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THE DEMISE OF THE  
PATRIARCHAL PRIESTHOOD, PART 2

## WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD

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*“For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round.” (1 Nephi 10:19)*

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## INTRODUCTION

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It is sometimes noted that in the Nauvoo period and early Utah there was a greater emphasis on the power and ordinances of the temple than was taught later on. Early sources and testimony indicate through the temple rituals that women participated in and exercised the priesthood.

However, some modern authors have instead argued that the Temple Priesthood introduced in Nauvoo that women received wasn't technically "priesthood" at all, but rather that it was merely a cosmological framework for heaven and eternity.

But was the priesthood of the temple seen as merely cosmological in nature? Or was this new "priesthood" introduced in Nauvoo seen as having real world authority for women?

It is also acknowledged that women often gave blessings, could heal, and cast out devils in 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormonism. But was that done merely by faith, or was it by priesthood authority?

That is the purpose of this next issue of *One Eternal Round*, to investigate and document the Nauvoo and early Utah teachings on women and the priesthood, as well as to identify how and when this understanding was lost.

THE DEMISE OF THE  
PATRIARCHAL PRIESTHOOD, PART 2

WOMEN  
AND THE  
PRIESTHOOD

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*by*  
*Jacob Vidrine*

Near the end of Joseph Smith's life he began to reveal to the saints a new order of priesthood. This new priesthood was a "temple priesthood" of Kings and Priests. But not only were men made Kings and Priests in this priesthood, but women also received this authority by being made Queens and Priestesses. Faithful women were endowed, given the keys of knowledge and power, and anointed and ordained alongside their husbands. Yet inasmuch as this priesthood pertained to the family, it was also sometimes called the "Patriarchal Priesthood."

This was not merely heavenly power and authority, but according to the earliest sources this

priesthood was supposed to have real world implications for the saints. Joseph Smith explicitly told this to the Relief Society on one occasion:

“The Church is not fully organized, in its proper order, and cannot be, until the Temple is completed, where places will be provided for the administration of the ordinances of the Priesthood. ...I calculate to organize the Church in its proper order as soon as the Temple is complete.”<sup>1</sup>

From the evidence it appears women were actually brought into a preparatory order of the priesthood before being given the “highest order” of it. The first part of women being brought into the priesthood was the formation of the female Relief Society of Nauvoo. The Relief Society was intended to function alongside the male priesthood of the Church, and was even patterned after the Church.

Sarah M. Kimball, an original member of the Relief Society, recalled:

“A few of us met together in my parlor in Nauvoo; we had a desire to do something towards helping to build the [Nauvoo] Temple. We had some by-laws written out by Sister E[liza] R. Snow, and we showed them to President Joseph Smith, and he said he was glad to have the opportunity of organizing the women, as a **part of the priesthood belonged to them.**”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *History of the Church* vol. 4 <28 April 1842> pages 603–604.

<sup>2</sup> *Women’s Exponent* vol. 7 no. 3 <1 July 1878> page 18, emphasis added.

In a more detailed statement several years later she reiterated that the Relief Society was to organize the sisters “in the order of the priesthood”:

“About a dozen of the neighboring Sisters by invitation met in my parlor the following Thursday and the subject [organizing a women’s society] was further discussed, and approved. Sister [Phebe] Rigdon suggested that Sister E. R. Snow be invited to take part and to assist in getting up a Constitution and bylaws, the Speaker was delegated to wait on Miss Snow and solicit her aid which was cheerfully and efficiently rendered.

A Constitution and bylaws were prepared and submitted to President Joseph Smith. He pronounced it the best constitution that he ever read, then remarked this is not what the sisters want, there is something better for them. **I have desired to organize the Sisters in the order of the Priesthood [and] I now have the key by which I can do it.**

**The organization of the Church of Christ was never perfect until the women were organized.** He then said I want you (E. R. Snow) to tell the sisters who delegated you that their offering is accepted of the Lord, and will result in blessing[s] to them. He further said I want the adjourned meeting to meet with me and a few of the brethren in the Masonic Hall on Thursday at 1. P. M. next, **And I will organize you in the Order of the Priesthood after the pattern of the church.”**<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah M. Kimball statement, 17 March 1882, in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 495, emphasis added.

## WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD TAUGHT IN THE RELIEF SOCIETY

While the minutes of the first meeting of the Relief Society do not explicitly record any mention of women receiving the priesthood, priesthood language was highly implied. Joseph Smith wanted “a presiding officer to preside over them, and let that presiding officer choose two Counsellors to assist in the duties of her Office — that he would **ordain** them to preside over the Society — and **let them preside just as the Presidency, preside over the Church.**”<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Smith remarked that Emma had already been “ordained” in response to a revelation in July 1830 as an “Elect Lady” to “expound Scriptures and exhort the Church,”<sup>5</sup> and so while apostle John Taylor at this first meeting “ordained” Emma’s two counsellors to assist Emma “in all things pertaining to her office,” Emma’s setting apart was only to “**confirm** upon her all the blessings which have [previously] been **conferred** on her.”<sup>6</sup> This indicated Emma had already received all the priesthood authority necessary for the office. If this was merely another “calling”, would it not have made more sense for Emma to *also* be set

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<sup>4</sup> Relief Society Minutes, 17 March 1842, *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 31, emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> D&C 25:3, 7; *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <17 March 1842> page 32.

<sup>6</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <17 March 1842> page 32, emphasis added.

apart to this new calling, rather than only having authority that had been already conferred on her “confirmed”?

Nearly 40 years later in Utah John Taylor would deny that this was a priesthood ordination.<sup>7</sup> Yet in contrast to John Taylor, Sidney Rigdon in 1869 recalled that Emma’s 1830 ordination as an “Elect Lady” made her the “first” to receive “the female priesthood.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, William Smith also believed that Emma received priesthood from her husband.<sup>9</sup> Even among the Brighamites when John

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<sup>7</sup> On July 17, 1880 John Taylor stated that “the ordination then given did not mean the conferring of the Priesthood upon those sisters” yet still admitting that through the temple ordinances women held “a portion of the Priesthood in connection with their husbands.” (*The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* pages 475–476) A month later, Taylor would reiterate his position in stronger terms: “Some of the sisters have thought that these sisters mentioned were, in this ordination, ordained to the priesthood. And for the information of all interested in this subject I will say, it is not the calling of these sisters to hold the Priesthood, only in connection with their husbands, they being one with their husbands.” (*Journal of Discourses* vol. 21 <8 August 1880> pages 367–368)

<sup>8</sup> “Emma was the one to whom the female priesthood was first given and it was through giving it that that priesthood was brought to light.” (Sidney Rigdon letter to Stephen Post, June 1868, LDS Archives)

<sup>9</sup> A conference on January 6, 1846 organized by William Smith resolved that “we receive Emma Smith, wife of the deceased Prophet, in the Church with all the authority conferred upon her by her husband, and also, as a Counselor in the Church.” (“Minutes of a Conference held by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, January 6, 1846” page 1) It is possible William is only referencing her receiving “authority” through the Nauvoo temple ordinances rather than



Taylor presided over the Church, Taylor admitted (while disagreeing) that “some of the sisters have thought that these sisters mentioned were, in this ordination, ordained to the priesthood.”<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Smith at this first meeting of the Relief Society even further compared the Relief Society organization to the organization of the Church in stating that if they wanted to ordain officers “to carry out the designs of the Institution” that they should “be appointed and set apart, as Deacons, Teachers, &c. are among us [i.e. men in the Church].”<sup>11</sup> In early Utah, the Relief Society would follow this counsel in setting apart “deaconesses”, “teachers”, and “priestesses” to act in the organization.<sup>12</sup>

On March 31, 1842, the Relief Society minutes explicitly indicated that Joseph Smith instructed the women of the Relief Society that they were to further involved with the priesthood. He taught that “the Society should move according to the ancient priesthood... [and] said he was going to

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the Relief Society, yet it seems probable he recognized her receiving priesthood authority in *both* organizations.

<sup>10</sup> *Journal of Discourses* vol. 21 <8 August 1880> pages 367–368.

<sup>11</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <17 March 1842> page 31.

<sup>12</sup> “Without an appeal to new revelation about female priesthood office, Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. Young, and Sarah M. K. Ball presumed to organize the Relief Societies of pioneer Utah wards with women as ‘deaconesses,’ ‘teachers,’ and ‘priestesses.’” (D. Michael Quinn essay “Mormon Women have Held the Priesthood Since 1843”, in *Women and Authority* page 376)

make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day — as in Paul's day."<sup>13</sup>

On April 28, 1842 Joseph Smith made even stronger remarks about women receiving priesthood authority. He “spoke of delivering the keys to this Society and to the church...that the keys of the kingdom are about to be given to them, that they may be able to detect everything false — as well as to the Elders.”<sup>14</sup> He spoke of women being authorized to heal the sick: “He ask'd the Society if they could not see by this sweeping stroke, that wherein they are ordain[e]d, it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority which is confer'd on them — and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let everything roll on.”<sup>15</sup> While that comment specifically spoke of women healing by virtue of “authority” that had been conferred on them, he also taught that *un-ordained* women could heal by faith:

“Respecting the female laying on hands, he further remark'd, there could be no devil in it if God gave his sanction by healing—that there could be no more sin in any female laying hands on the sick than in wetting the face with water—that **it is no sin for anybody to do it that has faith**, or if the sick has faith to be heal'd by the administration.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <31 March 1842> page 43.

<sup>14</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <28 April 1842> pages 56–57.

<sup>15</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <28 April 1842> page 55.

<sup>16</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <28 April 1842> page 55, emphasis added.

Summarizing his instructions in his journal, the Prophet stated:

“At two o’clock I met the members of the ‘Female Relief Society,’ and after presiding at the admission of many new members, gave a lecture on the Priesthood, showing how the sisters would come in possession of the privileges, blessings, and gifts of the Priesthood, and that the signs should follow them, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, etc., and that they might attain unto these blessings by a virtuous life, and conversation, and diligence in keeping all the commandments.”<sup>17</sup>

A month after Joseph’s instructions on April 28, 1842, additional comments were made alluding to women receiving priesthood authority: Joseph implied on May 26, 1842 that faithful women would hold the “keys of power.”<sup>18</sup> The next day Newel K. Whitney made comments affirming there was more to the priesthood yet to be restored to the saints, and women’s participation was necessary to restore it:

“Bishop Newel K. Whitney arose and after some preliminary remarks, proceeded to address the congregation by saying that he rejoiced and did rejoice at the formation of the Relief Society that we might improve upon our talents and to prepare for those blessings which God is soon to bestow upon us.

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<sup>17</sup> *History of the Church* vol. 4 <28 April 1842> page 602.

<sup>18</sup> “The object is to make those not so good, equal with the good and ever hold the keys of pow’r which will influence to virtue and goodness.” (*The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <26 May 1842> Page 70)

**In the beginning God created man male and female and bestowed upon man certain blessings peculiar to a man of God, of which woman partook, so that without the female all things cannot be restored to the earth. It takes all to restore the Priesthood.** It is the intent of the Society, by humility and faithfulness [to receive it]; in connection with those husbands that are found worthy.”<sup>19</sup>

Another strong remark about women holding priesthood authority comes from Emma Smith in the last meeting of the Relief Society of Nauvoo. Likely referencing her role not only as Relief Society President, but also the anointed Queen and Priestess over the Kingdom,<sup>20</sup> the minutes recorded her saying: “if there ever was any authority on the Earth she had it — and had [it] yet.”<sup>21</sup>

## WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD IN OTHER NAUVOO SOURCES

In a note to his wife, Willard Richards wrote that in the new “order of things” that was about to be introduced that “the Priesthood is for the sisters as well as for the brethren”:

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<sup>19</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <27 May 1842> pages 75–76, emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> Emma’s authority and the office of the Queen and Priestess over the Kingdom is discussed in *One Eternal Round* #5 “The Prophet, Priest, and King over the Kingdom of God.”

<sup>21</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* <16 March 1844> page 272.

“My dearest Jeannetta you must let your heart swell out large, for things await this generation. Meditate on these glorious principles I have written you from time to time. The Priesthood is for the Sisters as well as for the Brethren. The blessings which await you are without bounds if you continue faithful, as I believe you will. Always remember God never instituted an order of things which would not tend to the happiness of His children.”<sup>22</sup>

Hyrum Smith affirmed that John Taylor’s wife Leonora Taylor was to receive priesthood authority in a patriarchal blessing he gave her on July 28, 1843: “You shall be blessed with your portion of the Priesthood which belongeth to you, that you may be set apart for your anointing and your endowment.”<sup>23</sup>

Brigham Young also wrote about his wife receiving priesthood, recording that his wife’s endowment in the Anointed Quorum on November 1, 1843 was her being admitted into the “hiest [highest] order [of] priesthood.”<sup>24</sup> This was not their Second Anointing (which would not occur until

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<sup>22</sup> Willard Richards note to Jeannetta Richards, circa 1842, Willard Richards Papers, LDS Archives. Willard Richards’ comment “Always remember God never instituted an order of things which would not tend to the happiness of His children” appears to also be a vague allusion to the doctrine of plural marriage also being introduced at that time.

<sup>23</sup> Hyrum Smith patriarchal blessing for Leonora Taylor, 28 July 1843, LDS Archives, spelling and grammar corrected, cited in D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843” in *Women and Authority* pages 366–367.

<sup>24</sup> Brigham Young Journal, 1 November 1843, LDS Archives.

November 22, 1843),<sup>25</sup> but Mary Ann's *first* anointing as a Queen and Priestess. Mary Ann Young was already sealed to Brigham Young on May 29, 1843,<sup>26</sup> so it was her anointing that brought her into the priesthood, not her eternal marriage sealing.

It was also acknowledged that the Second Anointing gave women further priesthood authority. Joseph Smith taught that the Second Anointing conferred "all the keys and powers of the Priesthood" including the "sealing powers" upon men,<sup>27</sup> and it was understood that women also received all the keys including the sealing power through the Second Anointing.

Joseph Smith's journal records that when he received his Second Anointing on September 28, 1843 that he was "anointed and ord[ained] to the highest and holiest order of the priesthood (and companion d[itt]o.)."<sup>28</sup> The fact that this record indicates that his "companion" also received the "Highest and Holiest Order of the Priesthood" on this occasion is important.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the wording

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<sup>25</sup> Devery Anderson and Gary Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed* <22 November 1843> page 37.

<sup>26</sup> Devery Anderson and Gary Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed* pages 21–22.

<sup>27</sup> *History of the Church* vol. 6 <8 April 1844> page 319; *History of the Church* vol. 6 <21 January 1844> page 184.

<sup>28</sup> Another account by Willard Richards that was copied by Wilford Woodruff in his journal at a later date records that this was their "Second Anointing of the Highest and Holiest Order." (Both accounts are included in Devery Anderson and Gary Bergera, *Joseph Smith's Quorum of the Anointed* pages 25–27)

<sup>29</sup> While Joseph Smith's journal entry did not identify who his "companion" was, William Clayton recorded a conversation

of Mary Ann Young's Second Anointing as recorded in the Nauvoo Temple Book of Anointings indicates she received authority:

“Sister Mary Ann Young, I pour upon thy head this holy, consecrated oil, and seal upon thee **all the blessings of the everlasting priesthood**, *in conjunction with thy husband*: and I anoint thee to be a Queen and Priestess unto thy husband, *over the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*; and thou shalt be heir to all the blessings which are sealed upon him, inasmuch as thou dost obey his counsel; and thou shalt receive glory, honor, power and exaltation in his exaltation...”<sup>30</sup>

While the language of Mary Ann Young's anointing stating that she received “all the blessings of the everlasting priesthood” in conjunction with her husband may seem ambiguous to some, the understanding that women received the “keys of the Priesthood” conferred in the Second Anointing with their husbands was indirectly affirmed by Brigham Young in a negative comment he made about women in 1845. In commenting about how women couldn't receive the “keys” *apart* from their husbands Brigham Young still acknowledged they *could* hold the “keys of the priesthood”:

“Relative to things in which any of our sisters have been engaged they have no right to meddle in the affairs of the kingdom of God, outside the pale of this they have a

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with Joseph several weeks later indicating that it was Emma who received it with him (*An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* <19 October 1843> page 122).

<sup>30</sup> *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies* <11 January 1846> page 398, emphasis added.

right to meddle because many of them are more sagacious and shrewd and more competent [than men] to attend to things of financial affairs. **They never can hold the keys of the Priesthood apart from their husbands...**<sup>31</sup>

Yet in the context of the Second Anointing, it is *equally true* that men could not fully receive the blessings of the “keys of the priesthood” without a wife either. As Joseph Smith taught regarding the unusual circumstance of Parley P. Pratt receiving his Second Anointing without a wife:

“Joseph said Concerning Parley P. Pratt that He had no wife sealed to him for Eternity and asked if there was any harm for him to have another wife for time and Eternity as He would want a wife in the Resurrection **or else his glory would be clipped**. Many arguments He used upon this subject which were rational and consistent. Brother Joseph said now what will we do with Elder P. P. Pratt? He has no wife sealed to him for Eternity. He has one living wife but she had a former Husband and did not wish to be sealed to Parley for Eternity. Now is it not right for Parley to have another wife that can [be sealed to him]?”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* <9 March 1845> page 72, emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> *Wilford Woodruff Journal* vol. 2 <21 January 1844> page 340, emphasis added. These comments recorded by Woodruff appear to have been said by Joseph the day Parley P. Pratt received his Second Anointing, indicating the unideal circumstances of the (abbreviated) ordinance.



Recognition that women held the “Keys of the Priesthood” was also acknowledged in the 1877 book *The Women of Mormondom*:

“The sisters were also apostolic in a priestly sense. **They partook of the priesthood equally with the men.** ...If you saw her not in the pulpit teaching the congregation, yet was she to be found in the temple, administering for the living and the dead! **Even in the holy of holies she was met.** As a high priestess she blessed with the laying on of hands! As a prophetess she oracled in holy places! As an endowment giver she was a Mason, of the Hebraic order, whose Grand Master is the God of Israel and whose anointer is the Holy Ghost. **She held the keys of the administration of angels and of the working of miracles and of the ‘sealings’ pertaining to ‘the heavens and the earth’.**”<sup>33</sup>

Apostle Orson Pratt also preached in 1845 that women would hold a “portion” of the Priesthood with their husbands:

“The spirits of men are not all that will be employed in this delightful task [of redeeming the dead]; but you too, my sisters, will take a part therein, **for you will hold a portion of the priesthood with your husbands,** and you will thus do a work, as well as they, that will augment that glory which you will enjoy after your resurrection.”<sup>34</sup>

Orson Hyde, another apostle, provides one of the most direct statements in the Nauvoo era that

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<sup>33</sup> Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* <1877> pages 22–23, emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> Orson Pratt sermon, 24 May 1845, in *Times and Seasons* vol. 6 <1 June 1845> page 920, emphasis added.

priesthood resting on women involved them being “ordained” to priesthood authority. In a revelation he received on March 15, 1846, the Lord stated:

“I have made my Church as upon a hill. The Priesthood holds the power and all have been ordained or ought to be. **It is necessary that all be ordained.** *It is necessary that it should rest upon all, not upon men only but upon women also that ye may be all one.* Fear not little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. It is given to you and power to overcome all things.”<sup>35</sup>

## OTHER EVIDENCE

Other evidence for the priesthood authority of women include that when Woodruff recorded his wife performed the second part of the Second Anointing for him, that he understood her washing his feet made him “clean every whit.”<sup>36</sup> Since the priesthood ordinance of man-to-man foot washing was not part of the Nauvoo temple ceremonies, this wife-to-husband foot washing likely was seen as a continuation or incorporation of that previously male-only ordinance.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Orson Hyde revelation, 15 March 1846, in *BYU Studies* vol. 3 <Winter 1991> page 61, emphasis and italics added.

<sup>36</sup> “Phebe washed my feet that I might be clean every whit.” (*Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* vol. 2 <5 May 1844> page 393)

<sup>37</sup> This subject is also addressed in *One Eternal Round* issue #3 “King and Priest Endowments and the Washing of Feet.” Possibly the reason that a male-to-male foot washing was added as part of the Second Anointing in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was due to the loss of the belief that women held priesthood and their foot washing was a priesthood ordinance.

In his research on the Second Anointing, church historian Leonard Arrington observed that this part of the Second Anointing appeared to be evidence that women received and exercised priesthood authority, and that there were early pioneer women who also believed as much:

“There is a portion of the ceremony in which the wife goes through a symbolic ceremony of preparing the husband's body for burial and for resurrection, and she uses her equivalent to the priesthood to anoint him and to seal him up for the resurrection. Because of this portion, some women in pioneer Utah, on the basis of their diaries and histories, apparently thought that the priesthood was being conferred upon them. This is apparently not something which women in this century have assumed. But there must be something to the idea, since they are not only sharing in the symbolic ceremony as recipients but also actively performing an ordinance which involves sealing — performing this on authority which they receive during the ceremony.”<sup>38</sup>

Another interesting indication of women's authority is that in the Nauvoo Temple not only did families designate a male birthright but also a female birthright for their family.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington* vol. 2 <26 March 1979> page 756.

<sup>39</sup> Horace K. and Sarah Ann Whitney were both recognized as holding “the birthright of their sexes” when they were sealed to their parents on January 12, 1846 (*The Nauvoo Endowment Companies* page 410). George A. Smith recorded in his personal history that on January 25, 1846 “We went to the Temple and anointed our children, George Albert and Bathsheba to the birthright and they were sealed to us upon the altar...” and the Sealings and Adoptions record states that

## WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD UNDER BRIGHAM YOUNG

Similar to how the apostles continued to teach that the Fullness of the Priesthood was the highest priesthood authority for a time, the saints continued to understand that women received priesthood authority through the ordinances of the temple as well.

Hosea Stout was a member of the Seventy and Council of Fifty, and had received temple ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple with his wife. He wrote on Saturday, June 27, 1846 in his journal that when his three year old son was on his deathbed that he and his wife together exercised their priesthood to bless him:

“Thus alone my wife and me over our only and dearest son struggled in sorrow and affliction with the last

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Joseph and Hannah Fielding had their children adopted to them on the same date with “the birthright of the sexes being upon Heber and Rachel.” (*The Nauvoo Endowment Companies* <25 January 1846> pages 492–493) On January 26, 1846 Hyrum Smith’s children were sealed to him by proxy, with the note that among his first wife Jerusha’s children John Smith received the birthright, and among his second wife Mary Fielding’s children Joseph F. Smith received the birthright. Two days later Lovina Smith as Hyrum’s eldest daughter was also sealed to her parents with the note “Lovina is Hyrum’s eldest living daughter, and holds the birthright for her own sex, but was not present when the other children were sealed.” (*The Nauvoo Endowment Companies* <26 January 1846> page 497, <28 January 1846> page 517)

determination that we would not yield [him up] with the portion of the Priesthood which we had to the evil spirits. After laying on hands on him and rebuking the evil spirits he took a different course. He ceased to manifest a desire to talk and his ghastly and frightful gestures and with a set and determined eye gazed at me as if con[s]cious of what had been done.”<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately though, the child passed away the following morning:

“I awoke very early this morning and immediately discovered my child to be dying. He seemed perfectly easy and now had given up to the struggle of death and lay breathing out his life sweetly. The evil spirits had entirely left him and he now had his natural, easy, pleasant, calm and usual appearance but death was in his countenance and his little spirit now in the enjoyment of its own body only seemed loth to give it up as almost everyone seemed involuntary to observe who was present. He gradually and slowly declined until forty minutes after seven when its spirit took its leave of its body without any appearant [sic] pain but seemed to go to sleep.”<sup>41</sup>

Augusta Adams Cobb, a plural wife of Brigham Young, had received her endowments and Second Anointing in the Nauvoo Temple also, and in Winter Quarters made two interesting references to herself as a woman holding Priesthood, in letters she wrote during the winter of 1847-1848.

On December 28, 1847, responding to a

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<sup>40</sup> Juanita Brookes, *On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844 – 1889* <27 June 1846> page 171.

<sup>41</sup> Juanita Brookes, *On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844 – 1889* <27=8 June 1846> page 171.

letter from her friend Amey Aldrich requesting a blessing, she wrote out a Matriarchal blessing in a responding letter. Invoking the name of Jesus Christ she blessed her with “all the desires of her heart” with a promise that “God would gather the Aldriches to Utah” and that Amy’s good name would “be handed down in honorable remembrance to the latest generations” that she would “have power to save thy kindred”, and that “if thou canst believe thou shalt have power to influence your husband to sell of[f] all and gather with the Saints and go over with them next Spring, taking your Children along with you for their never will be so good an opportunity again.” Augusta ended the blessing “I seal this blessing upon your head in the name of Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Priesthood vested in me.”<sup>42</sup>

The second reference comes from a letter she wrote to her husband, President Brigham Young, on February 21, 1848, entitled her “Last Will and Testament” requesting to be sealed to Joseph Smith, “believing it to be the will of God and being actuated from a sense of duty towards Him, as well as from a free and unbiased choice,” and “I do this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood vested in me, because I consider it necessary to my salvation, exaltation, calling and election.”<sup>43</sup> Thomas Bullock, secretary to the First Presidency was the scribe for

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<sup>42</sup> Augusta Adams Cobb letter to Amey C. Aldrich, 28 December 1847, Theodore A. Schroeder Collection on Mormonism, LDS Archives.

<sup>43</sup> “The Last Will and Testament of Augusta Adams,” 21 February 1848, Brigham Young Collection, LDS Archives.

the letter, and Brigham Young's two counsellors in the First Presidency, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, all signed the letter with her. Brigham Young accepted her request to be sealed to Joseph Smith, and the proxy sealing was performed on April 14, 1848.<sup>44</sup>

Another subtle reference to women holding priesthood in the transitional period from Nauvoo to early Utah comes from apostle George A. Smith in February 1849. In response to Peter Haws giving "several long and loud speeches about the power of the 'Fifty'" and "the rights of its members" George A. Smith "interrupted" him by contrasting that the Council of Fifty had "members of it that did not belong to the Church", while the Anointed Quorum on the other hand "had no members in it but those who held the Priesthood."<sup>45</sup> This was to undercut Peter Haws' claims that the Council of Fifty had lost ecclesiastical authority that they were intended to have. Since women were included in the Anointed Quorum even before George A. Smith was added to that body, this was a subtle admission that women held priesthood.

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<sup>44</sup> O'Donovan, Connell, "Augusta Adams Cobb Young: Priesthood Holder," in *Journal of Mormon History* vol. 38 no. 2 <Spring 2012>; see also "Episode 158: Augusta Adams", *Year of Polygamy Podcast*, 8 July 2018, interview with Connell O'Donovan by Lindsey Hansen Park.

<sup>45</sup> Orson Hyde, George A. Smith, and Ezra T. Benson letter to Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, 5 April 1849, LDS Archives, in *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* pages 188–189. The minutes of this discussion and the trial at the next meeting were not included in the Pottawattamie High Council record book, likely because of the sensitive nature of the organizations being discussed.

Some contemporary historians had a knee-jerk reaction to Augusta Cobb's reference to herself as a priesthood holder. Jonathan Stapley described her invoking of priesthood authority as "anomalous" and that they indicated "she rivals and perhaps surpasses John D. Lee's appetite for placement in the cosmological hierarchy."<sup>46</sup> Yet, Augusta Cobb was not alone in being a woman who invoked priesthood authority during this time period.

Helen Mar Kimball Whitney described that women at this time period rebuked evil spirits "by the power of the priesthood which had been conferred upon us in the house of God in connection with our husbands."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, George A. Smith's wife Lucy Meserve Smith recalled that in 1856 she rebuked an evil spirit that was attacking her "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood conferred upon me in common with my companion in the Temple of our God."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Stapley, "Responding to O'Donovan on Augusta Adams Cobb Young and priesthood" 12 April 2012, <https://juvenileinstructor.org/responding-to-odonovan-on-augusta-adams-cobb-young-and-priesthood/>.

<sup>47</sup> Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents at Winter Quarters," in *Women's Exponent* vol. 14 <15 August 1886> page 98.

<sup>48</sup> Lucy Meserve Smith, Account of Relief Society in 1856, as Recorded in "Historical Sketches," 12 June 1889 (Excerpt), in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 215.



## MINIMIZING WOMEN'S AUTHORITY

By the early Utah period, similar to how men's authority as Kings and Priests was minimized to only pertain to the next life, women's status as holding priesthood authority was minimized as well. Some leaders began to teach that women only utilized their husbands' priesthood rather than exercising any priesthood held by themselves. In a nutshell, this was a new idea that the ritual of Eternal Marriage sealing women to their husbands by the authority of the priesthood thus enabled women to exercise their husband's priesthood.<sup>49</sup>

While this may have merely developed because many women were endowed but not yet anointed Queens and Priestesses, it effectively replaced the understanding that Queens and Priestesses held priesthood. The apostles even added a statement to teach this understanding in the 1876 *Doctrine and Covenants*:

“1 In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; 2 And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the

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<sup>49</sup> The Endowment and Sealing connection was most directly stated by Charles Stayner in 1885: “A young Sister who was married by the sealing power became a partaker of the priesthood which her husband held but could not if she married him by any other means. If she had a child after this marriage, and it should become sick and afflicted, she could, in the absence of her husband and the absence of the Elders, herself lay hands upon her child by virtue of the priesthood she held in connection with her husband.” (Statement by Charles Stayner, 4 October 1885, quoted in Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness* page 86)

new and everlasting covenant of marriage];  
 3 And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. 4 He may enter  
 into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he  
 cannot have an increase.”<sup>50</sup>

The bracketed words “meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage” were not in this instruction of Joseph Smith as originally recorded by William Clayton.<sup>51</sup> Even though Joseph Smith likely was speaking about Celestial Marriage on that occasion, it was in the context of Celestial Marriage being an aspect of the priesthood order of Kings and Priests — not something intrinsically separate.<sup>52</sup>

This new understanding appears to also have been based on the early endowment ceremony covenant where women covenant to obey their husband, while men covenant to obey God.<sup>53</sup> So in a sense women were brought into the priesthood, but they were subject to their husband in it. As Heber C. Kimball stated on one occasion:

“The Priesthood is also with the woman, because she is

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<sup>50</sup> D&C 131:1–4.

<sup>51</sup> *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* <16 May 1843> page 102.

<sup>52</sup> For more on this see *One Eternal Round* issue #2 “The Kingdom of God in a Family Capacity” pages 4–7.

<sup>53</sup> In the Nauvoo Temple Heber C. Kimball commented upon this. “He [Heber C. Kimball] spoke of the necessity of women being in subjection to their husbands [saying] ‘I am subject to my God, my wife is in subjection to me and will reverence me in my place and I will make her happy. I do not want her to step forward and dictate to me any more than I dictate to President Young’.” (*The Nauvoo Endowment Companies* <21 December 1845> page 116)

connected with the man, and the man is connected with his God.”<sup>54</sup>

Yet Heber C. Kimball also made some of the earliest comments denying women held priesthood, and expressed that women administered only by virtue of faith or by their husband’s authority. In 1857 one of his wives recorded being instructed by him on this:

“I thought of the instructions I had received from time to time that the priesthood was not bestowed upon women. I accordingly asked Mr. Kimball if woman had a right to wash and anoint the sick for the recovery of their health or is it mockery in them to do so. He replied inasmuch as they are obedient to their husbands they have a right to administer in that way in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ but not by authority of the priesthood invested in them for that authority is not given to woman. He also said they might administer by the authority given to their husbands in as much as they were one with their husband.”<sup>55</sup>

It should be observed that this comment affirmed *two* different ways women could perform healing blessings. Joseph Smith had taught that women could heal by “faith” or by “authority which is conferred on them.” Instead of that, Heber C. Kimball said it was by virtue of faith “in the name of the Lord Jesus” or by “the authority given to their husbands.” In a public sermon four months later, Heber C. Kimball reiterated this comment:

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<sup>54</sup> *Journal of Discourses* vol. 11 <19 February 1865> pages 80-81

<sup>55</sup> Mary Ellen Abel Kimball diary, 2 March 1857, LDS archives

*“You [sisters] suppose that you receive the priesthood when you receive your endowments; but the priesthood is on your husbands. Can you honor God and the Priesthood, and abuse your husbands like the Devil? How can you honor the Priesthood, except you honor the man you are connected with? I am talking about good men: I will not in this connection say anything about bad men. How can you honor the Priesthood, except you honor the one you are connected with?”*<sup>56</sup>

While Heber C. Kimball was one of the earliest individuals to teach that women only utilized their husband’s priesthood, some later statements by Brigham Young indicated he still held to a belief that women held priesthood. In a sermon in 1874 he remarked:

“Now brethren, the man that honors his Priesthood, the woman that honors her Priesthood, will receive an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of God.”<sup>57</sup>

Brigham Young was not alone in teaching this in the early Utah period. Similarly, Eliza R. Snow noted that the “Latter-day Saint women of Utah” shared “in the gifts and powers of the Holy Priesthood.”<sup>58</sup> Bishop Edward Hunter also affirmed that the Relief Society sisters held priesthood, stating “They have the priesthood — a portion of

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<sup>56</sup> *Journal of Discourses* vol. 5 <12 July 1857> page 31, italics added.

<sup>57</sup> *Journal of Discourses* vol. 17 <28 June 1874> page 119.

<sup>58</sup> Eliza R. Snow, “Position and Duties,” in *Woman’s Exponent* vol. 3 <15 July 1874> page 28.

priesthood rests upon the sisters.”<sup>59</sup>

Brigham Young’s brother Joseph Young, also affirmed that LDS women received the priesthood through the ordinances of the temple. In 1878 he blessed Zina Young Card stating: “These blessings are yours, the blessings and power according to the holy Melchizedek Priesthood you received in your Endowments, and you shall have them.”<sup>60</sup>

Edward Tullidge’s book *The Women of Mormondom*, published in 1877, with heavy collaboration from the Relief Society in Utah, also contained many strong statements about women holding priesthood.<sup>61</sup> Two second-hand statements

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Hunter, 17 November 1877 in *Women’s Exponent* vol. 6 <1 December 1877> page 102.

<sup>60</sup> Zina Young Card patriarchal blessing by Joseph Young, 28 May 1878, in Zina Y. Card Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

<sup>61</sup> For one of the strongest statements about women holding the priesthood see page 20 of this pamphlet, quoting from *The Women of Mormondom* pages 22–23. The book *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* observes “*Women of Mormondom* was a product of a collaboration between Tullidge and the Relief Society...” (*The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 235) Claudia L. Bushman wrote that “[Eliza R.] Snow was involved in the *Women of Mormondom* from the beginning. She put her considerable prestige behind the book and was engaged in gathering funds for publication on subscription. *The Woman’s Exponent* reports a meeting of the Senior and Junior Retrenchment societies where Miss Snow ‘laid the subject of the Woman’s Book’ before the group and ‘solicited [the sisters’ aid] in behalf of the publishing of it.’ She also requested that ‘any special items in their lives, or spiritual manifestations which had been given them which they considered strong testimonies upon the principles of the gospel,’ be recorded and given to her or Mr. Tullidge. *The*

indicate Brigham Young endorsed the publication of *The Women of Mormondom*. These statements could be seen as him sanctioning the book's statements regarding women and the priesthood.

An unsourced statement written in the front of the Bancroft Library's copy of *The Women of Mormondom* noted "The night before he died, Brigham Young said he would like 1000[s] of this book distributed at the east." This statement is at least slightly corroborated in that Brigham Young's daughter Susa Young Gates recalled Brigham and Eliza R. Snow discussing the book and Brigham wanted to see women "sent out in the world" to give lectures and distribute the book:

"After prayers that evening he [Brigham] sat in council with aunt Eliza R. Snow in the prayer room. Edward Tullidge had compiled a story on *The Women of Mormondom* which contained some interesting biography on the leading women to the Church and had an account of the heroic struggle of those early years. Aunt Eliza and some of her associates thought it might be proper and advisable to send a group of women out into the world to give lectures on Mormonism and to dispose of the woman's book. Two of the daughters of Brigham Young were included in the list of women who were to go. 'It is an experiment — but one that I should like to see tried,' said Brigham Young to Sister Snow at

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*Woman's Exponent* frequently spoke in favor of him as 'one of the most gifted literary men of America' and provided a very favorable review in which he praised LDS women: 'There is a providence in the very attitude of Mormon women. The prophecy is distinctly pronounced in the whole history of their lives, that they shall be apostolic to the age.'" ("Edward W. Tullidge and *The Women of Mormondom*," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* vol. 33 <Winter 2000> page 18)

the close of the discussion.”<sup>62</sup>

Brigham Young had spoken in favor of women healing from the Nauvoo period to the end of his life. During the April 1844 General Conference he said: “I want a wife that can take care of my children when I am away, who can pray, lay on hands, anoint with oil, and baffle the enemy; and this is a spiritual wife.”<sup>63</sup>

In an 1869 sermon Brigham Young reiterated that “it is the privilege of a mother to have faith and to administer to her child; this she can do herself, as well as sending for the Elders to have the benefit of their faith.”<sup>64</sup> While this may be read by some as women merely administering “by faith” instead of by priesthood authority, Brigham in this statement actually equates women healing by faith to an Elder’s healing blessing, implying he saw *both* as exercising faith *and* priesthood.

Brigham Young on at least one occasion indicated his support of women “sealing” blessings — an implication of priesthood authority. When the issue of women holding the priesthood was being debated among the High Council of the Salt Lake Stake in 1885, a council member recalled that when Zina D. Huntington Young sealed a priesthood blessing, Brigham Young was present and said “amen” endorsing it.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Susa Young Gates, *Life of Brigham Young* pages 360-361.

<sup>63</sup> *History of the Church* vol. 6 <9 April 1844> page 322.

<sup>64</sup> *Journal of Discourses* vol. 13 <14 Nov. 1869> page 155.

<sup>65</sup> Salt Lake Stake High Council Minutes of Trials, 13 October 1885, LDS Archives, quoted in Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness* page 87.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO THE PRIESTHOOD IN TRANSITION

After Brigham Young's death controversy began to rise concerning women and the priesthood. Angus Cannon, George Q. Cannon's brother, indicated that women held the priesthood but that they needed to be "careful" how they utilized it in giving blessings:

"Women could only hold the priesthood in connection with their husbands; man held the priesthood independent of woman. The sisters have a right to anoint the sick, and pray the Father to heal them, and to exercise that faith that will prevail with God; *but women must be careful how they use the authority of the priesthood in administering to the sick.*"<sup>66</sup>

Two years later the First Presidency under John Taylor officially stated that women only exercised their husbands' authority.<sup>67</sup>

Yet women who had heard instruction on

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<sup>66</sup> Angus Cannon, 5 October 1878, in *Woman's Exponent* vol. 7 <1 November 1878> page 86, italics added.

<sup>67</sup> John Taylor stated "...it is not the calling of these sisters to hold the Priesthood, only in connection with their husbands, they being one with their husbands." (*Journal of Discourses* vol. 21 <8 August 1880> pages 367–368) This essentially made Heber C. Kimball's position on women and the priesthood the official doctrine of the Church, though it did not take long for the most church leaders to oppose even this concept of women sharing and exercising their husbands' authority.



women and the priesthood, the temple ritual, and female ritual healing during the Nauvoo period and from Joseph Smith would obviously be skeptical of such pronouncements. Helen Mar Kimball was a witness and participant in women's healings during the exodus from Nauvoo.<sup>68</sup> When two of her brothers debated women and the priesthood in 1886, she indicated her belief in women's priesthood when she noted in her journal that the brother arguing against women holding priesthood "does not appear to give us much credit":

"Hyrum spent the evening here talking with Sol. — debating on women's priesthood of which H[yrum] does not appear to give us much credit, but Sol thinks differently."<sup>69</sup>

While in early Utah it was a common practice for women to be set apart as healers, Eliza R. Snow as the President of the Relief Society wrote that this was not necessary, that all endowed women had the right and power to heal:

"Is it necessary for the sisters to be set apart to officiate in the sacred ordinance of washing and anointing, and laying on of hands in administering to the sick? It certainly is not.

Any and all sisters who honor their holy endowments, not only have the right, but should feel it a duty, whenever called upon to administer to our sisters in

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<sup>68</sup> Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents at Winter Quarters," in *Women's Exponent* vol. 14 <15 August 1886> page 98.

<sup>69</sup> Hatch and Compton ed., *A Widow's Tale: 1884-1896 Diary of Helen Mar Kimball Whitney* <17 July 1886> page 170.

these ordinances, which God has graciously committed to His daughters as well as to His sons; and we testify that when administered and received in faith and humility they are accompanied with all mighty power.

Inasmuch as God our Father has revealed these sacred ordinances and committed them to His Saints, it is not only our privilege but our imperative duty to apply them for the relief of human suffering. We think we may safely say thousands can testify that God has sanctioned the administration of these ordinances by our sisters with the manifestations of His healing influence.”<sup>70</sup>

The footnote to this article in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* indicates that the First Presidency under John Taylor took issue with the statement, because Franklin D. Richards wrote in his journal that “Prest. Taylor, Cannon, Woodruff, Carrington & myself met with sister Eliza Roxy Snow Smith in Gardo house & corrected her views as contained in the W. Exponent of Sept. 15 – 84, page 91, Questions 4 & 5.”<sup>71</sup> At first glance of the article, this question about women healing was question 5. Yet because there is a sub-question included after question 3 about raffles, that could have been the “question 4” referenced. That would make “question 5” the one about whether “members of the Relief Society go to the Bishops for counsel”, which came directly before the question about

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<sup>70</sup> Eliza R. Snow, “To the Branches of the Relief Society”, 12 September 1884, in *Woman’s Exponent* vol. 13 <15 September 1884> page 61 and *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* pages 515–516.

<sup>71</sup> Franklin D. Richards Diary, 26 September 1884, LDS Archives; underline in original, quoted in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 516.

women healing.<sup>72</sup>

Two strong reasons exist to doubt that this correction was over Eliza R. Snow teaching the endowment gave women power to heal. First of all, George Q. Cannon's account of this meeting only goes into detail correcting her on her advice about sisters handling disputes independent of the Bishop or male priesthood. Furthermore, George Q. Cannon made no mention about Eliza R. Snow's comments about women healing:

“We afterwards — that is, Pres. Taylor, myself, Bros Woodruff, Richards, Carrington & John W. Young — met with Sister Eliza R. Snow and brought to her attention an article which she had written in response to inquiries made of her in the *Woman's Exponent* of Sep 15th.

She had stated respecting difficulties between members of the Relief Society that they should be settled by the Teachers of the Society, and if it were not possible for them to affect a settlement, it should then be brought before the ward authorities, and if not settled then appealed to the Stake President of the Relief Societies, and then to the general President of the Relief Societies, and if not settled, then to be brought before the Priesthood. The manner in which this was stated made the female Relief Society a co-ordinate branch of the priesthood. After considerable conversation, during which I elicited from her her views. It was decided by vote, at the suggestion of Pres. Taylor, that I write an article explaining the true method of arranging these matters, and correct any inaccuracies that were in Sister Snow's statement, which are more probably the result of a want of clearness and fullness of the article than from

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<sup>72</sup> *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 515.

any design to teach improper doctrine.”<sup>73</sup>

A second strong reason to doubt that Eliza R. Snow was corrected on women healing by virtue of temple authority comes from the fact that Franklin D. Richards witnessed the First Presidency “correcting” Eliza R. Snow on this article, and he noted her being “corrected” in his journal. Yet if the correction was really about women healing would he later teach the same supposedly incorrect thing she was corrected on?

In 1896 he taught that it was the right of the women to “rebuke disease in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Holy Anointing which I have received.”<sup>74</sup>

Franklin D. Richards was a rare example of a church leader who acknowledged there were misogynistic tendencies of some of the priesthood brethren to be jealous of women exercising spiritual gifts of the priesthood. In July 1888 he stated:

“There are also some who look with jealousy upon the moves of the sisters as though they might come to possess some of the gifts, and are afraid they will get away with some of the blessings of the Gospel, which only men ought to possess. That is the way some look upon woman and her work. They don’t like to accord to them anything that will raise them up and make their talents to shine forth as the daughters of Eve and of Sarah. But have feelings of envy and jealousy; and instead of dealing open handedly with them, tell[ing] them to go forward and do all the good they can, it seems as though they would like to keep them back and

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<sup>73</sup> George Q. Cannon journal, 26 September 1884.

<sup>74</sup> Franklin D. Richards diary, 3 April 1896, LDS archives.

not let them do anything—more than is really necessary.

...I ask any and everybody present who have received their endowments, whether he be a brother Apostle, Bishop, High Priest, Elder, or whatever office he may hold in the Church, ‘What blessings did you receive, what ordinance, what power, intelligence, sanctification or grace did you receive that your wife did not partake of with you?’ I will answer, that there was one thing that our wives were not made special partakers of, and that was the ordination to the various orders of the priesthood which were conferred upon us. Aside from that, our sisters share with us any and all of the ordinances of the holy anointing, endowments, sealings, sanctifications and blessings that we have been made partakers of.

Now, I ask you: Is it possible that we have the holy priesthood and our wives have none of it? Do you not see, by what I have read, that Joseph desired to confer these keys of power upon them in connection with their husbands? I hold that a faithful wife has certain blessings, powers and rights, and is made partaker of certain gifts and blessings and promises with her husband, which she cannot be deprived of, except by transgression of the holy order of God. They shall enjoy what God said they should. And these signs shall follow them if they believe.”<sup>75</sup>

In early Utah a specific healing ritual was developed for women about to give birth that was called a “washing and anointing” for confinement, and it became widespread by the 1880s. In 1888, Emmeline B. Wells, the editor of the *Women’s Exponent*, wrote to President Wilford Woodruff

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<sup>75</sup> Franklin D. Richards discourse, 19 July 1888, in *Women’s Exponent* vol. 17 <1 September 1888> pages 52–54 and *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* pages 546–552.

inquiring whether it was proper to administer the confinement ritual for women who were not endowed or who had married a gentile husband. Woodruff's reply explicitly divorced the practice of women healing from the authority of the temple:

“[\*]First: Are sisters justified in administering the ordinance of washing and anointing previous to confinements to those who have received their endowments and have married men outside of the Church?

Second: Can anyone who has not had their endowments thus be administered to by the sisters if she is a faithful Saint in good standing and has not yet had the opportunity of going to the temple for the ordinance?[\*]

To begin with I desire to say that the ordinance of washing and anointing is one that should only be administered in Temples or other holy places which are dedicated for the purpose of giving endowments to the Saints. That ordinance might not be administered to any one whether she has received or has not received her endowments, in any other place or under any other circumstances.

But I imagine from your questions that you refer to a practice that has grown up among the sisters of washing and anointing sisters who are approaching their confinement. If so, this is not, strictly speaking, an ordinance, unless it be done under the direction of the priesthood and in connection with the ordinance of laying on of hands for the restoration of the sick.

There is no impropriety in sisters washing and anointing their sisters in this way, under the circumstances you describe; but it should be understood that they do this, not as members of the priesthood, but as members of the

Church, exercising faith for, and asking the blessings of the Lord upon their sisters, just asking the blessings of the Lord upon their sisters, just as they and every member of the Church might do in behalf of the members of their families.”<sup>76</sup>

In spite of this denial of the Endowment having connection to authority to bless and heal, some of the sisters and leaders of the Church continued to teach that endowed women particularly had received healing authority. Like Franklin D. Richards, Joseph F. Smith also taught that women could heal by virtue of their endowments, stating:

“In relation to laying on of hands by sisters, the speaker said it is a proper thing for mothers, who have received their blessings in the house of God to pray for their sick and to rebuke diseases. It is just as much the right of the mother as of the father, although he, holding the Priesthood, can do it by virtue of this, as well as in the name of the Lord. The women are not especially called upon to visit from house to house to administer to the sick, but they can do so properly, if called upon.”<sup>77</sup>

Zina D. Huntington Young also taught the sisters in 1889 “It is the privilege of the sisters, who are faithful in the discharge of their duties, and have received their endowments and blessings in the house of the Lord, to administer to their sisters, and to the little ones, in time of sickness, in meekness

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<sup>76</sup> Wilford Woodruff letter to Emmeline B. Wells, 27 April 1888, LDS Archives, underline in original. Also published in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* pages 541–542.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph F. Smith discourse, 17 March 1892, quoted in *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society* page 606.

and humility, ever being careful to ask in the name of Jesus, and to give God the glory.”<sup>78</sup>

Zina Young apparently continued to believe privately that women held priesthood, but should be careful about mentioning the subject. This appears evident when a sister asked Zina Young “if women held the priesthood in connection with their husbands?” Zina answered her “that we should be thankful for the many blessings we enjoyed and say nothing about it. If you plant a grain of wheat and keeping poking and looking at it to see if it was growing you would spoil the root.” The sister recorded “The answer was very satisfying to me.”<sup>79</sup>

## THE LOSS OF WOMEN’S RITUAL HEALING

Even though Wilford Woodruff’s official explanation of women’s healing rituals only being by faith and having no connection to priesthood was not widely accepted by the older members in his day, his view would eventually prevail. By the early 1900s the understanding that women healed by virtue of temple authority had been lost.

When Eliza R. Snow’s 1884 article in the *Women’s Exponent* answering questions to the Relief Society was re-published in 1902, the statement about “sisters who honor their holy

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<sup>78</sup> Zina D. Young discourse, 6 April 1889, in *Woman’s Exponent* vol. 17 <15 April 1889> page 172.

<sup>79</sup> Ruth May Fox diary, 8 March 1896, cited in Linda King Newell, “A Gift Given: A Gift Taken,” in *Sunstone Magazine* vol. 6 <September–October 1981> pages 19–20.



endowments” being able to heal was edited to read, “sisters who honor their holy *covenants*” being able to do so. This change was visual evidence that the belief that the endowment ritual empowered women to heal was de-emphasized.<sup>80</sup>

Whether women were able to “seal” their healing ordinances was a controversy that drew the First Presidency’s attention in 1900. A letter regarding the issue was read and discussed by the First Presidency on March 7, 1900:

“Presidents [Lorenzo] Snow, [George Q.] Cannon, and [Joseph F.] Smith were at the office today as usual. Recently a letter was received from the presidency of the Relief Society in Dublan, Mexico, asking certain questions on the subject of washing and anointing sisters preparatory to confinement and women and children for the restoration of their health; and among the questions was one asking if the washing should be sealed, and if the sisters had a right to seal, using no authority but doing it in the name of Jesus, or should men holding the Priesthood be called in to attend to their particular part of the ceremony or administration. These questions were referred to the general presiding officers of the Relief Society to prepare answers and submit the same. The answer to this question was as follows: Brethren are sometimes called in to seal the washing and anointing: usually by the desire of the sister herself, her husband being called, or her father, or someone in whom she has great faith. In case no request is made for brethren to be called, the sealing is done by the sisters officiating, uniting their faith and simply doing so in the name of Jesus, not mentioning authority.

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<sup>80</sup> This change was observed in Jonathan Stapley and Kris Wright, “Female Ritual Healing,” in *Journal of Mormon History* vol. 37 <Winter 2011> page 39 footnote 115.

President [Joseph F.] Smith expressed himself to the effect that in his opinion the word ‘seal’ should not be used by the sisters at all, but that the word ‘confirm’ might be substituted, and that it should be used not in an authoritative way but in the spirit of invocation.

President Snow and Cannon endorsed this, and the secretary was directed to refer the answer back with the request that sisters of the Relief Society adopt the change.”<sup>81</sup>

This instruction led to controversy in the Relief Society, who understood it had been standard practice for decades for sisters to seal blessings. On April 9, 1901, one sister wrote to Lorenzo Snow with serious doubts about these new instructions:

“If the information given in the answer is absolutely correct, then myself and thousands of other members of the Church have been misinstructed and are laboring under a very serious mistake, which certainly should be authoritatively corrected. Sister Eliza R. Snow Smith, from the Prophet Joseph Smith, her husband, taught the sisters in her day, that a very important part of the sacred ordinance of administrating to the sick was the sealing of the anointing and blessings, and should never be omitted. And we follow the pattern she gave us continually. We do not seal in the authority of the Priesthood, but in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”<sup>82</sup>

No reply to that letter is extant. Yet even the

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<sup>81</sup> President’s Office Journal, 7 March 1900. In *Journal History*, LDS Archives.

<sup>82</sup> Louisa L. G. Richards letter to Lorenzo Snow, 9 April 1901, LDS archives.

leadership of the Relief Society were hesitant and skeptical of these new instructions, in spite of them coming from the First Presidency. Linda King Newell's article "A Gift Given: A Gift Taken" recalls the Relief Society discussing the subject later that year:

"On 16 September 1901, a Relief Society general board meeting discussed 'whether the sisters should seal the anointing after washings and anointings. Pres. [Elmina S.] Taylor said that she thought it was all right. She had received just as great benefit from the sealing of the sisters as from the brethren, but thought it wise to ask the Priesthood to seal the anointing when it was get-at-able.' Her own testimony that she had been as greatly benefitted from the sisters as from the brothers suggests that she did not believe that a man with priesthood ordination might be more efficacious, only that she thought there was wisdom in including the priesthood holders as much as possible. This interpretation is borne out by her next statement: 'And if the brethren decided that women could not seal the anointing then we should do as they say,' but she could not see any reason why women could not, since 'Aunt Zina did'."<sup>83</sup>

After the shift in official policy regarding women healing between 1884 and 1900 — from healing by virtue of temple authority to healing by faith alone — it was only a matter of time before leaders entirely regarded women blessing and healing as unnecessary. In his essay in *Women and Authority*, historian D. Michael Quinn summarized

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<sup>83</sup> Linda King Newell, "A Gift Given: A Gift Taken," in *Sunstone Magazine* vol. 6 <September–October 1981> page 35.

nicely:

“As early as 1913 Relief Society general president Emmeline B. Wells expressed hope that ‘the blessing [of healing] will not be taken from us’ by disapproving general authorities. And in 1935 a woman asked if it was ‘orthodox and sanctioned by the Church today’ for women to perform such healing ordinances. Relief Society general president Louise Y. Robison replied that ‘it is our earnest hope that we may continue to have that privilege, and up to the present time the Presidents of the Church have always allowed it to us.’”

“In 1946 Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith informed the Relief Society general presidency that it was no longer approved ‘for sisters to wash and anoint other sisters.’ Instead, he said that women should ‘send for the Elders of the Church to come and administer to the sick and afflicted.’ Thus a century of Mormon women’s sacred ordinances no longer had the approval of the church’s hierarchy. An era had officially ended.”<sup>84</sup>

## DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

Reflecting on the Nauvoo period and the organization of the Relief Society in 1905 Bathsheba Smith remembered Joseph Smith’s remarks to the Relief Society in 1842 and believed they were fulfilled:

“I have always been pleased that I had my endowments

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<sup>84</sup> D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in *Women and Authority* pages 380–381.

when the Prophet lived. He taught us the true order of prayer. I never liked to hear a sermon without hearing something of the Prophet, for he gave us everything, every order of the priesthood. He said he had given the sisters instructions that they could administer to the sick and he wanted to make us, as the women were in Paul's day, 'A kingdom of priestesses'."<sup>85</sup>

While Bathsheba Smith believed that Joseph Smith gave women "everything...every order of the priesthood," others like Susa Gates Young believed that "The privileges and powers outlined by the Prophet [Joseph Smith] in those first meetings [of the Relief Society] have never yet been granted to women in full even yet."<sup>86</sup> Susa Young Gates' comment is especially poignant given that some of the sisters at that time recognized that the "privileges and powers" they had been given were beginning to be questioned by men in the church, and that the rights women had to participate in ritual healing were in jeopardy of being abandoned and forgotten.

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<sup>85</sup> Bathsheba W. Smith Statement, 9 June 1905, Pioneer Stake Relief Society minutes, LDS Archives.

<sup>86</sup> *The Young Woman's Journal* vol. 16 <March 1905> page 117.

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