

# “Daughters of Christ”: Finding Language to Talk about Women and Priesthood

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Those of you who had the opportunity to hear Wendy Ulrich and Jill Derr yesterday will recognize variations on similar themes in what I have to say. I was delighted to hear how those themes played out from their perspective and I'm honored to be part of the conversation.

In her presentation, “This is a Women’s Church,” at the FairMormon Conference two years ago, Sharon Eubank talked about the need to develop new language to express the way women relate to priesthood. “Some of it will be done by study, and by inventiveness,” she suggested, “and some of it will be done by revelation, as we learn to understand that better.... The apostles are trying to give us new language,” she observed. “Elder M. Russell Ballard said that ‘when endowed,’ both men and women are given ‘power in the Priesthood.’ Elder Oaks said, ‘Women many possess Priesthood authority.’ We have never put those words in a sentence together before, I don’t think, and really felt it was right.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The talk to which Sister Eubank was referring, of course, was given by Elder Oaks at the priesthood session of General Conference in April 2014: “We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman—young or old—is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function. The same is true when a woman is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization under the direction of one who holds the keys of the priesthood. Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties.”<sup>[2]</sup>

So why are we not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, if, as Elder Oaks affirms, that is the only kind of authority there is in the Church? Why did Sister Eubank feel that it wasn’t quite right to put those words together in the same sentence? The reason we feel uncomfortable with the idea that women have priesthood authority, I propose, is because we have been viewing women’s relationship to priesthood through the lens of a model developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a model whose historical roots we can trace. According to this model, priesthood is a role belonging to men and motherhood is its spiritual parallel for women. Women can enjoy the blessings of the priesthood, but only *through* men holding priesthood office. As Elder Oaks’ statement implies,

however, the model does not accurately reflect the way women actively serve in their Church callings, on missions, and in the temple.

Most of us are familiar with the priesthood/motherhood model, but not with the details of its evolution. Today I would like to briefly review the historical sources of the model and then explore the ways priesthood and Relief Society leaders are transcending it to open up the conversation on women and priesthood. It's always a challenge to talk about broad historical trends without being simplistic, especially in just a few minutes. Regarding Joseph Smith's foundational ideas about women and priesthood, however, we are lucky to have the minutes of the Nauvoo Relief Society, the constitution of Relief Society, and other crucial documents more accessible than ever before in the newly published *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*. Please read them for yourself and then you can supply the nuance. It's a big book, but it's a good read. I have a friend who hauled it all the way to Saudi Arabia so she could read it with her five daughters.

Here are key points:

- When Joseph Smith organized the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo on March 17, 1842, “after the pattern, or order, of the priesthood,” he brought women into Church government, granting the Relief Society presidency authority to direct the organization but without ordaining them to specific priesthood office.[3]
- Joseph Smith included women in the priesthood ordinances performed in latter-day temples, linking generations in an eternal priesthood order, and he authorized women to administer those ordinances to other women.
- He further established celestial marriage as the culminating ordinance through which husbands and wives together could receive exaltation and the fullness of the priesthood.

Referring to temple ordinances at the Nauvoo Relief Society meeting of May 27, 1842, Bishop Newel K. Whitney remarked that “without the female all things cannot be restor'd to the earth it takes all to restore the Priesthood.”[4] Eliza R. Snow, who became general president when the Relief Society was re-established in Utah Territory under Brigham Young's direction, felt confident admonishing the Relief Society sisters in Ogden in 1873: “You, my sisters, if you are faithful will become Queens of Queens, and Priestesses unto the Most High God. These are your callings.”[5]

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, our understanding of priesthood became increasingly focused on male priesthood office. In the western world of today, where equality between men and women is the ideal, though not the reality, it's hard to imagine the way earlier generations viewed women as distinct from men in terms of educational opportunities, life's work, and civic involvement. In the nineteenth-century, Victorian attitudes

framed this distinction as separate spheres—the public forum for men and the domestic realm for women. Men headed households and represented their families to the world; women exerted moral influence as wives and mothers through their inherent virtues of purity, charity and self-sacrifice.

Given this social context, it is not surprising that priesthood, in the form of priesthood office, could be equated with the public role that most people of the time saw as natural to men. In response to this narrower understanding of priesthood, Latter-day Saint women began questioning their own spiritual identity. Susa Young Gates was especially interested in issues related to gender and priesthood, but resolved her personal concerns in letters and conversations over a number of years with her friend and mentor Joseph F. Smith. Susa had been active in the national campaign for women's suffrage and she felt it was vital for there be a spiritual role in the Church for women equal to that of priesthood office for men. As founder and editor of both the *Young Women's Journal* and the *Relief Society Magazine*, she was used to expressing her ideas in public. "Women do not hold the Priesthood," she wrote in 1914 in the *Relief Society Bulletin*, the precursor of the *Relief Society Magazine*. "This fact must be faced calmly by mothers and explained clearly to young women," but she added, "Women in the Church must not forget that they have other rights which men do not possess."<sup>[6]</sup> What she had in mind was the idea of refined and virtuous motherhood as the sphere of action for women paralleling priesthood for men. While her approach magnified the spiritual importance of women's traditional roles, it also portrayed priesthood and motherhood as two mutually exclusive categories, a departure from the attitudes of first generation Mormons.

With her daughter Leah Widtsoe as co-author, Susa Young Gates promoted the idea of separate spiritual spheres in *Women of the "Mormon" Church*, first published in 1926: "Office and priesthood carry heavy responsibilities requiring constant labor and time," they wrote. "No woman could safely carry the triple burden of wifeness, motherhood and at the same time function in priestly orders. Yet her creative home labor ranks side by side, in earthly and heavenly importance, with her husband's priestly responsibilities. His in the market place—hers at the hearthstone.... That he would bungle and spoil home life if he sought to enter woman's sphere is as sure as it is that she would emasculate his affairs if, or when, she attempts to prove her equality by crowding man out of his place."<sup>[7]</sup>

In 1933, Leah Widtsoe wrote a two-part article for the *Relief Society Magazine* entitled "Priesthood and Womanhood." An articulate and enthusiastic apologist, she composed it while serving in the European Mission with her husband, Elder John A. Widtsoe, in response to questions posed by nonmembers about the fairness of granting priesthood authority to men only. In "Priesthood and Womanhood" Sister Widtsoe further developed the model of separate spheres, drawing on her study of psychology to suggest that motherhood was a quality inherent in all women. Because motherhood was an innate quality, Sister Widtsoe reasoned, it could

provide a comprehensive spiritual identity even for women who never became biological mothers. “Motherhood can be exercised as universally and vicariously as can Priesthood,” she wrote, “All intelligent worth-while work for social betterment in private life or in organized activity is but an enlarged Motherhood acting for the uplift of mankind.”<sup>[8]</sup> If women did not act with God’s authority, like men holding priesthood office, she concluded, they could still exercise the powerful moral influence of mothers.

Attuned to the progressive movements of the early twentieth century, Sister Widtsoe updated the Victorian ideal of motherhood with a passion, encouraging women to go to college and study chemistry, biology and sociology to become more efficient housewives and more capable mothers. “The woman who is to act intelligently in every capacity of her life as home-maker,” she asserted, “must have almost universal knowledge.”<sup>[9]</sup> “All the learning in the world can be applied and centralized in the home.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Of course, she insisted, husbands would want to listen carefully to the opinions of such educated wives. While a woman’s husband “is her wise counselor and advisor in all things,” she wrote, women should be “recognized as the equals and partners of men in the good game of life.”<sup>[11]</sup> In this she differed from her mother Susa who, like Joseph F. Smith, held the traditional view that “the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man” as expressed in I Corinthians chapter 11. The Widtsoes acknowledged the primacy of priesthood leadership in the home, but they emphasized the partnership of marriage. Traveling together with the Utah State Agricultural College extension division, they helped farmers increase their productivity and farm wives become more efficient homemakers and they co-authored a book on scientific evidence supporting the Word of Wisdom. Elder Widtsoe even gave a talk in General Conference devoted to his wife’s ideas about the ideal education for women.<sup>[12]</sup>

Furthermore, Elder Widtsoe quoted extensively from his wife’s Relief Society article, “Priesthood and Womanhood,” when he compiled the handbook and study guide, *Priesthood and Church Government*, published in 1939. *Priesthood and Church Government* was the Melchizedek Priesthood Manual for 1940-41 and for many years it was the one book on priesthood that people might have in their home library. The popularity of the Widtsoes’ priesthood/motherhood model lay in encompassing not only the transition from a broad understanding of priesthood authority to a focus on priesthood *office* held only by men but also the rapidly expanding interest in women’s equality. President Spencer W. Kimball reflected the Widtsoes’ pioneering emphasis on equal partnership in distinctive roles when, at the annual Women’s Fireside in 1978, he famously exhorted women to be contributing and *full* partners in their marriages, not *silent* or *limited* partners and he referred approvingly the next year to a quote by Elder Widtsoe that “The place of woman in the Church is to walk beside the man, not in front of him nor behind him.”<sup>[13]</sup>

A talk by Sister Sheri L. Dew at the 2001 General Relief Society Meeting demonstrated the persistence of the priesthood/motherhood model. She quoted from *Priesthood and Church Government* and then elaborated on the theme of vicarious motherhood: “Just as worthy men were foreordained to hold the priesthood in mortality, righteous women were endowed pre-mortally with the privilege of motherhood. Motherhood is more than bearing children, though it is certainly that. It is the essence of who we are as women. It defines our very identity, our divine stature and nature, and the unique traits our Father gave us.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Sister Dew’s eloquent language affirmed the eternal significance of motherhood as had Leah Widtsoe’s seventy years earlier, but it also reinforced the idea that priesthood and motherhood are mutually exclusive categories. Despite the endurance of the priesthood/motherhood model, we are becoming more sensitive to its limitations:

- As Elder Oaks’ observed, the model does not fully acknowledge the authority women exercise in their Church service. Leah Widtsoe used the analogy of an electric power plant to show the relationship of women to priesthood. “No woman in the Church may say that since she cannot hold the Priesthood it is no concern of hers,” she insisted, “It is just as though she were to sit in a dark house refusing to turn on the electricity because she is not an official... of the electric company. She would better rejoice that she can use all the benefits of electric power without carrying any of the burden of administering the electric plants.”<sup>[15]</sup> Even so, this explanation leaves women as passive recipients of priesthood blessings.
- Second, because motherhood is common to women throughout the world, motherhood itself does not give Latter-day Saint women a spiritual identity that signifies their commitment to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Sister Widtsoe did not refer to scripture when portraying priesthood and motherhood as distinct spiritual modes, but relied instead on social attitudes and insights from her study of psychology. Using the lens of the priesthood/motherhood model, women may find it difficult to recognize their own connection to the priesthood language permeating LDS scriptures and ordinances.
- Furthermore, even with the idea that motherhood is innate in all women, the model of priesthood and motherhood as spiritual alternatives for men and women can leave unmarried women and those who are not biological mothers feeling uncertain of their own spiritual identity or value. It can also minimize the important role of fathers in nurturing children.

Continuing to discuss the relationship of women to priesthood in the context of the priesthood/motherhood model blinds us to the richness of Joseph Smith’s priesthood doctrine with its expanding ramifications for women. As the LDS Gospel Topics Essay on “Joseph Smith’s Teachings about Priesthood, Temple and Women” points out: “Latter-day Saints and

others often mistakenly equate priesthood with religious office and the men who hold it, which obscures the broader Latter-day Saint concept of priesthood.”[16]

I appreciate the desire for members of the Ordain Women movement to increase the spiritual power and influence of women in the Church, a desire reflecting the promises of Joseph Smith to the women of the Nauvoo Relief Society. It’s worth considering, however, that the Ordain Women movement itself is based on the premise of the priesthood/motherhood model that all priesthood power and authority inheres in male priesthood office. Focusing single-mindedly on the goal of ordaining women to priesthood office as the non-negotiable first step to increase women’s spiritual gifts and participation in decision-making throughout the Church narrows the issue to a power struggle with General Authorities.

A more effective approach, I suggest, is not maintaining the status quo, but looking for opportunities to collaborate with priesthood and Relief Society leaders. Neylan McBaine in her book *Women at Church* and many other writers have offered tangible ideas for working together in our stakes, wards and homes.[17] But we can also enhance the status of women in the Church by learning to *think* and *speak* differently ourselves. Weigh the impact of Elder M. Russell Ballard’s challenge to women at the 2015 BYU Women’s Conference: “Like faithful sisters in the past, you need to learn how to use the priesthood authority with which you have been endowed to obtain every eternal blessing that will be yours.”[18]

Statements like those of Elder Oaks and Elder Ballard can magnify our efforts to understand who we are and who we can become as we study scripture, reflect on the language used in ordinances, and actively seek the Spirit. Finding specific words to describe our spiritual identity is not just an empty intellectual exercise. When we have words to describe who we really are, we understand more fully our potential. When our understanding of ourselves is truer to the scriptures and the ordinances of the gospel, we can build on that foundation to transform our lives and our collective life in the church.

Elder Oaks’ assurance that women are given priesthood authority to perform priesthood functions suggests new ways to explore women’s relationship to priesthood. We often ask “Should women ‘have’ the priesthood or ‘hold’ the priesthood?” implying that priesthood is an object which is made tangible in the priesthood offices given only to men. Thinking of priesthood as the authority to perform priesthood *functions* can help us to ask more relevant questions. For example:

1. How do women *act* with priesthood authority and power as missionaries, in the temple, and in their Church callings?
2. How do women *function* as priestesses in the temple?

3. How do men and women share divine authority to establish and guide their families when they enter into the eternal covenant of marriage?
  4. How do women become queens and priestesses; that is, how are women spiritually transformed?
1. How do women act with priesthood authority and power as missionaries, in the temple, and in their Church callings?

In his address on the keys and authority of the priesthood, Elder Oaks stated “Relief Society is not just a class for women but something they belong to—a divinely established appendage to the priesthood.”<sup>[19]</sup> While in ordinary parlance an appendage is the same thing as an auxiliary, in the context of Doctrine and Covenants sections 84 and 107 an appendage is something more, something included in or belonging to priesthood.

The understanding that both men and women can act with priesthood authority under the direction of those holding priesthood keys can be applied to women serving in other organizations of the Church as well as Relief Society. In April 2013 Elder Tad R. Callister encouraged leaders to trust the young men in Aaronic priesthood quorum presidencies with greater responsibility. By virtue of the priesthood *in* them, as he phrased it, they have the right to receive revelation when they recommend counselors, reach out to less active members and teach lessons in their quorum meetings.<sup>[20]</sup> Keeping in mind Elder Oaks’ clear instruction that when a woman—young or old—is set apart to function as an officer or teacher in a Church organization, she is given priesthood authority, we can assure young women that they also exercise priesthood authority in their callings. When a young girl asks why she cannot pass the sacrament, what is the common response? “Because women don’t hold the priesthood.” A more accurate response might be “Passing the sacrament is an assignment given to deacons in the Aaronic Priesthood. You will also have the opportunity to exercise priesthood authority—as class president in the Young Women’s organization, as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or in administering priesthood ordinances in the temple.”

Elder Ballard has long advocated the use of councils in every unit of the Church, starting with the family, to increase women’s participation in decision-making. Those who participate in councils are expected to voice their honest opinions, listen carefully to each other, and then seek the Spirit to come together in unity. The understanding that both men and women exercise priesthood authority strengthens the standing of women in these councils and also opens the door for women and men to collaborate further in their Church service. When President Monson lowered the missionary age for women, young women responded with enthusiasm. To reflect the capabilities of these talented women, the old Zone Leader Councils were replaced with Missionary Leadership Councils, which now include the mission president’s wife and sister missionaries holding the new position of sister training leaders. Returning home, these young women will bring added confidence to their lifetimes of leadership in Church organizations.

## 2. How do women function as priestesses in the temple?

The priesthood/motherhood model can put women in an especially ambiguous relationship with the temple, which can result in culture shock. Our young women have grown up in the Church with the idea of equal partnership expressed in image of the Sacred Triangle where men and women relate equally to God and to each other, while the temple experience is structured hierarchically. They have also been taught that motherhood is women's appropriate role and that women do not "have" and should not want the priesthood. When they go to the temple, however, they are immersed in priesthood language and symbolism and participate actively in priesthood ordinances.

The question "Do women 'have' or 'get' the priesthood by virtue of their temple endowment?" became an especially contentious issue in the 1990s. Elder Oaks' 2014 clarification that women act with priesthood authority when performing priesthood functions can help women ponder the significance of what they do in the temple without feeling they are claiming something that isn't theirs. With the understanding that women *act* with priesthood authority, we can talk about the role priests played in offering sacrifice in ancient Israel and then confidently relate it to the way both women and men mediate the sacrifice of the Savior by participating in priesthood ordinances in modern temples. Kathleen Flake phrased it this way: "Most simply, a priest is one who has the right to access the powers of heaven and to mediate or exercise those heavenly powers for the benefit of others on earth."<sup>[21]</sup> The parallel of motherhood is fatherhood; the parallel of priest is priestess. Even though they are not *ordained* to ecclesiastical office, women clearly *function* as priestesses, both in performing sacred ordinances as temple workers and in officiating in those ordinances as proxy for deceased ancestors.

## 3. How do women become queens and priestesses; that is, how are women spiritually transformed?

D&C 76 was revealed in 1832, ten years before Joseph Smith introduced temple ordinances that would include queens and priestesses as well as kings and priests in the eternal priesthood order. In retrospect, we are confident that D&C 76 itself encompasses queens and priestesses, nevertheless, because of the pervasive influence of the priesthood/motherhood model, we hesitate to discuss clearly a woman's path to *becoming* a queen and priestess.

Members of the Relief Society General Presidency have emphasized one important way to talk about that path, which is that we are "women of covenant." While the phrase "women of covenant" does not explicitly say what *kind* of covenant nor define how women relate to priesthood, it does encompass women's participation in priesthood ordinances. "Women of covenant" is a spiritual identity that is active, not passive, and, significantly, it includes all women, whatever their stage in life, and whether or not they are married or have children.



But what is the nature of our covenant and how does it relate to priesthood? According to King Benjamin, when we enter into the covenant of baptism, we take upon ourselves the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:8). The priesthood/motherhood model implies that only men holding priesthood office can belong to the order of the Son of God. In contrast, one way to think of women's spiritual progression is to contemplate how baptism and all subsequent ordinances *order us* in our relationship to the Savior. Let me elaborate:

### 3.A. Being in the Image of Christ.

In Moses 2:27 we learn not only that men and women were created in the image of God, but that both were created in the image of Christ: "And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them." Catholic theology maintains that since only men are in the physical image of the Savior, only men can represent Christ as priests. In contrast LDS scripture affirms that being in the image of Christ is not a matter of gender; therefore, women as well as men have the potential to perform priestly functions in the House of the Lord and ultimately become queens and priestesses in His kingdom.

### 3.B. Becoming Daughters of Christ.

In Moses 6:64-65, Adam is baptized by being immersed in water and born of the Spirit. The Hebrew word '*adam* can be used as a proper name, but *ha-'adam*, "the human," refers to humankind. In Moses 6:9 we learn that when God created male and female, He "called their name Adam." Adam's baptism is a pattern for everyone, regardless of gender. After Adam is baptized, a voice from heaven declares: "Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. This is the record of the Father, and the Son, from henceforth and forever. And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from eternity to all eternity." This phrase resonates with Hebrews 7:3 and is associated with Melchizedek who, having been made like the Son of God, remains a priest forever. A common interpretation of Moses 6:67 is that God must have included ordination to priesthood office along with Adam's baptism. But a more straightforward reading is that going through the process of faith, repentance, baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is to *be* after the order of Christ.

The Lord then tells Adam, "Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons" (Moses 6:67). King Benjamin makes clear that through obedience to the first principles of the gospel both men and women can become children of Christ: "And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you." (Mosiah 5: 7).

We often talk about the value of women as daughters of Heavenly Parents, a precious relationship we share with every human being on the face of the earth. To become a daughter of Christ, however, is something we choose. To become a daughter of Christ is to enter into the order of Christ through baptism and to take upon ourselves the nature of Christ as we receive grace for grace. Understanding that as daughters of Christ we are connected to the Savior through the Spirit like branches to a vine gives us confidence to act in His name to bring forth good fruit. In intercessory prayers offered in behalf of his apostles in Jerusalem and his disciples in the New World, the Savior emphasized the power and intimacy of that unity: “And now, Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23).

### 3.C. Becoming Joint-Heirs with Christ.

While “enduring to the end” can mean enduring to the end of one’s life, it can also mean enduring until we become who God intends us to become. To be a priestly king or queen is to serve in a governing role for the benefit of others, but it is also to *be* a certain kind of person, someone who has received “of the fullness” of God. In the Book of Revelation 1:5-6 the apostle John emphasizes that it is Jesus Christ who having “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood...hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Women, therefore, become queens and priestesses not by virtue of their relationship with their husbands but by virtue of their relationship with Christ.

#### 4. How do men and women share divine authority to establish and guide their family when they enter into the eternal covenant of marriage?

Sharon Eubank framed the question another way: “How can we talk about the divine sealed pair under the umbrella of the priesthood?”<sup>[22]</sup> Citing D&C 131:1-2, the LDS Gospel Topics Essay referred to previously states: “When a man and a woman are sealed in the temple, they enter together, by covenant, into an order of the priesthood.”<sup>[23]</sup>

Toward the end of his life, Joseph Smith was continually thinking about the priesthood revealed through Elijah, which organized families into eternal units. The term “patriarchy” comes from the Greek word meaning “the rule of the father.” The secular definition of patriarchy is the systematic oppression of women in a male dominated system. Joseph Smith, on the other hand, used the concept to distinguish family priesthood from ecclesiastical priesthood. His revelations declare that this is the priesthood order that will continue into the eternities. From this perspective, we can understand patriarchy as family government, an order of the priesthood in

which both fathers and mothers—patriarchs and matriarchs, in the words of Elder Faust—function with the authority to bless and empower their children as our Heavenly Parents bless and empower us.[24]

What is the Church going to look like in ten, twenty, a hundred or a thousand years? What ideal form is the Church working towards that will not only honor the differences between men and women but also allow women to receive all the blessings inherent in the restoration of the gospel? We don't know yet. We become fit for celestial glory not by living in Zion—no earthly organization has yet been perfected—but by working to establish it. But the miracle of the gospel is that the Spirit can both guide our efforts to find better ways of thinking and doing in the Church and also teach us to transcend our current limitations. In this regard, Tania Rands Lyon wrote eloquently about partnering with a District Leader to establish a fledgling branch on her mission to Donetsk, Ukraine:

*The hierarchical divisions of priesthood authority I usually felt melted away into irrelevance. Elder Genta was my priesthood leader—and there was value in having an established organization for handling many issues—but the priesthood itself became a tool we both used for a common goal: building up the Kingdom of God. I felt that we were equals yoked together in the work and pulling with all our might. Who held the priesthood didn't seem nearly as important as who used it.... What we achieved seemed marvelous: we brought an introduction to God to people with no history of religious freedom, and we built a sturdy community organization where there was no tradition of civil society. I found I had tapped into a love far beyond my personal capacity. For a time I would come to my knees at the end of the day and find I had no words to say because it seemed I had been in a constant conversation with God all day long, channels wide open to the Spirit. Member after member bore testimony about the role I had played in the miracle of their conversion. By the time I went home and Elder Genta was sent on to open a new city, many members called us the mother and father of the branch and the praise and love that engulfed us was dizzying. I had certainly never felt so adored or immortalized. My spiritual side squirmed in this spotlight and fought to stay humble—to see myself only as a tool in God's hands. My political side was very much aware that no other setting, including those which explicitly embraced feminism, had ever granted me access to such power and influence.[25]*

The restored Church of Jesus Christ provides a dynamic balance between central authority and individual empowerment and the gospel eliminates false distinctions in a way that transcends the highest expectations of any secular society or system. One of the most exalted questions both women and men can ponder is this: “To what are we anointed?” We are created in the image of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, *the* Anointed One, and He promises us power to become His sons and daughters through faith on His name. D&C 76:94-95 declares that those who dwell in the presence of God, “see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace./ And he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims our potential to become joint-heirs with Christ and fulfill the measure of our creation. No secular institution offers anything close.

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Notes

[1] Sharon Eubank, "This is a Woman's Church," FairMormon Conference, August 8, 2014.

[2] Dallin H. Oaks, "The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood," *Ensign* 44 (May 2014): 51.

[3] Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow, eds.,

*The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), 24-33.

[4] "Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tenth Meeting of the Society, May 27, 1842" in Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years*, 75-76.

[5] Eliza R. Snow, "An Address by Miss Eliza R. Snow Delivered in the Tabernacle, Ogden, at a Relief Society Meeting, Thursday Afternoon, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1873" in Derr et al., *The First Fifty Years*, 388.

[6] *Relief Society Bulletin* 1 (February 1914): 1-3. *Relief Society Bulletin* continued as the *Relief Society Magazine* in 1915.

[7] Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *Women of the "Mormon" Church* (Independence, Missouri, 1928), 3-5.

[8] Leah D. Widtsoe, "Priesthood and Womanhood," *Relief Society Magazine* 20 (October 1933): 597.

[9] *Young Woman's Journal* 14 (January 1903): 35.

[10] *Young Woman's Journal* 9 (May 1898): 232-33.

[11] *Young Woman's Journal* 10 (January 1899): 40; "Priesthood and Womanhood," *Relief Society Magazine* 20 (November 1933): 668.

[12] John A. Widtsoe, "Training for Women's Work," *Relief Society Magazine* 27 (June 1940): 379.

[13] Spencer W. Kimball, "Privileges and Responsibilities of Sisters," *Women's Fireside*, 16 September 1978, *Ensign* 8 (November 1978): 10 [emphasis in original]; Spencer W. Kimball, "The Role of Righteous Women," *Women's Fireside*, September 15, 1979, *Ensign* 9 (November 1979): 102–03.

[14] Sheri L. Dew, "Are We Not All Mothers?" *Ensign* 31 (November 2001): 96-98. Compare J. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government*, 85, with L. Widtsoe, "Priesthood and Womanhood," (October 1933): 597.

[15] Leah D. Widtsoe, "How We May Honor Priesthood in the Home," *Relief Society Magazine* 27 (November 1940): 739.

[16] LDS Gospel Topics Essay: "Joseph Smith's Teachings about Priesthood, Temple, and Women," [www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org).

[17] Neylan McBaine, *Women At Church: Magnifying LDS Women's Local Impact* (Draper, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2014).

[18] M. Russell Ballard, "Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination and Action," May 1, 2015, in *Between God and Us: How Covenants Connect Us to Heaven: Talks from the 2015 BYU Women's Conference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2016), 151.

[19] Dallin H. Oaks, "The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood," *Ensign* 44 (May 2014): 51.

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