disbelief.

When school was out, Darby went to the ranch to help Jack—his stepfather—tend livestock and harvest hay. At fifteen, he could work alongside any man. Of medium stature, he had broad shoulders and well-muscled arms. He had short, blond hair, parted in the middle, and blue eyes, sensitive to the sun, hence in a perpetual squint, even indoors. He was quiet and polite by temperament. He was handy with a rope and had already developed a knack for breaking horses.

Sometimes his mother came out to the ranch but mostly she stayed at the house in Missoula so she could help out with the church's charitable projects. Darby and Jack came in to town on Sunday for the 11:00 service at the church. They came in a buggy pulled by two prancers—"Just to prove we ain't barbarians," Jack said. "Ain't everybody in town got a rig this fancy." Jack was around fifty years old. He wasn't handsome, having a scarred face from a mine explosion. He never tried to discipline Darby. Generally, Darby didn't require it, and when he did, Jack reported him to his mother and left the matter to her.

One day Darby and Jack were mending some fence on the northern boundary of the ranch and Darby brought up a fact likely to shock Jack but requiring some advice.

"Jack," he said, "I've got something bad to tell you."

Jack stopped driving a staple and looked up.

"I don't believe in Jesus," Darby said.

Jack went back to pounding the staple.

"You got any advice?"

"No, sir," Jack said. "I don't believe in him either."

So it was Darby who ended up being shocked.

After a while Jack said, "Maybe I do have some advice. Not believing don't give you no license to live on the wild side of life. Leave the whores alone and don't get no girl pregnant you don't intend to marry."

It was advice that Darby had the good sense to follow, which meant that he went on relieving his lust by practicing the solitary vice, as the Baptist minister called it during a sermon denouncing the abominations of the modern day Sodoms and Gomorrahs of Montana.

1890

The year he turned nineteen, Darby got a job in one of the underground silver mines in Butte. Once a month he took a weekend off and went up to Missoula to visit his mother and Jack. At noon on Saturday, Jack met him at the train station with the buggy and drove him to the house, and come Sunday evening he drove him back to the station. One Sunday evening, Darby said, "An old guy at the mine says my father wasn't killed in a railroad accident. He says my mother worked in a whore house, and that's where I came from."

"Well, if that ain't the wildest damn story I ever heard," Jack said. "Who is this old horse turd that told you that?"

"He's a tally keeper at the mine. He used to run a saloon up in the red light district."

"Your mother wasn't no whore and I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch who says she was," Jack said.

"So where was I born?"

"In a boarding house."

"And my dad really *was* killed in a railroad accident?"

Jack pulled at his mustache with nervous fingers.

"Well, was he or wasn't he?" Darby insisted.

"No, he wasn't," Jack said. "And his name wasn't Henry Shaw, either. Your ma just made that name up. I never asked her what his real name was and she never offered to tell me. She was just seventeen and she was slinging hash in a boarding house, and a man took advantage of her, and when she told him she was pregnant, he lit out, and that's where I come in, because when I moved into the boarding house, your poor little ma was as puffed out as a toad and feeling pretty bleak about things, so when I offered to marry her, she took me up on it even if I had this smashed-up face.

I gotta say, Darby, your ma really is one hell of a good woman, and I hope you ain't ashamed of her."

"No, sir, I'm not ashamed of her."

Jack slapped the reins down hard on the butts of the prancers. "I hope you ain't ashamed of me neither," he said. "I've tried to be a good dad."

"You *have* been a good dad," Darby said.

1891

Darby's best friend in Butte was Harley McAlister, a young fellow from a ranch near Bozeman. Although he was only twenty, same as Darby, he had done some hard living, having signed on for a couple of trail drives into Canada, during which he did what cowboys are famous for, which is boozing and visiting soiled dives and shooting up little towns. But when one of his buddies was killed in a barroom fight, Harley did an instant turn-around. He quit the cowboy life and got a job at the mine in Butte and started saving his money because there was serious talk of a new college in Bozeman and he had in mind getting an education so he could become a Methodist minister.

Darby met Harley on the night shift at the mine, and they hit it off right away. Harley took a bunk at the boarding house where Darby rented, and they spent Sundays together on the weekends when Darby didn't go up to Missoula to visit his mother and Jack. On Saturday nights Darby and Harley had a bath and a shave and then went to the Butte Miners' Union reading room and caught up on the newspapers. On Sunday, they'd attend a service at the Methodist chapel. Afterward, if the weather was good they'd hike in the hills beyond town; if it was bad, they'd go back to the Union reading room to finish the day. Either way Harley talked a lot about religion. It was a marvel and a glorious wonder, Harley said, how the Carpenter of Nazareth had framed us a doorway into a better life on the Other Side. Darby was fascinated by Harley's fervor for religion even if he didn't share it. It was a strength to be around somebody who wasn't worried about dying.

1893

Things changed between Darby and Harley when Colin Morrell hired on at the mine and rented a bed in the boarding house where Darby and Harley stayed. They became a threesome—except that Darby found himself left out of the conversation a good deal of the time. Furthermore, Harley did another turn-around, this time going back to what he must have been while he was still a cowboy. Darby was confounded by the change in Harley. It was as if he had never had a religious feeling in his entire life. What surprised him most was that when Colin started talking about getting out of the rut of hard labor in the mine by robbing a bank, Harley took to the idea. Darby was therefore not surprised when he came in from a night shift in the pit to find that Harley and Colin had left town.

Midsummer, Darby received a letter from Harley's mother, Rhetta McAlister, which said:

> *My boy has played the fool they will hang him on august 16. Would you be so kind as to fetch him home his corpse I mean. His father has disowned him.*

Colin and Harley had robbed a bank in Cody, Wyoming. The teller was slow in forking over the cash, and Colin killed him. A posse formed and kept on their trail. By nightfall, when an utterly dark, rainy sky forced them to bivouac, Harley's horse developed a limp. Soon after dawn, the posse caught up with Harley while Colin made good his escape with the booty. Harley was sentenced to hang at the penitentiary in Rawlins as an accomplice to the murder.

On the night before the execution, Darby spent a half hour with Harley in the prison. There was a man of the cloth there, too, an Episcopal minister. Harley had the shakes, his cheeks were grey, his lips were blue. "I don't want to die, I don't want to die," he said over and over.

"Pray with me, son," the minister said. "Trust in the blood of your Savior."

It was as if the minister weren't there. Harley stared past him, as if he could see something beside the brick walls and iron door

of the cell. When he looked at Darby, Darby could see deep pools of eternal nothingness in his eyes.

The next day, riding with the coffin in the baggage car, Darby mulled the words of the minister at the prison gate. The priest had gripped Darby's arm with iron fingers and in a voice choked with grief said, "Let us trust in the blood of our Savior," and Darby wondered if the minister was exhorting himself. Remembering the strange, bottomless pools of nothingness in Harley's eyes, Darby wept, silently he hoped, stifling a sob from time to time, consumed by the inexhaustible pity of being a creature destined to meditate upon the certainty of its own demise. The only good of it all was that, when the baggage car attendant helped him load the coffin onto a waiting wagon at the Bozeman station, he was drained of his weeping. He could now put on a manly impassivity.

Rhetta McAlister rode on the wagon seat beside Darby, her face as stolid and emotionless as Darby's. By and by they passed a ranch house. A man stood on the porch, his arms folded, his forehead creased by a frown.

"It's my husband," Rhetta said. "We can't stop here. We'll take Harley to my brother's ranch."

Her brother's ranch was on Bozeman Creek—a pretty spread, Darby could see. It was what he wanted, what he intended some day to have: a mountain valley, grassy with a creek running through it. It was late in the day and the brother said to bring the coffin into the house. "Better not," Darby said. "It stinks." So they unhitched the horses and left the wagon sitting outside the pole fence, about a rod from the porch. After supper, the brother brought chairs out onto the porch, saying, "We'll sit up with him tonight and dig his grave in the morning."

His wife said they ought to talk about his virtues and strengths.

"Harley was a good hand at roping," the brother said. "Never missed."

"He was a thoughtful boy, real considerate of others," Rhetta said.

"He was my best friend," Darby said.

"What I don't understand," Rhetta said, "is how he got together with that Morrell fellow."

"We roomed in the same boarding house up at Butte. First thing I knew, he and Harley were working the same shift, and after that things weren't the same for me. Harley kind of forgot me. Colin Morrell is a strange guy. He's like a fast river when you fall in it. Once you're in, you can't get out. It sweeps you downstream."

Late in the night they dozed in their chairs. Darby roused from time to time, feeling guilty for not watching the night through.

The family cemetery was on a ridge south of the ranch house. It was a pretty place to be buried—yellow bunch grass, some scarlet Indian paintbrush, a few ponderosa pines. They dug the grave at dawn and after breakfast brought the coffin up. The brother's wife brought a Bible. "What shall we read?" she said. They decided on the Beatitudes, also Psalm 23. Before they filled the grave, Rhetta said, "He really was a good boy. I hope the Lord will forgive him."

Darby seized a shovel and went to work filling the grave. At least he didn't believe Harley had gone to Hell. As Jack said, when you're dead, you're dead.

1899

When the bottom dropped out from under the world price for silver, Darby went down to Park City, Utah, where he heard the silver mines were still hiring. A foreman at the Silver King mine told Darby, "What I need is a man on the timbering crew. Can you handle an axe and your end of a crosscut saw?" He could, and that's how he ended up working in a timbering camp on the north slope of the Uinta Mountains, felling and sectioning lodge pole pines for shoring up shafts in the Silver King and Ontario mines.

There were three other men on Darby's crew: Curly, Dean, and Albert. Albert, whose last name was Mason, was a Mormon, and he had some family in a little town called Oakley. Once in a while, Curly and Dean made fun of Albert for being a Mormon, but Albert didn't get riled or flustered. He just laughed with them. Darby could see he believed in Mormonism lock, stock, and barrel—Joseph Smith, the gold plates, the Book of Mormon. It was curious, bunking with someone who knelt at the side of his

cot at bedtime saying a silent prayer for ten or fifteen minutes. What did he pray about?

After a couple of weeks, Albert invited Darby to spend Sunday in Oakley with him. When they got off the train at Wanship, they found a waiting buggy, driven by Albert's sister Tilly—a girl of nineteen or twenty, who had dark, shoulder-length hair and blue eyes set in a long, slightly freckled face. Relegating her to the back of the buggy, Albert took the reins and invited Darby onto the seat beside him.

Albert's mother struck Darby as something like a duchess or countess. Her chief function was the supervision of her daughters, who were busy setting the table and preparing supper. These included—besides Tilly—Belle, Madge, Ona, and Myreel, descending in age from Tilly, the eldest, by increments of three or four years till it came to Myreel, who was only three.

When it came time for the meal, Albert sat at the head of the table and asked Belle to say a blessing on the food. "We honor the priesthood in this home," Mrs. Mason explained to Darby as she passed a bowl of creamed green beans.

Darby slept that night with Albert in an upstairs bedroom. "I should have explained earlier," Albert said, "that my father has two families."

"He's a polygamist, I guess," Darby said.

"Yes. I hope it won't offend you. In the eyes of the law, he is not married to my mother. He spent six months in the penitentiary in Sugar House, and he can't live in this house any more. He has to stay in Kamas with Aunt Sheila. Sometimes he visits."

"At least you know who your father is," Darby said. "I can't say the same for myself."

The next morning, Albert took Darby to priesthood meeting at 9:30 and then Sunday School at 10:30. At noon they went home for a big dinner that Tilly and her sisters had prepared, and then at 2:00 they all went to sacrament meeting, which went on till nearly 4:30. He had to hand it to the Mormons: they could preach. After meeting, they went home for a light supper of bread and milk and bottled fruit. After that, while the younger girls did the dishes, Tilly took Darby to the henhouse

to gather eggs. Tilly wore a dress of light blue cotton with collar and cuffs of white. She asked him to hold the basket while she picked eggs from the nesting boxes. At the last nesting box they faced each other wordlessly. It seemed to Darby that something needed to be said. At least it was obvious that they both wanted to say something. What was it? He didn't know.

Albert and Darby got up at 3:00 the next morning, and after a quick breakfast Tilly drove them to the Wanship station, where they caught the train headed for the timbering camp. They sat on crates in the swaying caboose. After a while Albert said, "Tilly is gone on you."

Darby's eyes widened.

"I know you wouldn't lead her on," Albert added.

"No, sir, I wouldn't."

"Because whoever she marries has to be a Mormon."

Darby thought about Tilly for several days in the timbering camp. At breakfast one morning he said to Albert, "What does it take to be a Mormon?"

1900

To Mr. & Mrs. Jack Wilson, Missoula Mont Dear Mother and Jack It's best I tell you I have been courting a Mormon girl. Her name is Tilly Mason. She has freckles but is very pretty. She has dark hair and blue eyes. I have never seen that in a girl before. She comes from a good family. Mormons are people just like everybody else. I wish you could meet Tilly. Your loving son, Darby.

To Darby Wilson, Park City, Utah Dere Darby; Yore mother says to tell you you are trifling with damnation to tye in with the Mormons. She says to tell you you are welcum here any old time but your gal is not. That aint my idea Darby For me, you are grown up and know yore own mind Best of luck, Jack.

Darby tried hard to convince himself he wasn't becoming a Mormon just so he could court Tilly with a free hand. He wanted to take on Mormonism lock, stock, and barrel, just like Albert. He had a lot to overcome. He wasn't sure he could master the long list of do's and don'ts. Giving up tea, whiskey, and an occasional

cigar was no problem, but coffee was another matter. Also, the Mormons spent a lot of time in meetings. Furthermore, Darby had his doubts about mastering the ins and outs of Mormon theology, which was strange stuff.

Albert said Mormons don't believe in hell, just in heaven—a different sort of heaven, a multiple one. There were three kingdoms in the Hereafter. The highest was called the Celestial Kingdom. Nobody but good Mormons went there. The middle one was called the Terrestrial Kingdom. That one was for all the good folk on earth who hadn't managed to hear about Mormonism or who had been tricked into disbelief by the craftiness of man. That would include his mother for sure, who had been misled by Baptist ministers. As for Jack, Darby wasn't sure, Jack being a disbeliever. Jack might end up in the bottom tier, which was called the Telestial Kingdom. This kingdom was reserved for the truly wicked—adulterers and thieves and sorcerers, etc., etc.—which, if Albert was to be believed, would include about nine-tenths of the people ever born. Darby could see that he himself would end up there if he couldn't manage to get past his disbelief.

Ironically, it'd be the place where Harley McAlister and Colin Morrell would be. That would be okay for Harley, who had paid for his participation in a crime with his life. But it would be far too nice a place for Colin Morrell. Maybe there ought to be a place of eternal torment for people like him.

1901

To Mr. and Mrs. Jack Wilson, Missoula Mont Dear Folks It is my honor to tell you Miss Tilly Mason has consented to become my bride on Oct 17th in the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City. There will be a wedding supper after in Hotel Utah. Please come. Someone will meet you at the train station and make sure you get there. The Masons have many relatives in Salt Lake who can put you up just fine. Your loving son, Darby.

To Darby Wilson, Park City, Utah Deare Darby Yore mother says dont bother her with no more newes about yore doings amungst the Mormons That aint

my idea If you luv this gurl I luv her too A ten doller bill is enclosed Yore affecshunite father Jack Wilson.

Unfortunately, once again the Holy Ghost didn't measure up to Darby's expectation and turn him into a believer. Darby was somewhat ashamed of himself for accepting this fact so easily. However, he knew he had to bear testimony as to the truthfulness of the Latter-day Saint view of the gospel in testimony meeting once in a while. He chose to do this in the testimony meeting closest to the quarterly stake conference. This kept him on the good side not only of Tilly but also his father-in-law, Harold Mason, who happened to be the second counselor in the stake presidency. Tougher duty than that was presiding over his own household—that is, over himself and Tilly in the apartment they rented at the back of a farm house a couple of miles out of Park City. As a holder of the priesthood, he called on Tilly to say family prayer before supper on one day and on himself to say it on the next. It couldn't be a brief prayer. He had to call on the Lord to bless the president of the Church and the Quorum of the Twelve, also to bless by name each member of the stake presidency and the Oakley Ward bishopric as well as each member of the immediate Mason family and a lengthy retinue of uncles, aunts, and cousins, also to bless Darby's mother and Jack, since Tilly expected it. Luckily, this didn't snuff out his love for Tilly. In fact, he sometimes felt he ought to be paying an even stiffer toll for the privilege of being her husband.

1902

Tilly went into labor at dawn on the day before Christmas, and her screams went on throughout the day. It didn't matter where Darby went, in the house or outside, he could hear her screams. About 9:00 on Christmas Eve the screams stopped and an infant wailed. Darby was in an adjacent room. Tilly's mother opened the door briefly and said, "You have a daughter." They had already decided on a name—Millicent. After a while his mother-in-law called him into the bedroom and laid the infant, wrapped in flannel,

in his arms. Darby sat beside the sleeping Tilly, carefully cradling the tiny bundle in his arms. About 4:00 on Christmas morning, Tilly awoke and nursed their child. Darby floated weightlessly above the earth, lost in an ecstasy not far below the moon. He loved Tilly beyond bounds, he loved their child beyond bounds. He regretted giving up on those long prayers at bedtime. He really was going to try harder to believe.

1905

Western Union *May 5 1905 Darby Wilson, Oakley Utah. Your ma Cora Wilson has died of typhoid -stop- your pa is besot with grief -stop- best come. Hanna Simmons.*

Western Union *May 6 1905 Hanna Simmons, Missoula Montana. Will arrive tomorrow night -stop- please hold on funeral. Darby Wilson.*

The minister of the Mullen Road Baptist church preached the funeral sermon, assuring his listeners that Sister Cora Wilson had died in a state of grace. He also made sure everybody understood there were certain ones among the congregation that day who perhaps would not die in a state of grace were they so misfortunate as to be unexpectedly cut off from this mortal coil. "There are those, even among us at this instant, who have not opened their hearts to Jesus." He looked hard at Jack and Darby while he spoke.

Jack and Darby lingered at the grave for a while after everyone else had left.

"She was a beautiful woman," Jack said.

"She was," Darby agreed.

"I hate to leave her here," Jack said. "Somehow it seems wrong just to put her in the ground like that and walk away. Funny damn thing, ain't it? Dying, I mean. Just suddenly not existing anymore."

Darby nodded.

"It could make you wish Jesus was real."

"Yes, sir, it could. It does."

"Folks you live with believe he's real, I expect."

"They do."

Jack loosened his tie. "Just having *her* was Jesus enough for me."

Hannah and Wilmer Simmons had Jack and Darby in to supper that night. "What's your plans?" Wilmer said to Jack.

Jack shook his head dismally. He pulled out a bandana and wiped his cheeks—something Darby had seen him do every few minutes since he had got out of bed that morning.

"I think he ought to come down to Utah with me," Darby said. "It's time he met his granddaughters."

"So how many have you got?" Hannah said. "I'll bet they're real pretty."

"They are so," Darby said. "Millicent is two-and-a-half—no question who is boss when she's around. Katie isn't three months old yet. Big, bright blue eyes, like her mother."

"Well, there you go," Hannah said. "You just do that now, Jack. Go down to Utah and get acquainted with those pretty little girls."

Jack shook his head and dabbed again at his cheeks. The next day, as he accompanied Darby to the train station, he agreed to get someone to look out for things out at the ranch and come down to Utah for a visit.

About an hour after Darby got aboard, his train passed through Butte. He couldn't help thinking of Harley McAlister and Colin Morrell. Wasn't it time for him to find Colin Morrell and kill him? Didn't he owe that to Harley? Then he reproached himself for such thoughts. They weren't proper for a man married to a woman as kind and decent as Tilly.

1906

Jack moved to Utah to stay in the spring. He sold the house and lot in Missoula and traded his ranch for a ranch in the Heber valley, about sixteen miles from where Darby and Tilly lived on the outskirts of Park City. Darby spent some Sundays helping Jack put up barbed wire fences and a corral. They also did some repairs on the dilapidated old ranch house. This troubled Tilly, of course. She liked Jack but she was down on Sabbath breaking.

1908

In the middle of October, Darby and Jack rounded up some cows on the flank of Mount Timpanogos. Tilly had been in Oakley with her mother for a month, giving birth to daughter number three, Deborah. After they had the cattle gathered and moving nicely toward the ranch, Jack said, "I've got something to tell you. I have met a sweet little Jew lady from Salt Lake City, up visiting a friend in Heber. Her name is Aliza, Aliza Sharner. She don't practice the Jew religion. She has converted to no religion at all, which is my sort of religion. Me and her want to get married and start up a boarding house in Salt Lake."

Darby's mind churned. He was bowled over, knocked down. It wasn't right for Jack to betray Cora by marrying somebody else.

"That ain't all," Jack said. "You been itching for a ranch of your own for years. Let's get my ranch appraised. We'll figure half of it is already yours, an inheritance from your mother. The other half, you buy out, and that's what Aliza and me will use to set up a boarding house. I'm tired of ranching, Darby. I just want a little time to enjoy life before they cart me to the cemetery."

Darby was still speechless.

"I've been hell for lonesome," Jack went on. "It's eating me up. Your ma told me the day she died, 'Get yourself another wife, Jack.' I said, 'I can't do that! I can't never forget you,' and she said, 'You don't have to forget me, but you ain't cut out to be alone.' And you know, Darby, I truly ain't."

Darby sighed and shook his head. "Do whatever you've got to do," he said. "It isn't for me to stop you."

"I'm still your dad," Jack said. "That ain't going to change."

1909

> Western Union *June 9, 1909. Mr & Mrs Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City. Wife's brother Albert killed -stop- funeral Oakley Fri -stop- please come. Darby.*

A horse Albert was riding shied and he fell among some rocks, splitting the back of his skull. At the viewing, he lay in a satin-covered

coffin with his skull bandaged. He was dressed for Sunday in a black suit and white shirt and tie.

Darby had Jack with him when he took a final look at Albert before the closing of the coffin.

"He sure looks dead, doesn't he?" Darby said.

"They always do," Jack replied.

"My mother-in-law has gone to pieces. Melted like butter in a frying pan."

"It's pretty tough, I imagine, losing your only son."

"Tilly is taking it pretty good," Darby said. "'He's just gone on a trip,' she says. 'He's gone to visit grandpa and grandma. He's gone to Jesus.'"

Jack nodded. "It's best if you can see it that way."

"I wish I could."

In bed that night, Tilly asked Darby to hold her tight, and while he did, she sobbed. He knew then that her talk about Albert just being gone on a visit was whistling in the dark. He pitied her but that didn't keep him from taking advantage of her vulnerability and doing what a married man has a right to do. Moreover, he didn't withdraw in time and went off inside her. He went on holding her after he had finished, and eventually she went to sleep. The next morning, feeling depressed and guilty for exploiting her grief, he sat on the edge of the bed before dressing for the day. Though he and she had figured they weren't ready for another baby, he had very likely got them one. Just as he made a motion toward standing, she put her arms around his waist and held him tight. "I do love you so," she said, and his emotions changed. "I love you too," he murmured, powerless to express the strength of his feelings. Love was a prairie alive with wind-whipped grass. That was how he felt about Tilly.

Tilly stayed on at Oakley, mothering her little sisters and taking care of her mother, who didn't get out of bed except to use the chamber pot. Darby thought maybe his father-in-law's other wife would pitch in and help out, but she didn't. Darby lived by himself at the ranch all week and came into Oakley on Saturday night, leaving the ranch in the hands of a hired hand, a Ute Indian named Chester.

1910

April 14, 1910 To Mr. Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City, Utah *Dear Jack, It is 2:00 am and I can't sleep. I am in Oakley right now. I hope to hell things are okay out on the ranch. Chester is a pretty good hand so I likely don't need to worry. I used to come in from the ranch Saturday nights and spend Sunday. Now it's rare I spend more than a day at the ranch each week. It's been nearly a year since Albert was killed. You'd think we'd start to recover by now. My mother in law is pretty much an invalid. Ditto for Tilly just now. The new baby is fine. Another girl as you might guess. We named her Cora for my mother.*

We've hired a neighbor lady to come in and help out around the house during the daytime, also to stay with Tilly on the nights I go back out to the ranch. Tilly takes a good deal of propping up. Surprises me. The way she used to rely on the Lord, etc., I thought she was tougher than me. Not so, it turns out.

Well, here I go giving in to my feelings again. I am going to quit feeling sorry for myself though to be truthful Albert's going has hit me in the belly very hard too. Sorry to say, it has brought up my feelings over Harley McAlister. I haven't ever said this to anybody before but it's true. It has been a rare day ever since I watched them hang poor Harley that I haven't had dismal thoughts about him. What's worse, I can't put down thoughts of finding that son of a bitch Colin Morrell and killing him. That isn't right, is it, Jack, thinking every day of wanting to find a guy and kill him.

As it turned out, Darby tore up this letter. He couldn't admit to wanting to kill somebody. Also he didn't want Jack thinking he was feeling sorry for himself.

1911

Sept 14, 1911 *Mr & Mrs Jack Wilson, Salt Lake City Dear Jack & Aliza, I have got where I don't know how I should be feeling over the way things are turning out. I spend two, sometimes three nights every week out at the ranch but it's still mostly in Chester's care and doing okay. We ought to make some money on our steer shipment this fall.*

But the damnedest thing has happened. My dad in law has finagled me onto the board of the Utah Horse and Cattle Growers Association. I hope you can put me up a night or two toward the middle of October when I come down to Salt Lake to attend my first board meeting. I don't feel up to it, Jack. But I know what you'd say. You'd say, hell, yes, you are up to it. If I know anything at all about ranching it's because of you, Jack. Thanks for all the things you taught me.

On the day before the board meeting convened in Salt Lake, the neighbor lady, Mrs. Morris, came over to spend the night so Darby could leave Oakley at a very early hour. She said she would tend the kids so Darby and Tilly could go to bed early. As usual at bedtime, Darby and Tilly knelt beside their bed to say their secret prayers, Darby feeling bad because he was merely pretending to pray.

Tilly didn't rise immediately after her prayer. "Why has Jesus abandoned us?" she said.

"Abandoned us?"

"Why has he sent us so many tribulations? Why did He desert Albert? Why won't He heal Mother?"

He edged close to her and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Tribulation is what this world is for," he said.

"At least I have you," she murmured. "You are such a good man."

They rose, turned out the light, and got into bed.

Darby had hoped to make love to her but the moment seemed too troubled, too fraught with concern, for such a carnal deed. Resigning himself, he rummaged about his mind a bit, seeking some thoughts that would help him fall asleep. Then she spoke in a tone with just an edge of surprise. "Don't you want to do it?"

"Do you mind?"

"It feels good to have you hold me," she said. She tugged her night gown to her waist and lay waiting.

* * *

Darby arrived in Salt Lake in time to take lunch with the other board members in a small conference room in the just-completed Hotel Utah. Counting himself, there were seven members of the

board, some of them hailing from faraway ranches. The chairman of the board owned a giant ranch in the northwest corner of Utah that extended into Nevada and Idaho. "This is Harold Mason's son-in-law," the chairman said while introducing Darby. "He comes highly recommended, being not only a gentleman of the first water but a practitioner of the latest methods of livestock and range improvement." Darby could see that an ability to slather on the compliments was one of the requirements for a chairman.

After lunch, the board settled down to business, which was principally concerned with sending a delegation from the Utah Horse and Cattle Growers Association to the annual convention of the Western States Livestock Association, assembling in February in Phoenix, Arizona. The board's immediate duty was to prepare a revision of the bylaws of the larger association for consideration at the convention. A lesser duty was to designate a speaker for the opening session of the convention.

"It's an honor for the Utah delegation," the chairman said, "to be asked to provide the keynote speaker for the opening plenary session of the convention. It shows that Utah has got beyond the stigma of polygamy in the minds of our associates from other states."

Hobart pulled two photographs from his briefcase, saying, "I propose that we choose one of these two ranchers as our speaker. They are prominent men, both of them, one from Uintah County in the northeastern part of the state, another from Iron County in the southwestern part."

He pushed the photographs toward the board member who sat on his left, "Take a look and pass them along."

He paused as if debating what he should say next. "I am modern, gentlemen," he said at last in a voice in which pride and embarrassment mingled. "I took along a photographer and had photographs taken of both—including myself in both, of course, to overcome their natural reluctance to be thought desirous of prominence. They are truly solid, down-to-earth men. Take your choice. I am convinced either will give us a stellar performance."

Another photograph had slipped from Hobart's briefcase, which lay on its side on the table. He took up the photograph

and contemplated it for a moment before replacing it. "Here's one that got away," he said. "William Prothman's his name. He has a ranch out east of Kanab on the border with Arizona. In fact, his spread laps over into the House Rock valley east of the Kaibab plateau. That would have been something, wouldn't it, a speaker with holdings in both Utah and Arizona? But he said no, very emphatically. Didn't want to be photographed, but I already had this one from the county clerk in Kanab."

Sitting at Hobart's right, Darby saw the photograph clearly before Hobart placed in his briefcase. He saw it and froze, for staring at him in black and white was a man who looked very much like Colin Morrell.

Darby had supper that night at Jack and Aliza's boarding house. The boarders, all of them men, were university students and a couple of professors. Their conversation was lively, but Darby scarcely listened. His mind cycled furiously around the question of traveling to Kanab to see for himself whether this William Prothman were truly Colin Morrell. If he were, he was no one for a novice like Darby to stalk. What capacity for self-defense did a man have who found it distasteful to cut off the head of a chicken for Sunday dinner? And say Darby somehow bested Colin in a shoot-out, wouldn't the law hold him liable for having taken on a duty proper to an officer? Yet it still galled him to leave Harley unavenged. Harley hadn't died easy. When he dropped through the trap door of the gallows in the Wyoming penitentiary he was supposed to die instantly of a broken neck, but instead he had suffered a long, slow strangulation—another particular for which Colin needed to pay.

At bedtime, Jack took Darby up a back stairway to a room in the attic. Though it was tiny, it was clean and had a dormer window, which let him look out on the lights of the city. Darby undressed, turned out the light, and got into bed. He was still in a state of panic. His stomach was tight, his muscles tense. Then, suddenly, it came to him what he could do—what he *should* do. He would attend the convention in Phoenix, but he would leave early and, unknown to anyone else, he would visit Kanab to ascertain whether this prosperous rancher William Prothman was truly Colin Morrell. Moreover, he would go incognito in case chance

brought him face-to-face with Colin. And if Prothman proved to be Colin, Darby could alert authorities in Wyoming and Utah as to his whereabouts, and, if asked, he could serve as a witness. He could exert every legal effort, make whatever expenditure it required, to see Colin bereft of the spoils of his crime. And with that determination, Darby fell into a deep, tranquil sleep.

1912

Darby disliked deceiving anyone. He especially disliked deceiving Tilly, which he did by failing to tell her that his itinerary for Phoenix included an arduous detour by way of Kanab—a detour, moreover, that might be of such length that it would altogether preclude his attendance at the convention. As a disguise, he had grown a beard and mustache. Though his whiskers were modestly trimmed, Tilly had protested. "It's not you," she wailed in mock despair, welcome words in Darby's ears, that being exactly the effect he hoped for. To complete his disguise, he carried literature and samples from a saddle and harness shop in Salt Lake City, and, after boarding the train, he put on a derby common to traveling salesmen. In his pocket nestled a snub-nosed, double-action, hammerless revolver. He had bought it in Salt Lake before returning home from the board meeting, and he had fired it enough to believe it reliable.

A note in Darby's handwriting:

> *Feb. 8, 1912. I shall keep this log in case I am called upon to testify in court. I departed Salt Lake City this morning at 9:17, bound for Marysvale, a very small mining town, as I understand, where a spur of the Utah Central ends. From there I must take the mail stage tomorrow morning, which will stop tomorrow night in Panguitch. I expect to arrive in Kanab on Saturday evening. I am in for a bad shaking I am told, the roads being in poor condition due to the hard winter. I had no idea making my way to Kanab would prove so onerous. It's almost enough to turn me back.*

Truly Kanab was a hard place to get to. For miles the road from Panguitch was no more than two tracks over the crusted snow. Moreover, it was a dark, broody day and gusts of wind rocked the stagecoach from time to time. Kanab itself counted scarcely

forty houses. But it had a hotel, a bank, a courthouse, and a livery barn where Darby arranged to hire a buggy and a team of horses for a few days.

"We don't see a lot of fellows like you around here in the winter," the owner of the livery barn said. "There ain't but maybe thirty ranches between here and the canyon."

"Maybe I've made a mistake," Darby granted, "but as long as I'm here, I just well see what I can sell. We've got a superior line." He started to walk away, then turned back. "You ought to get in this line yourself," he said to the owner. "This country's goin' grow. You can get in on the ground floor. You can do more than just make a living. You can leave your kids an inheritance." Darby stopped, ashamed of himself for talking like a real drummer.

He took a room at the hotel, which was a two-story house with rooms off a central corridor upstairs and down and two outdoor privies in the back, one for women, another with a three-hole seat for men. It was while using the latter that Darby was advised to consult the postmistress for the whereabouts of local ranches. "She knows everybody," his advisor said, who happened to be a judge of the circuit court, in town for hearing grievances and property disputes. Darby took account of the judge's presence with a double satisfaction, knowing that such a magistrate was precisely the sort to whom the presence of a fugitive from law like Colin Morrell should be reported.

A note in Darby's handwriting:

> *Feb. 10, 1912. Arrived this evening. Cold wind rising. Not much difference between this hotel and a run of the mill boarding house. Three Forest Service men at table for supper. They are on their way to measure snow depth on the Kaibab plateau thirty or forty miles south of here which I am told butts onto the Grand Canyon. We gathered in the parlor after supper with a nice rumbling fire in a glazed German stove. That must have cost a pretty penny to tote way out here.*

By the time Darby turned off the kerosene lantern and got into bed, a blizzard was in progress outside. At dawn, the wind abated and the sky began to clear, but wild, irregular dunes of fresh snow obliterated the roads that led from town. That was

ominous. Making his way to the ranch of William Prothman was a dubious proposition given the best of weather. Once again, the precariousness—no, the utter foolishness—of his plan bore in on him, and he was of half a mind to take the northbound stage when it left, though that wouldn't be until the next morning. Like it or not, he had a Sunday to spend in Kanab.

His prospects improved while he and the Forest Service men still sat at the breakfast table. While the girl who had waited on the table was clearing dishes, the hotel's manager—a portly woman—came into the dining room. "Would one of you men be so kind as to help Mrs. Prothman who rents the back rooms get in some wood?" the manager said. "Her husband didn't show up in that storm yesterday, and she's trying to split wood in this snow. She's been sickish, and her baby's got the croup too."

"I guess I could do that," one of the Forest Service men said.

"Let me," said Darby, quickly standing up. "The exercise would do me good."

Out the back door and around the corner of the house, Darby found a small woman wearing a long coat buttoned at the collar and a scarf tied over her head. In her bare hands she held an axe with which she tried to scrape snow from a mound of wood.

"Let me do that for you, ma'am," he said, reaching for the axe.

She seemed reluctant to give it up. He tugged and she released her grip.

"Go in," he said, and she did.

He split an armload of wood and took it in. The woman stoked the stove, which fortunately had embers enough to ignite the snow-dampened juniper. A boy of maybe six years sat at a small dining table writing on a slate. An infant of less than a year lay on a sofa, breathing noisily. An empty crib stood in a corner. "She's got the croup," the woman said.

Darby split wood steadily for a couple of hours, filling the wood-box next to the kitchen range. Each time he brought in an armload he looked about the room. A shelf was hung on the wall next to the door. On it were silver salt and pepper shakers, a few knickknacks, and several photographs in frames. There was none of a person who resembled Colin Morrell.

Without her coat, the woman appeared close to being emaciated. Her cheeks were sunken, her long blond hair tied back. She seemed eager to talk, responding readily to Darby's questions.

She said she was ill. It wasn't the croup. Something in her lungs. She said it was lonely in town. She didn't feel lonely out at the ranch though it was just her and Bill and the kids out there, plus a Paiute family that worked for them. This was her first year in town. Their boy Bobby was six now and needed to go to school. But Kanab wasn't an easy town to live in if you weren't a Mormon. She didn't tell Darby that until after she had asked him in a timid, roundabout way whether he was Mormon and he had decided he would learn more from her if he told her he wasn't, which in a sense was true. As for this woman—Agnes was her name—she said she and Bill didn't belong to any church. They just believed in Jesus. They read the Bible on Sunday nights when they were together, especially the parts about Jesus.

She was a native of Barstow, California. She was working as a waitress in a restaurant when she met Bill. He was in town selling cattle. He swept her off her feet. She had never met anybody like him. They were both orphans, more or less. That is, her daddy died when she was a little girl and her mother died the year Agnes turned fifteen, and Bill's parents were killed by Indians in Kansas. A kind couple from Wichita raised him, but they were dead now and so neither Agnes nor Bill had anywhere to go back home to. But she didn't mind. Bill was so kind, so gentle. It was something to watch him with the kids. She didn't know what she would do without him. She just hoped and prayed he didn't have an accident or a renegade Indian didn't come along and shoot him. She prayed hard Jesus would protect him. "Jesus! He's our hope, he's our sustainer," she said.

All this Darby gathered intermittently as he brought in the split wood. It was interesting but unrevealing. He felt let down, frustrated, even angry, being no closer to knowing whether William Prothman—her Bill—was Colin Morrell than before he had launched himself upon this fool's errand.

And then things changed with a cataclysmic suddenness: the sun stood still, the waters of the Red Sea parted, Vesuvius erupted.

As he entered the kitchen with a final armload of wood, Darby heard an exclamation of delighted surprise from Agnes, a happy shout from Bobby, and the murmuring intonation of a deep masculine voice, and he knew with no doubt whatsoever that Colin Morrell had just come home to his wife and children.

Darby panicked, thought of dropping his armload of wood on the floor and running, but finally froze and stood where he was. Agnes entered the kitchen, closely followed by Colin and Bobby.

"This nice man has filled our wood-box to overflowing," Agnes said.

"I'm in your debt," Colin said.

"It's nothing to speak of," Darby mumbled, bending to conceal his face while he carefully deposited each stick upon the overfull wood-box.

"I meant to be here last night," Colin said, "but the storm forced me to hole up along the way."

Darby backed from the kitchen into the snowy outdoors, waving a hand as he closed the door. Though he had been working in his shirtsleeves, he was sweating. He retrieved his jacket and his bowler from a fence post where he had hung them and trudged to the front entrance of the hotel and went to his room. For the moment, he was feeling superior, triumphant, on top of the world. William Prothman and Colin Morrell were one and the same person. "We've got him!" Darby said silently to Harley McAlister. "We've nailed him!"

The room was cold so he put on the jacket and also his overcoat. He took off his shoes and lay on the bed. He could feel the revolver in the pocket of his jacket. It comforted him. Also it sobered him, brought him down off the top of the world. Colin wasn't in custody yet, and taking him could prove a dangerous business. So what was Darby's next move? Inform the circuit judge of the presence of a felon wanted for robbery and murder in Cody, Wyoming? Or first look up the county sheriff, assuming there would be such an officer in Kanab, the seat of Kane County? Or might there be a federal marshal in town?

He could hear the tolling of a bell, probably the signal for the Mormons of Kanab to gather for sacrament meeting. He wondered how many of them truly believed in a living Jesus. A

strange question, that, just now. Or maybe not so strange. Those who believed were the lucky ones. They had an antidote, a cure, for fear. They felt watched over and protected. *Felt* watched over, *felt* protected. Sooner or later Jesus would let them down just as he would very, very shortly let Agnes Prothman down. She relied on him to protect her husband from accidents and renegade Indians. At this moment she basked in her husband's presence, blissfully unaware of the looming presence, not of a protective Jesus, but of the blind goddess who in one hand held the scales of impartial judgment and in the other the double-edged sword of Justice.

What was there about Agnes that reminded him of Tilly? Agnes was blond and had grayish eyes and a sweet, plaintive smile, quite unlike his blue-eyed, dark-haired, befreckled Tilly. Wasn't the common bond between them their wifeliness, their motherliness? He regretted having thought of Tilly just now. For years he had imagined her grief and devastation should calamity befall him. For years he had tried to be cautious, to foresee and thereby forestall danger, to keep himself hale, hearty, and whole for the benefit of those who depended on him. And now, far too easily, he could imagine the approaching devastation of Agnes Prothman.

He could see where his sympathy for her led, and he tried to steel himself against it. "I won't abandon you," he said to Harley. He imagined himself rising from the bed and finding the judge this instant but he didn't. Later, reading a days-old newspaper in the dining room, which served as the hotel foyer between meals, he continued to assure himself that he would shortly seek out the judge, but he didn't. Nor did he say a word to the judge after sitting with him at supper. In bed, he lay rigidly awake much of the night, determined to see the thing through at first opportunity in the morning.

At breakfast the stage driver announced that a cowboy from Long Valley had informed him the road to Panguitch was passable, and he therefore intended to start north as scheduled. After the others had left the breakfast table, Darby remained sitting there for a few moments, but no longer in a state of paralysis. He *had* abandoned Harley, he saw. He *couldn't* ruin Agnes Prothman, *couldn't* plunge her into widowhood. This gross miscarriage of justice had to be, whereby Colin Morrell went on enjoying the fruits

of robbery and murder. Darby rose and went out to tell the stage driver he intended to be in the coach when it rolled northward.

As much as possible Darby kept his thoughts centered upon Harley throughout the long day in the pitching, jolting coach. It was a memorial session of sorts, a way of paying respect and affirming their friendship, also a way of begging forgiveness for conceding to Agnes Prothman's greater need. By way of compensation, Darby tried to recall scenes from those happy two and a half years in Butte when they had spent sabbaths together, rambling over the hills in good weather and frequenting the union reading room in bad weather.

On the second day of the journey northward, the coach driver halted the stage briefly and pointed out the log cabin in which the famous bank and train robber Butch Cassidy had grown up. His present whereabouts were, of course, a matter of debate. Some said he was living out at Robber's Roost or in New York City under a new alias. Others said he and the Sundance Kid had migrated to South America and had been killed in a shootout with Bolivian soldiers. Darby couldn't help wondering whether such stories had grown up in the vicinity of Colin Morrell's boyhood, wherever that might be—certainly not in Kansas as Agnes Prothman had been led to believe.

This reflection brought Darby back to the ambiguity, the moral uncertainty, of his decision to spare Colin for the sake of his wife. His wife prayed to Jesus to keep her husband safe from accidents and renegade Indians. Ironically, it was a mortal Jesus acting in proxy who had saved him most recently. But wasn't that the way with the real Jesus? The real Jesus was the Jesus in good men and good women who did the right thing when it was needed. A make-do Jesus? Yes, but under the present circumstances, wasn't that Jesus enough?

When Good is Better than Great—Susan Elizabeth Howe's *Salt*

Susan Elizabeth Howe. *Salt: Poems.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013. 122 pp. Paperback: $19.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-222-3.

Reviewed by Douglas L. Talley

What Beatrice said of Dante might well apply to Susan Elizabeth Howe's latest collection of poetry, titled *Salt.* The observation was fictional, served up in an obscure but brilliant nineteenth- century book, *Classical Conversations* by Walter Landor, in which, during an imagined last conversation, Beatrice tells Dante, "You will be great, and, what is above all greatness, good."[1] Now whether Howe's collection will ever be deemed "great" is at present unknown, but it is most certainly a good book, a very good book, and in a number of particulars that goodness certainly exceeds what is great. Howe has learned to strip her work of pretension and self-consciousness, creating a pure and thorough modesty of tone, a plain speech, which nevertheless is marked throughout by compelling flashes of thought and language. In her manner she is like the Psalmist, who wrote:

> O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
> my eyes are not raised too high;
> I do not occupy myself with things
> too great and marvelous for me.
> But I have calmed and quieted my soul. . . .
> (Psalm 131:1–2 RSV)

A calm detachment shapes the tone of Howe's entire collection, even in those poems where deep passion moves her most. By focusing primarily on daily concerns close to home—on concerns, nonetheless, that matter to the common reader—she has quietly resisted the vainglory that traps so many talented poets into pretentious postures. Instead, she offers a view of what is plain and simple and good. And this, to be sure, is above greatness.

What, then, is simple and good about this collection? There are at least three general elements worth addressing: (1) Howe's allegiance and connection to place, specifically the Great Salt Lake Basin; (2) the subtle but direct affirmation of her religious beliefs; and (3) her development as a writer.

With regard to Howe's connection to place, we might open with a digression. An ultimate curse laid upon Lucifer was his banishment, which condemned him to utter homelessness. He has no place in heaven, and his place upon the earth is only temporary at best. From the moment he was cast from his first and only habitation, he has strayed toward greater and greater isolation, which is outer darkness, and his eternal punishment is to never again find a place he can claim as home—no house for his spirit and otherwise no land, no village, not even a nutshell, for his habitation. Thus, central to Latter-day Saint doctrine is the prospect of our coming to earth to find a mortal homestead and there establish the beginnings of an eternal home. Howe, in her attachment to and appreciation for the Great Salt Lake Basin, informs us deeply about the privilege of having a place to call home, a land and a country we claim as our own. While a number of the poems find her abroad, she returns again and again to the Basin, her "true country." It is "in the red desert" she belongs, and she speaks of it convincingly. She makes the Utah landscape with its spare, arid beauty the potential seedbed of a distinct, cultured poetry, as memorable in its way as the Attic poetry that grew from an ancient Greek coastline of granite outcrop and olive groves.

As to the affirmation of her religious beliefs, Howe rarely addresses her faith explicitly in the poems, but it is everywhere present and felt throughout, often in modest, isolated lines. In the poem "Letter to My Husband, Sent from Ireland" she quietly observes, "I believe in our prayers." In the one poem in which she depicts a church ordinance, "Blessing the Baby," she acknowledges, "We are low church" and notes, knowingly and sympathetically, that we sometimes succumb to casual religious observance—the neighbor who "reads a novel hidden in his Bible" and the two teens who "thumb wrestle, eyes closed" during the ordinance. Nevertheless, her Mormon faith fully pervades the

volume, particularly in the expansiveness of its title, *Salt*, suggesting not only the place where the great Mormon migration finally found its rest but also something of that unique Mormon savor—those peculiar people who call themselves "saints" and believe they belong among those called "the salt of the earth." The saints she writes about—her extended family, neighbors, and friends, herself and her husband included—belong to a "soiled Earth," but it is an earth that is, nevertheless, "sometimes washed, renewed, sweet-scented."

As to her development as a writer, this is one of the most intriguing features of any poet's work. As in so many other instances, Shakespeare is the great example: what a distance is cleared in his mastery of both language and drama between *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* and, later still, *The Tempest*. A great deal of commentary is offered about the elusiveness of his personality, but his development as a writer from first to last remains beyond controversy. Howe's debut collection, *Stone Spirits*, was published in 1997. *Salt* is her second collection and was accepted by Signature Books in 2009, twelve years later, but for various reasons the volume was not published until 2013. She has acknowledged that during this time she "spent a lot of time revising" and continued to "refine the poems until they actually went into galleys."[2]

Such revision has not created overwrought poems. On the contrary, in the words of Yeats, all her "stitching and unstitching" have led to lines that "seem a moment's thought."[3] Howe's technical development during this period is evident in reduction and conciseness—a lyrical line pared down to direct, vivid clarity of statement, reminiscent of the classical Greek ideal, as, for example, in the following fragment of Sappho:

> Love rifles my heart,
> like wind rushing through a mountain oak.[4]

Reduction to a clear, vivid image allows the poet, in the words of Donald Justice, quoted in the preface, "to keep memorable what deserves to be remembered." Vivid simplicity can leave an indelible impression. I would cite a few lines to let this unshakable vividness speak for itself:

From "I Practice Managing My Stress":
Because it's time for breakfast,
I like to think of my heart
as warm whole wheat bread
fresh from the oven, not yet sliced.

From "Family Trees":
A growing tree is a miracle
in a valley named for salt . . . .

From "A Cold May Morning":
Mountains coming this way, a snow
wall already baffling the far fields.
As if spring had been mistaken
in its kindness. As if kindness
sifted a warning into fiery
tulips, yellow daffodils—*worry*
about your death.

From "'Dull Blue Crows'":
The ten, then thirty, then seventy
pinyon jays that appeared
at our feeder were sky-blue travelers
in gray cloaks, a little like the Amish,
smart enough to lift the lid
and generous to their fellows,
each filling its craw and flying
to the trees so others could seize
a winter stash.

The growth brewing in Howe until the publication of this second collection was not, however, merely a growth in technical skill. Vividness and earned simplicity also bespeak wisdom, a clarity of perspective that can only come with the passage of time, traveling great distances, and all the while paying close attention.

No doubt some of this perspective is attributable to marriage and a maturing relationship with her husband, Cless. The distances

we travel in life are always magnified by relationships; a trek of certain miles can often be doubled by the second viewpoint of a traveling companion and perhaps tripled by the shared viewpoint that forms with a growing unity in the trek. It is particularly in her expressed affection for her husband and her belief in the goodness of marriage that Howe offers her best work.

The most compelling example is the poem "Letter to My Husband, Sent from Ireland." This title has the virtue of clarity that poet Billy Collins commends in titles offered by Chinese poets of the Sung dynasty: "how easy [s]he has made it for me to enter here"—"no confusingly inscribed welcome mat to puzzle over."[5] As the poem begins, the author is sitting in the kitchen of a cottage that "tilts toward Coulagh Bay." She is abroad but thinking of home and is assailed by thoughts of distance from her husband—

> until a wasp strafes me, then caroms off
> the peaches and into my mug. She scalds,
> dying quickly, her thin abdomen with its stinger
> curling to touch her head. I spoon her out
> of my lemon and ginger tea. On the saucer,
> wings spread, she looks like an Irish faery,
> caught. Could she be an omen
> from this magic-haunted land?

If there is a more vivid, carefully-rendered image found in contemporary poetry, I do not know what it is. Not only is the image haunting in its own right, but the poet utilizes it to deeply moving effect in continuing to the final lines of the poem:

> Yes, life has its trajectories—who would believe
> our single paths could intersect
> with such force? Now, after this happy year,
> the world has bounced you to your work,
> me to mine, the boiling Atlantic between.

The final six lines of the poem are so powerful that I would not wish to divulge them here for fear of ruining what will prove for any thinking reader an unforgettable aesthetic experience, full of pathos and beauty. You will simply have to buy the book.

The cost of the paperback is a bit stiff—$19.95. But with fifty poems to the volume, the average cost is a mere 40 cents per poem. And this particular poem is so compelling, it is by itself worth the price of the entire book. Yes, it is that good, and in its own modest way, better than great.

Notes

1. Walter Landor, *Classical Conversations* (Wash.: Dunne Publishing, 1901), 324.

2. Susan Howe, e-mail message to author, April 23, 2013.

3. William Butler Yeats, *Selected Poems and Two Play*s (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 28.

4. English translation here by the author. Original in David A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 46.

5. Billy Collins, *Sailing Alone Around the Room* (New York: Random House, 2001), 138.

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Empowerment at the Local Level

Neylan McBaine. *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact.* Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014. 218 pp. Paperback: $20.43. ISBN: 1589586883.

Reviewed by Lisa Torcasso Downing

Tension isn't new to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From its foundation, the Church has drawn fire for its religious, social, and political stands. However, these historical tensions seem, in large measure, to have been externally crafted by outsiders who may or may not have desired the downfall of the Mormons. Today, however, the LDS Church faces a new tension, one that originates from among the ranks of our faithful,

and speaks its message broadly and clearly, both to those inside and outside the faith: Mormon women are not treated as equals. In her latest text, *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact*, Neylan McBaine, a prominent LDS feminist, blogger, and brand strategist, presents a practical, yet pastoral, guide devoted to helping faithful Latter-day Saints implement prayerful, inspired solutions that fit within the context of the current hierarchical system.

McBaine does not call for the kind of revolution those supporting the Ordain Women movement urge, one where gender equity must be achieved through institutionalizing female ordination. In fact, McBaine doesn't foresee any ready changes to the order of Church governance. *Women at Church* is her call for the faithful to uncover ways to improve the sense of honor for and openness to the contributions of LDS women. For McBaine, changing the status quo does not require changing the present Church structure.

In *Women at Church*, McBaine provides a tidy summation of the history of gender issues, both outside and inside the Mormon experience. Of particular interest is her framing of gender as a fundamental concern throughout LDS history. She briefly recounts public discussion of the controversies surrounding healing blessings performed by women in the early days of the Church, as well as of polygamy. She walks us through the mid-nineteenth century correlation efforts which stripped the Relief Society of autonomy and made political warriors out of Mormon women in the Church's fight to stop the Equal Rights Amendment. Lastly, McBaine gives a nod to the recent excommunication of Ordain Women founder, Kate Kelly, and yet she remains focused on efforts that Mormons can make within the present system.

After establishing that gender has always been openly discussed, debated, and pondered in the LDS Church, McBaine reminds her readers that those who covenant to bear one another's burdens must, in the exercise of their faith, develop empathy for those who express pain, particularly regarding gender issues. A woman who grew up as a faithful Mormon in New York City, she learned from an early age to embrace diversity. As demonstrated through

her work on the "I'm a Mormon" campaign, she appreciates the need to assume the perspective of those we seek to motivate or to serve effectively. She compels her readers to broaden their concept of gender roles by providing ample voices of those who suffer, voices like this:

> I grew up in Utah, and was always fully active—graduated from BYU, served a mission in Brazil, married in the temple. The whole time, I was 100% orthodox and obedient, but secretly I was plagued by doubts, mostly about gender. I felt persistently less-than as a woman in the church. When I went to the temple, I felt deep shame as a woman. I would read the scriptures and cry because I could not find myself there. On my mission, I often felt patronized and condescended to, knowing I was an effective missionary but always being subordinate to men who were younger than me and had not studied the gospel as rigorously as I had. (25)

McBaine uses this story, and others like it, to demonstrate that today's young women have never known a world in which gender dictated a person's life script—except in their church. This disconnection between their experience outside and inside the religion is frictional. When Church rhetoric speaks of equality in the eyes of God, their life-lived experience becomes the measure by which they judge whether or not gender equality truly exists within their faith community. As a result, many young women judge the rhetoric hollow. The challenge, then, is for local leaders and congregations to improve the practice of what is preached.

In the second portion of *Women at Church*, McBaine argues for small changes to the way the LDS faith is implemented, suggesting small changes add up to big improvement. She advocates increasing the visibility of women, both physically by placing female leaders on the stand, and theologically by elevating the work, words, and wisdom of LDS women to manual-worthy status. Much of the latter half of the text offers examples of imaginative re-thinking of the way we practice, never once stepping beyond the Church's official *Handbook of Instructions*. For instance, some mothers feel slighted at being left out when

their infants are given a name and a blessing. While the *Handbook* is clear that only Melchizedek priesthood holders may offer the blessing, some ward leaders, after prayerful consideration, have begun inviting mothers to participate in the rite by holding their infant while the priesthood pronounces the blessing. These creative suggestions for change, all of which comply with the wording in the *Handbook*, should, in my opinion, be read and considered by every local leader.

This is not to say that *Women at Church* will evoke only positive reaction. Some traditional Mormons are not likely to interpret McBaine's suggestions as beneficial, and others may take offense at the notion of change coming through grass-roots effort, believing divinely inspired course corrections come only from the top down. Feminists may balk when she counsels women to use "humor and graciousness" as they approach priesthood leaders or female decision-makers about their needs and concerns (93). In fact, some of McBaine's advice smacks, to my ears, of counsel that Mormon women remain well-behaved, even as they speak up about abuses they have experienced. However, her advice, as painful as it may be, is likely wise for many situations, considering that the LDS realm continues to be "embedded in a mid-century culture where men and women don't interact outside of familial ties" (105) and where men govern and women submit. Asking for change may be interpreted as an act of aggression by some, or as an insult, or a condemnation of another's love of God. Hence, McBaine's advice that women assume the responsibility to prayerfully, carefully consider to whom and how they take their concerns forward is, unfortunately, needed. Of course, such advice may be very difficult for young LDS women to navigate if they already resent their unequal footing.

Women at Church is a substantial contribution to the ongoing dialogue about gender in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It comes at a time when many LDS women feel shut down and shut out by recent disciplinary action against leading Mormon feminists. But, with her text, McBaine reminds all Latter-day Saints that empowerment is something women can claim, not something they must wait to be granted. No matter

how a person feels about the hot topic of female ordination, she or he can push for improvements in the way LDS women are treated at the local level.

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Negotiating the Paradoxes: Neylan McBaine's *Women at Church*

Neylan McBaine, *Women at Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact*, Greg Kofford Books, 2014. Paperback: $20.43. ISBN: 1589586883.

Reviewed by Julie M. Smith

Neylan McBaine's book *Women at Church* includes the following interview excerpt:

> On one Sunday in my ward, the final assigned speaker was a woman. She seemed flustered to be in the last slot, was apologetic to the audience and lamented that we weren't going to get the final word in the meeting from a priesthood holder. And then she gave her talk.
>
> The stake president happened to be visiting, and after she finished he stood to make a few comments. He thanked her for the talk, and acknowledged she was just being self-deprecating. But he said it was his responsibility as presiding officer in the stake to correct misinformation. He then affirmed that there is nothing wrong with scheduling a sister to speak in the last slot in sacrament meeting, that that is perfectly appropriate. When we don't do that, it is just a tradition.[1]

McBaine's response to this incident is "I want to shout 'Hooray!'" The irony of the story—that a woman was *not* the final speaker in the meeting and that the final word *did* come from a priesthood holder—exemplifies the many paradoxes

surrounding the role of women in the LDS Church in general and in McBaine's book in particular.

The first half of *Women at Church* explores current Mormon doctrines, policies, customs, and rhetoric related to women; McBaine frames the issue in terms of the pain that these cause some women. This framing makes the discussion accessible and non-threatening to the widest possible audience. It also meshes nicely with the metaphor of the body of Christ; although McBaine doesn't develop this imagery, the idea that pain in any part of the body is a concern to the entire body should inculcate the notion that women pained by various aspects of the church should not be written off or shouted down.

But this framing can also be problematic. One solution to the problem of pain is to explain why the practice should not be regarded as painful, but this rhetoric is itself problematic for most LDS feminists.[2] And the primary concern when considering a practice or doctrine should be whether it aligns with the gospel, not whether it causes pain; one would not, for example, want to jettison fasting just because many people find it distressing. Plus, presenting pain as necessarily negative does not integrate well with Mormon rhetoric on the sanctification that suffering can bring. Focusing on pain could lead to a utilitarian calculus where the status quo is justified because most women do not find it painful. And the pain narrative reifies stereotypes of women as emotional creatures who are associated with feelings rather than intellect.

At one point, McBaine presents a compelling alternative to the pain framing: it is focused on the question of what women need from their church experience that they are not getting.[3] So instead of arguing, for example, that the lack of scripture stories about women is painful, she could have pointed to the legitimate need women have to see models of lives similar to their own in the scriptures. Had she used this framing, the aforementioned problems would have been largely avoided.

And yet despite the framing, the first half of the book is an excellent inventory of the issues that concern some Mormons, presented in the least divisive manner possible. By quoting from interviews, McBaine is able to lay out controversial viewpoints

(from an anonymous interview: "My faith loss stems from the oppression of women in the church"[4] and from Fiona Givens: "We might hope to one day . . . offer healing blessings and other blessings in behalf of family members"[5]) without undermining her credentials as an unfailing supporter of the institutional church. She includes other provocative ideas as well: for example, when you tell women that they are naturally good nurturers, the ones who aren't will develop a distrust for the speaker.[6] And while it is not its purpose, the first half of the book is an excellent history of the last decade of Mormon feminism.

The second half of *Women at Church* explores what changes—changes permitted by the current iteration of the *Church Handbook of Instruction*—might be implemented at the local level to augment the visibility, voice, and authority of women. But by restricting the discussion to only those local changes that McBaine deems aligned with the handbook, several problems may arise.

First, it treats the handbook as sacrosanct—not a helpful attitude for LDS who may already tend toward canonizing it. And since McBaine herself provides examples where the handbook is violated (with, presumably, the approval of Church leaders) in order to meet the needs of women,[7] limiting the discussion to the confines of the current handbook is questionable.

More seriously, sporadic and localized change sends the message that the empowerment of women is not integral to the kingdom but rather something that may or may not occur based on the preferences of a few (male) local leaders. A girl who grows up watching her older sister bake the sacrament bread, hand out programs, conduct sacrament meeting music, and visit teach with their mother—but then experiences the young women's program under the direction of a bishop who scuttled all of those programs—may internalize the message that her contribution to building the kingdom is an optional accessory. This is an ironic stance for a book deeply concerned with what messages current LDS practice sends. Because a local response to a structural problem denies the structural nature of the problem, local efforts to empower women deny that their limited opportunities are actually a problem.

Further, if one imagines a spectrum of wards in the Church—extending from those doing an exemplary job empowering women to those most actively restricting them—would it not be the case that the wards *most* in need of change would be the *least* likely to institute it locally? And couldn't this dynamic lead to vast disparities among wards, which could increase "ward shopping," which would in turn further polarize wards? One of the benefits of centralization is consistency; this uniformity also limits the contention that might occur with more autonomy and variety. Local change can be very divisive: conservative members generally accept liberalizing policies when they come from the general Church leadership due to their commitment to heeding general authorities, but may be less accepting of changes implemented locally. And more liberal members may fume if their local leaders are unwilling to adopt changes that are implemented elsewhere. One example that McBaine focuses on is the possibility of women becoming more involved in the blessing of their babies by either holding the baby, holding the microphone, or being assigned to bear testimony immediately after the blessing.[8] The handbook states that only Melchizedek Priesthood holders may "participate" in a baby blessing.[9] Does holding the baby constitute "participating"? That is debatable, which means that there is a significant potential for acrimony if it were in fact to be debated in every ward in the Church. Another change that McBaine explores is having the Young Women visit teach with their mothers;[10] in the discussion that accompanied a review of McBaine's book at the blog *By Common Consent*, a bishop related that he decided to do this and announced the plan in his ward's Relief Society. But his stake president determined that this practice was contrary to the handbook.[11] While the bishop handled the situation with equanimity, it is easy to imagine that the same people who are troubled by current Church policies would find this series of events agonizing. So while McBaine presents her suggestions as all falling within the guidelines of the handbook, there is doubt as to whether they will be perceived that way. At the very least, all of them violate "the unwritten order of things" since they contradict current practice. There is a sense in which McBaine's

leadership in advocacy for local change to meet an ideological outcome is quite as foreign to Mormonism as anything Ordain Women has done.

Fourth, the first half of the book describes many gender-asymmetric policies, including the extreme disparity in General Conference speakers and some aspects of the temple ceremony, for which there are no local solutions. This means that there is a profound disconnect between the two sections of the book; many of the problems explored in the first half are not addressed by the solutions offered in the latter portion.

Despite these drawbacks, there is no doubt of the benefits of McBaine's approach. By positioning her suggestions within what is (arguably) allowed by the current handbook, McBaine will avoid being dismissed as an apostate. Because the Church has recently made a variety of minor policy changes along the lines of those advocated by McBaine, she is able to harness that extant trajectory in order to position her suggestions as faithful. Church members who read the book will be empowered to instigate change locally and if these efforts are met with success, surely the result will be more optimistic than a fruitless focus on changing general-level Church policies and doctrines. Just because all of the changes that LDS feminists might want to see cannot be achieved does not imply that it is preferable not to pluck the low-hanging fruit of local traditions. McBaine has provided a model for discussing gender issues in a way that does not call one's faithfulness into question, framed problems in a non-adversarial manner, and positioned the idea that women should have a greater voice as obvious; each of these is a benefit to Mormon feminists. McBaine's approach also channels the Mormon ethic of rolling up one's sleeves and working hard to improve Zion within one's sphere. The process of local change that McBaine envisions may also contribute to a greater level of comfort with the idea of innovation in general, which might some day be leveraged on a larger stage. And future high-level Church leaders who participated in congregations where women had greater visibility and voice will approach gender issues from a different frame of reference.

McBaine announces at the outset that her work is practical and pastoral, not historical, theological, or scriptural.[12] But without history, theology, and scripture as bedrock, her suggestions can appear to be managerial maneuvering to meet a marketing goal instead of advocacy for practices rooted firmly in the restored gospel. Feminists may bristle at what appears to be an effort to make the Church *look* good on women's issues without it actually *being* good on those issues. For example, McBaine mentions having the stake Relief Society presidency sit on the stand during stake conference.[13] This would increase their visibility and imply a level of parity with the stake presidency. But given that the stake presidency has substantially greater authority, influence, and autonomy relative to the stake Relief Society presidency, is implied parity a legitimate message to send?

And the brief forays that she does make into history, theology, and scripture are tenuous; this can be seen in her treatment of how two modern ideas influence thinking about women in the Church. As for the idea that equality requires sameness, she pushes back using theological reasoning and scripture,[14] but she leaves unexamined the second idea: the assumption that women should have a greater voice and visibility. But why should we grant that women should inhabit this greater sphere while rejecting the notion that equality requires sameness? And if we assume that women should have greater voice and visibility, then why are we limiting ourselves to policies congruent with a handbook that is severely restrictive? Why should Latter-day Saints be more committed to the current handbook's restrictions on women than to, for example, a long tradition of women giving healing blessings?[15] If we limit ourselves to the handbook (which requires women to have a very limited sphere in Church leadership), then shouldn't we assume that this limited sphere is the proper sphere and efforts such as McBaine's to increase women's voice and visibility are misguided? At one point, McBaine bemoans that many Church members regard female General Conference speakers as lacking sufficient authority to make them worth listening to,[16] but she does not explain why—in a Church where authority is believed to derive from priesthood office—one should regard female

speakers as authoritative. And it could certainly be argued that efforts to increase "visibility" are antithetical to Christianity. Furthermore, it is difficult not to bemoan the lost opportunity when she does not reference scriptural texts featuring women that so clearly support the cause for which she is advocating.[17] That she does reference scripture on occasion makes the lacuna of women's stories all the more disappointing.

When the history of twenty-first century Mormon feminism is written, McBaine's book will probably merit a prominent place as one of the few texts able to both frame the issue in a manner that traditionalists will be able to engage and to suggest concrete solutions that are likely to be implemented. If the goal is to encourage conversations about the place of women in Mormonism on a practical, grass-roots level, the book succeeds admirably. If the reader approaches this book wanting it to be the definitive word in twenty-first-century Mormon feminism, she will be sorely disappointed, since serious theological, historical, and exegetical work is not here—not to mention any consideration of changes not permitted by the current handbook. But if the reader sees McBaine as filling one particular niche—the ability to explain the problem to those who cannot see it and to suggest non-threatening local changes—she will appreciate this book.

Notes

1. Neylan McBaine, *Women in the Church* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 111.

2. In an interview at the publisher's website, McBaine explained that she avoided the words "feminist" and "feminism" in the book since they "bring with them preconceived biases." (See http://gregkofford.com/blogs/news/15177249-q-a-with-i-women-at-church-i-author-neylan-mcbaine) She did frequently employ language about "using" women (see McBaine, pp. 40, 62, and 75) that, although her sense is positive, some readers may find grating.

3. McBaine, 74f.

4. Ibid., 25.

5. Ibid., 51.

6. Ibid., 144.

7. Ibid., 62.

8. Ibid., 79.

9. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, 20.2.1.

10. See McBaine, 72.

11. See http://bycommonconsent.com/2014/08/28/book-review-mcbaine-women-at-church/#comment-336099.

12. See McBaine, xvi.

13. Ibid., 129.

14. Ibid., 59–60.

15. See Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, "Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History* 37 (Winter 2011): 1–85.

16. See McBaine, 135.

17. See, e.g., Numbers 27:1–11, 1 Samuel 1, and Mark 7:24–30.

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E-mails with a Young Mormon about Adam Miller's *Letters to a Young Mormon*

Adam S. Miller. *Letters to a Young Mormon*. Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2014. 78 pp. Paper: $9.95. ISBN: 978-0-8425-2856-6.

Reviewed by Russel Arben Fox and Megan Elaine Fox

Russell Arben Fox: Okay, Megan, I'll start.

Miller prefaces his book with the statement that "Here, my work is personal. I mean only to address the real beauty and real costs of trying to live a Mormon life." The thing is, I'm not sure I know what he intends the phrase "a Mormon life" to mean. On the basis of his chapters, it presumably involves some sense of personal agency and responsibility, a devotion to work, an awareness of sin, a desire for faith, a habit of praying, etc. Many of

his observations, comments, and critiques about those topics are challenging and fascinating. But I'm not sure how I'm supposed to see them as building upon his stated purpose, because I'm not really certain any of those suggestions and explorations couldn't apply equally well to the life of just about anyone from any other religious tradition at all, not just Mormons.

I mean, it's true that sometimes Miller will quote from the Book of Mormon or make reference to figures and statements from Mormon history. But with the exception of the chapter on temples and maybe the one on scripture, I'm not sure he ever describes the costs and beauties of a life exclusive to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He certainly never talks about "Mormon life" in the sort of specific terms which we associate with being baptized at age eight, serving a mission at eighteen, nineteen, or twenty-one, marrying young and having children, serving in callings, and so forth. So what do you think, Megan? Could you imagine any of your friends reading this book and seeing themselves (their concerns, their beliefs, their struggles) in here?

Megan Elaine Fox: I think the obvious and simplistic definition of living a "Mormon life" would be "being a Mormon and then staying alive." After you're baptized, you're Mormon. However you choose to live after that, unless you choose to have your name struck from the lists or get excommunicated, you're still Mormon. But I agree with you that this is not the sort of Mormon life that Miller is talking about; there is no real beauty or cost to saying, "Oh, I'm Mormon" and then doing whatever follows from that. The same sort of thing applies, I think, to most, if not all, religions out there. After all, from what I have learned, in a certain sense to be a Muslim all you really have to do is announce "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet" out loud and say you believe it.

In contrast to that, I think what Miller is talking about is the sort of religious life which leads to sincere self-reflection and an honest and ongoing attempt at self-betterment. This sort of religious life does have a real cost and a real beauty to it, but seems to have

less to do with ordinary praxis and more about how much work one is willing to put into it; i.e., it's less about what you are doing and more about why and how you are doing it. There is a real and significant difference between going through the motions of a religion and sincerely using a religion to become closer to God in whatever form you choose to interpret him.

RAF: What do you see that difference as consisting of?

MEF: Well, think about Islam again. There are five basic acts that are considered mandatory to living a Muslim life. They include praying five times a day, paying a tithe, and fasting during Ramadan, among others. I've fasted Ramadan, for reasons that don't matter now. It didn't bring me closer to God; it wasn't particularly helpful to my spiritual well-being, and I generally just spent a month being very hungry. This wasn't because I was performing the *Sawm* [the formal Arabic name of the Ramadan fast] wrong: to the best of my knowledge, I didn't break any of the rules of Ramadan. (I even recall pulling out a black and white thread once and checking to see if it was too late for me to eat breakfast.)

Though it is not explicit scripture, there are similarly basic things a Mormon is supposed to do to become closer to God: attend Church meetings, have personal and family prayer, take the sacrament, etc. However, I'm sure there are people who go through these motions much the same way I went through Ramadan. It's not entirely sincere.

The struggle that comes from sincerely trying to become closer to God, be it through going to sacrament meeting or going on *Hajj* [the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca], is, I think, very similar from one religion to the next. I have friends who attend Sunday meetings very different from ours for the exact same reasons we do, and get some of the exact same reactions out of it. Same with fasting or prayer. They are taking their salvation seriously, through avenues that are open to them. Anyone who is trying to sincerely live a religious life is constantly going through self-reflection and attempting to better themselves. Though the context may be different, though what we may be doing is very

different, it seems to me that why we are doing what we are doing is very similar.

RAF: So, you think that the religious life that Miller is encouraging through the topics he explores in his book is not substantively different from the kind of life which your Presbyterian or Methodist or Catholic friends who also choose to sincerely pursue a life lived "Methodistly" or "Catholically" are seeking, is that right?

MEF: Yes. Overall, I think *Letters to a Young Mormon* is less about how to live a "Mormon life," whatever Miller may have had in mind when he wrote that, but rather how the determination to live a sincere religious life applies to the particulars of Mormon practice and rhetoric.

RAF: I like how you put that: "less about what you are doing and more about why and how you are doing it." What that sounds like to me is "authenticity." But whenever authenticity is brought into a discussion, there's a potential downside: you end up, however careful you may be, enshrining at least a degree of subjectivism.

MEF: What do you mean?

RAF: Well, being a "good" Mormon is something which is at least partly determined collectively, by Church institutions and/or the Church community, while Miller's calls to an authentic Mormon life seem to depend almost entirely, as you put it, on "sincere self-reflection and an honest and ongoing attempt at self-betterment." Which is something we do ourselves, with our status as "good" Mormons being possibly irrelevant to that measurement. After all, as you point out, someone can go through the motions of Mormon life, as you went through the motions of Ramadan, and get no authentic transformation out of it at all—though if their primary goal is just to tell themselves they are good Mormons, reflecting back to themselves the judgment of others, then maybe that's good enough.

So I guess what I'm saying is this: maybe Miller, as he expresses himself through this book, really *isn't* interested in helping people

be more successful or skilled in the various duties or accomplishments or particulars of their lives as Mormons—in other words, helping them become more obedient home teachers, or more faithful tithe payers, or more generous and charitable service providers, or whatever. Rather, he wants Mormons to live their lives more "Mormonly," more centered on a kind of inward devotion, something that could only be known subjectively.

MEF: I think that the result of someone trying to live an "authentic" Mormon life and someone simply trying to be a "good" Mormon can look very similar from an outside perspective, but really aren't *that* similar. Like you said, whether or not one is a "good" Mormon is determined, 90 percent of the time, by what your community thinks of you, whereas being "authentically" Mormon depends a great deal more on your extremely personal attempts to be closer to God.

I'm reminded of you telling a story about a companion you had on your mission who wouldn't ever fast. He said that fasting didn't help him focus spiritually, it didn't help him think about the less fortunate, made him grouchy and mean-spirited, etc. So he simply never did it. That's one of the best examples I can think of about how trying to be authentically Mormon can differ from trying to be a good Mormon.

RAF: Of course, maybe what I took as my companion's sincere effort to seek the spirit as it was most available to him may have just been, deep down, a totally self-interested concern with his own comfort.

MEF: Sure, and that's why the community can't be *entirely* left out here. There is some overlap between "authentic" Mormon religiosity and Mormon "goodness." "Good" Mormons go to sacrament meeting; it's something you just *do.* But I don't think it's something anyone who's trying to be authentically Mormon is going to skip, either. I can see a legitimate argument being made for sitting in the hall for the entirety of the meeting, but I don't think any "authentic" Mormon is going to entirely skip the meeting for religious reasons. Same goes for praying and

reading the scriptures. There is some merit to those standard Mormon answers.

RAF: I wonder if it would bother Miller to hear the arguments in this book put in this way. Is he really just talking in a rather philosophical and meditative way about the "standard Mormon answers," as it were? I guess I didn't see that, but now that I think about it I kind of suspect it's true. Clearly he's not talking about *all* the "standard Mormon answers"—I don't remember anything from the book about obedience, for example, or any of the usual stuff about family and priesthood and whatnot. But to the extent the Standard Mormon Answers are "pray, read the scriptures, attend church, etc.," I suppose you're right that he does hit on most of them. Do you see that as a fault in the book? Is there a possibility that, for all his apparent intention to open up hard questions and think "Mormonly" in a way that goes beyond what we do at church, he actually kind of failed? (And if so, then why did you say you liked the book anyway?)

MEF: Lots of—if not all—religions have basic fundamentals that they go back to time after time. That's not a bad thing; you can't have any kind of "authenticity" without it. And I don't think that he's failed to think in a way that goes beyond the way we talk in church, because he *does* make the reader ask some of the hard questions about what it means to take on more responsibility for their thoughts and actions. That's why I liked the book; I never thought about faith, or scripture reading, etc., the way he suggested until I read what he wrote about it. And that's a good thing.

RAF: Let's talk about those for a moment. What was your favorite insight from the book?

MEF: I really liked his chapter on faith. Miller claims that some people find it really easy to believe that there is a God, and some people find it almost impossible—which I think is totally true—and then goes on to say that both groups of people have certain advantages and disadvantages when it comes to faith, which for

him isn't really related to "belief" at all. For him, it connects to listening, to "attending to the difficult, disturbing, and resistant truths God sets knocking at your door . . . to care for what's right in front of you." In other words, he doesn't really think about "faith" as a thing ("I have faith in God, Jesus Christ, etc."); he thinks about "faithfulness" as a practice: when something is revealed as true to you, through your engagement with the community you're part of, don't treat it causally or idolize it. Instead, take it seriously enough to figure out what it is saying, so as to be really "true" to that revelation. Reading this chapter was the first time I really understood the often-quoted phrase "faith is an action word."

RAF: I think my favorite was how, in Miller's chapter on scripture, he essentially presents all of us a "translators," having to find for ourselves afresh the meaning (which I think is the same as the "truth" you wrote about above in conjunction with the faith chapter) of the books that claim to include the words of the prophets. He sees no other way to do this except to read them—really read them, and read lots of other things besides them, so as to deepen our ability to translate the words on the page. I think that's a powerful image, and one that fits in with a lot that I already believe about the importance of interpretation as we work our way through life.

MEF: Yes, I really liked that chapter too.

RAF: To get back on track, and to remember the title of the book: do you think that these more introspective, more "authentic" approaches to thinking "Mormonly" about the Standard Mormon Answers is actually helpful to young Mormons like yourself?

MEF: I think *Letters to a Young Mormon* is a good book—a *very* good book—but I don't think the "authenticity" that is kind of its theme is quite enough for Mormon youth like me. I have no doubt that Miller cares about the fate of the struggling and doubting young Mormons out there. There is a lot of significant and sometimes harmful baggage that comes from old phrases being thrown around

again and again in our Standard Mormon Answers, and just, at least, *not* talking about old issues in the same way can itself be a significant help. His chapter on sexual hunger really stands out here.

So, honestly, *Letters to a Young Mormon* is a great resource for reframing questions and coming to a different sort of understanding on issues that you've heard on repeat ever since you were twelve or eight or even younger. And it's a great resource, I think, for young Mormons who are beginning to learn to think about these issues for themselves, and want the sort of relationship with God and Christ that they've heard the adults in their life testify of. But for young Mormons who look at their ward, or the Church culture in general, and are hurt, or who feel alienated due to years of having been hammered with the same doctrines or general practices or anything else like that, I don't see how *Letters to a Young Mormon* is going to do much. Because, in the end, all Miller is doing is writing about the same things we hear every Sunday. And telling us to pray harder or have a little more faith isn't going to cut it—no matter that he calls it "listening" or "translating"—not when we can't feel God through the, quite frankly, often limited ways the Church wants us to interact with Him.

RAF: Is that really fair? I do think that there are at least a few places where Miller's rather subjective approach to thinking about Mormon life leads him into some new—for most Mormons, anyway!—territory. Like, what do you think about his use of "ignorance"? There is his very Zen reference to how religious people need "great faith, great doubt, and great effort"; there is the way he talks about prayer as an almost Buddhist meditative struggle to listen, which you've already mentioned; and there is the way in which he talks about "eternal life" as something which is "always for now and never for later." I think it is possible that Miller's explorations are, at least, bringing some kind of robust concept of "unknowability" into those SMAs. In talking about prayer and the temple and faith and eternal life, he seems to be getting at the idea that there really are things that just *can't* be known. Not in the usual "wait on the mysteries of God to be unfolded" mode, or the "put it on a shelf for a while" approach to doubts, but rather in the sense of ineffable experiences that

are never reducible to propositional knowledge. I don't know Miller, but my gut tells me that in this book he is subtly working out a rather "Mormonly" way of saying something outright mystical. That truth is the illusive, immediate experience of the divine, and *not* doctrinal clarity about the historicity of the Book of Mormon or whatever.

But maybe I'm reading him wrong—maybe he really *does* think that Mormon revelations will give you definite answers to religious questions, and not just give us a mode of thinking about and experiencing how God's unknowability abides around us (which is one way of getting at "mysticism"). Any opinions there?

MEF: I'm not sure if I got an impression from the book regarding whether Miller wants his readers to think that there is definite knowledge that can be found or learned about the mysteries of God or not. It seems to me that Miller is trying to marry two beliefs. One, that revelations can give you definite answers to your questions, that prophets, seers, and revelators exist today and speak directly to and for God, and that while there are mysteries of the kingdom that we, as mortals, can't and won't understand now, we will when we're exalted. Two, that the best we can really hope for in terms of personal revelation is gaining an understanding that God "hides himself in what we would like to ignore." It's a little confusing. Still, I agree that he's done a really great job of pointing out that the Mormon rhetoric which we typically think of when we talk about SMA stuff—prayer, faith, eternal life, etc.—can be used much more broadly for much more mystical ideas. He connects this with the temple, which is another really fascinating part of *Letters to a Young Mormon*. To me, Miller is making the point in that chapter that what the temple is really there for is to show you just a small bit of the mysteries of the kingdom, only so you can get a glimpse of just how *little* we understand about God. "It will acquaint you with your own ignorance." And, to bring us back to the beginning, that's not something that's solely Mormon either. It applies to most if not all areas of study. One of my favorite quotes: "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know" —Albert Einstein.

RAF: Are you sure that was Einstein? I think I saw on Facebook that Dumbledore said it.

MEF: "Don't believe everything you read on the internet, Dad." —Benjamin Franklin.

Charity on the Rocks

Hannah Pritchett

This talk was given at the Oakland 1st Ward, Oakland, California, on January 26, 2014.

My husband grew up backpacking, and it was one of the conditions of our marriage that I would learn to backpack too. I do it now, and occasionally even enjoy it, but it's definitely a stretch to say that I'm good at it or love it as wholeheartedly as Mike does; backpacking is perpetually a challenge for me, and my favorite part is the end of the day when I collapse in our tent with my Kindle. I say this by way of prefacing a personal story so that you understand the context as I start telling you about a time when nature nearly got the best of me.

It was the end of a long day climbing mountains with a heavy backpack, and when we hit a boulder field about a mile before our planned campsite, Mike skipped over it in his usual sure-footed way, leaving me behind to pick my way across carefully, looking to identify gaps I could jump over and trying my best to not simply fall down and cry with exhaustion. Mike reached the end of the boulder field while I was still only a third of the way through, and, like the generally helpful person he is, he turned around to shout directions to me, trying to guide me the best way through the boulders—the way he had come.

The problem was, and always is while backpacking, that Mike and I are different people with different energy levels, different skills (namely, hopping between boulders or carrying a backpack through Yosemite), and different leg lengths. The best way for Mike was not the best way for me—some of those jumps were *huge*—and having him stand at the edge of the field shouting directions at me, leading me over to gaze at gaps that were way too large for my tired legs, felt like frustration, shame, and failure, not aid.

Do you ever have life experiences that are clearly a metaphor even as you're experiencing them? As I was slowly picking my way along an easier path through the boulders, I was thinking to myself, "This is going to make it into a church talk some day." (Cold comfort, that.) At the time it seemed like a perfect metaphor for how people can lead different lives and take different paths back to God, depending on their individual strengths, but how all those paths can succeed in the end. (Spoiler alert: I did eventually get to drop my pack and pick up my novel at the campsite.) This story could have prefaced a beautiful talk about diversity in the Church and the legitimacy of personal revelation as we choose our own paths.

In the many months since this experience, though, I've been reflecting on compassion and charity, and I think the story teaches that too. (Like all the best parables, this one is flexible.) Mike was trying to serve me—despite dragging me on death marches, he's generally very kind—but he was far away from me, standing at the destination already, and his vantage point and mine didn't match up. He didn't understand where I was or what I could do, and, from that distance and without that understanding, his service was useless. Poor Mike was in a situation I'm sure we all recognize: he wanted to help but didn't know how, and his best efforts, far from helping, were probably making things worse because his directions to me only emphasized how easy it was for him, leaving me feeling even more like a failure.

As dedicated disciples of Christ, we all know how essential it is for us to strive for charity, the pure love of Christ, but that doesn't mean it's immediately easy. Charity starts with understanding. Proverbs 4:7 tells us that "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." I was a nerdy child who grew up to be a nerdy adult, and I've always thought, or at least hoped, that that referred to book learning, philosophy, and the intellect.

As I gain more life experience outside of books, however, I'm coming to find another interpretation: true wisdom means understanding people, and understanding people means having charity. Look at the people around you. Ask them questions. Listen to their answers. Understand who they are, where they're coming

from, what their strengths are, what they want, and what they need, and *that's* when you can love them, serve them effectively, and see them as children of God. (Nerds can still have hope! I think these skills can be learned in reading. Fiction, and its omniscient narrators, have blessed my life immensely in teaching me how other brains work and what other people want. I can practice walking a mile in a thousand other pairs of shoes without ever getting up off the couch.)

Christ, of course, is our ultimate exemplar for practicing charity in understanding. When a woman in a crowd touched the hem of his garment, hoping to be healed, he understood what it meant to her and why she did it and reacted with compassion rather than irritation. When the Pharisees brought him the woman taken in adultery, firmly convinced of their own rightness and their own interpretation of justice, but equally firmly rooted in a culture without much respect for women's agency, especially sexual agency, Christ modeled mercy and compassion. I like to think—though this may be reading into the story—that part of his mercy was based on understanding her. Christ could see that what she needed wasn't exacted judgment and punishment but compassion; only with that could she heal and start living anew. How often are we like the Pharisees, quick to judge someone for perceived sin but slow to understand the context for that person's choices?

Side note: I include myself in this. I work in online safety and, while I will spare you all the gory details, in the course of my job every day I see people making terrible choices that cause real pain and damage in their lives. It's sometimes tempting to dismiss those situations as entirely their fault, mostly because that way I feel less heartache over the pain of innocents and less drive to take responsibility and try to fix difficult situations. I have to constantly remind myself that I'm not seeing all the context and that I can't see what needs they have unmet, what pain they have in their hearts, what pressures they have in their heads that drove them to make those choices. As I do my job, I have to strive and pray every day for greater understanding and charity.

Christ models perfect compassion based on understanding, but we also have imperfect examples to look to in the scriptures.

In the story of Job, his friends come after his tragedies and try to comfort him. Judging by their deep conversations with each other, I think Job had probably considered these people good friends. They seem sincere in their desire to support their friend, but of course, they don't understand the real nature of Job's misfortunes (and who can blame them?) and their clumsy attempts at comfort probably hurt more than they help. "You must have done something to deserve this" isn't generally what lessens a sufferer's pain.

Like Job's friends, our own efforts to express charity are often clumsy. We feel good about ourselves when we donate our cast-off clothing to Goodwill or the Salvation Army and know that someone in need, probably someone in Africa, is going to end up with our 2005 5K run t-shirt. Look at us! We are clothing the naked, just like the scriptures say! And yet what we don't understand is that they weren't actually naked: prior to this outpouring of donated clothes, there was a sizable and productive textile industry in Africa; between 1981 and 2000, 40 percent of the decline in production and 50 percent of the jump in unemployment could be explained by clothing donations.[1] Which would have been better for the poor: our used, stained t-shirts or jobs? Or take disaster relief to Japan in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami: the Japanese Red Cross clearly stated that donations weren't needed[2]—Japan is a fairly wealthy nation with good infrastructure and preparation for disasters like earthquakes—and yet the American Red Cross received $34 million in donations to Japan anyway. This is a hard truth, but we must face it: not all charity is helpful, and good intentions aren't everything; sometimes, in our lack of understanding, our attempted charity may be hurting the very people we want to help.

To be fair to Mike, I have to return now to my story of the boulder field. After a few minutes, he saw that shouting to me across the distance wasn't helping, and so, having dropped off his own pack at the destination, he hopped back over the boulder field, stood next to me, and, sharing my perspective with me, coached me through the boulders, step by step. This, not his directions from the sidelines, was Christlike service: he stood right next to me, understood where I was and where I wanted to go, and helped me along to the goal.

Christ's path is as much seeking to understand and empathize as seeking to solve the problem because only understanding and context and wisdom can actually solve the problem. Not practicing charity is not an option—not for us—and so we must get wisdom, and with all our getting get understanding.

One example of this that inspires me is Cécile Pelous, a French member of the Church recently featured in a Mormon.org video.[3] Wanting to serve, in 1986 she started spending three months every year in India. Besides the personal sacrifice on display, what most struck me about her practice of charity is the humility she took with her; she went intending to help and packed articles she thought would be useful—medicines, basic training in first aid—but, on arriving, was open to doing anything that needed doing: "Dirty clothes and sheets had to be boiled and washed, meals prepared, patients fed in night shelters and almshouses, and medical care given." She couldn't have known about all those needs from a distance, but she was willing to bridge that distance, to get up close with the people she wanted to serve, and when she understood what needed to be done, she did it.[4]

This isn't easy. It's much harder than a systematic, by-the-numbers, just-donate-your-clothing or always-bring-a-casserole approach to charity. (Hence, of course, why people are still donating their t-shirts.) This is the higher law than even the golden rule: treat people how *they* want to be treated.

So what can we do with these hard truths? First, we remember them; we keep in mind that charity goes deeper than a checklist. We ask questions and listen—sincerely listen—to their responses. We learn about the people around us and let them tell their stories. We pray for it if we need to: D&C 136:32 tells us, "Let him [or her] that is ignorant learn wisdom by humbling himself [or herself] and calling upon the Lord." We take home and visiting teaching seriously: in its purest form, the program is designed for building this kind of understanding, if we let it, since it asks us to go into people's homes and let them into ours. Understanding starts with openness: opening our doors and welcoming people in, opening our minds and asking the right questions, and opening our hearts as we learn to empathize.

Sometimes this charity will look a little different than we expect it to. Sometimes it means taking a casserole. Sometimes it means washing sheets, preparing meals, and feeding patients. Sometimes it means tracing patterns in the dirt and having mercy on a sinner. Sometimes it means covering ourselves in sackcloth and ashes and mourning with those that mourn. Always, though, it means dropping our own heavy packs, walking back on the path to where a sister or brother stands, and, step by step, side by side, leading them along.

Notes

1. Garth Frazer, "Used-Clothing Donations and Apparel Production in Africa," *The Economic Journal* 118 (2008): 1,764–84.

2. Stephanie Strom, "A Charitable Rush, With Little Direction," *New York Times,* March 15, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/16/world/asia/16charity.html.

3. "Hi I'm Cécile," http://www.mormon.org/cecile.

4. Thierry Crucy, "Cécile Pelous: Love and Friendship in India," *Liahona,* March 1992, http://www.lds.org/liahona/1992/03/ccile-pelous-love-and-friendship-in-india.

Contributors

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Dialogue Announces a New Award for Women Scholars

In Honor of the Women of Exponent *and* Exponent II

The Dialogue Board of Trustees announces a new award for the best article published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* written by a female scholar. The award is named in recognition of pioneering women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who established forums to give voice to Latter-day Saint women. In the nineteenth century, Louisa Lula Greene, Emmeline B. Wells, and their associates published women's expressions on politics, religion, culture, family, and faith and were in the forefront of issues relating to women's equality both in Utah Territory and in the nation. Over its forty-two-year history, *Exponent* reflected the vision of Joseph and Emma Smith, both of whom saw in the Restoration a gospel of liberation for women. In the twentieth century, under the guidance of Claudia Bushman, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Nancy Dredge, and others, the spirit as well as the substance of *Exponent* was restored and revitalized in a new publication, *Exponent II*. Over the course of its forty-year-history (1974–2014), *Exponent II* has continued the legacy of its nineteenth-century sister publication while, at the same time, inspiring a number of non-Mormon scholars to engage in research and writing on the Mormon experience, thus broadening and enriching the conversation about Mormonism in general and the role of women in Mormon culture in particular.

In establishing this award, *Dialogue* recognizes the need for more female scholars to explore Mormon history, doctrine and culture. The future of Mormonism will be greatly enriched through the cultivation of more research, scholarship and publishing by and about women. *Dialogue* is especially interested in encouraging younger female scholars to use their skills, talents, and feminine point of view to broaden the understanding of Mormonism as it continues to expand its influence in the world. The award, which carries a prize of $500, will be announced in *Dialogue* in 2015 and the first award will be given during *Dialogue*'s jubilee year, 2016.