CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE PROPHET’S “DAILY WALK AND CONVERSATION”: THREE WOMEN WITNESSES

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Eliza R. Snow became acquainted with Joseph Smith during the winter of 1830–31, when he called at her father’s home in Ohio. She later wrote, “As he sat warming himself, I scrutinized his face as closely as I could without attracting his attention, and decided that his was an honest face.”1 After her baptism four years later, Snow boarded at the Smith home in Kirtland, where she taught the family school. She later filled the same role in Nauvoo. There, she wrote, she had “ample opportunity to mark his ‘daily walk and conversation,’ as a prophet of God; and the more I became acquainted with him, the more I appreciated him as such.”2

Many women were uniquely qualified to testify of Joseph Smith as a result of their proximity to him. Mary Alice Cannon Lambert met him when she was young in an impressionable moment: “I knew him the instant my eyes rested upon him, and at that moment I received my testimony that he was a Prophet of God.” Emmeline B. Wells described Joseph’s “majestic bearing.” She wrote, “The one thought that filled my soul was, I have seen the Prophet of God, he has taken me by the hand, and this testimony has never left me.” Jane Manning James wrote about working in the Smith home in Nauvoo: “He was the finest man I ever saw on earth.” Others also described his physical presence or remembered hearing him speak, while many more recorded tender interchanges with him.3

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witnessed of a personal spiritual testimony linking this man to God. As the recipient of such divine testimony, each woman participated in her own personal revelation, linking her as well with the divine.

Following a rich tradition of women actively involved in American religion through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many Latter-day Saint women raised their voices in a similar manner. Speaking of their personal experiences with the Prophet and of their deep conviction of the Restoration, women have remembered and commemorated not only a mighty man but also a momentous movement, with each individual woman giving voice to a unique perspective. As Leonard Arrington, a past Church historian, observed, “Anyone who spends a substantial amount of time going through the materials in church archives must gain a new appreciation of the important and indispensable role of women in the history of the LDS church—not to mention new insights into church history resulting from viewing it through the eyes of women.” The wealth of their words adds a heretofore untapped depth to a modern understanding of Joseph Smith as Prophet of the Restoration, allowing for individual access and participation in the greater power of God’s work on the earth.

A brief examination of three women whose intimate acquaintance with Joseph Smith and close connection to the Restoration through personal revelation reveals a living, dynamic, individual touch to an institutional memory. Lucy Mack Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Helen Mar Whitney are three writing women whose intimate acquaintance with Joseph Smith and close connection to the Restoration through personal revelation reveals a woman’s touch. The power of their words can be felt as the Spirit adds to their testimonies, for “in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

The witness of these women, as a result of their personal experience, locates them in the Restoration, much as it can for every member. The personal construction of memory, according to historian David Thelen, as for these women, illuminates how individuals establish core identities and how they connect and even participate with large-scale historical events. Elder M. Russell Ballard said: “A most significant evidence of our conversion and of how we feel about the gospel in our own lives is our willingness to share it with others. . . .
This is God’s work. He wants us to participate with Him and His Beloved Son.”7 Our modern testimonies can then rise with theirs, as we too have ample opportunity to learn from them about Joseph Smith and to follow their pattern in full participation in the Restoration.

“Mother in Israel”—Lucy Mack Smith

Lucy Mack Smith, mother of the Prophet Joseph Smith, is remembered with a term used by Brigham Young in October 1845, “a mother in Israel.”8 As a church matriarch, Sister Smith was honored and revered in her unique role as witness of the Restoration; she was the first woman to speak at a general conference of the Church in Nauvoo in October 1845, where she testified of the Book of Mormon and the Church’s organization.9 She is also recognized as the author of the first extensive biographical account of the Prophet following the martyrdom in June 1844. With the assistance of Nauvoo residents Howard and Martha Jane Coray, she penned the “History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet” in 1845 as a special effort to reaffirm the divine prophetic role during a crisis in leadership succession. The book was published in 1853 by Orson Pratt in England and later revised and published many times throughout the twentieth century as the History of the Prophet Joseph Smith, becoming, in the words of historian Jan Shipps, the “premier printed resource for information about young Joseph Smith and the beginnings of Mormonism.”10

A close examination of Lucy Smith’s words reveals her intimate connection to God and her subsequent intense desire to testify, an incumbent responsibility to witness of her participation within the Restoration. Of her own connection with the divine, in a time of great sickness, Lucy Smith wrote, “I made a solemn covenant with God, that, if he would let me live, I would endeavor to serve him according to the best of my abilities.”11 Her introduction stated: “I feel it a privilege as well as my duty to all candid inquirers after truth to give (as my last testimony to a world from whence I must soon take my departure) an account . . . And inasmuch as no one on earth is so thoroughly acquainted as myself with the entire history of those of whom I speak I have been induced by these and other considerations to assume the task.”12 She followed the pattern of other
nineteenth-century religious women, who, according to historian Catherine Brekus, “seem to have wanted to be remembered.” With many narrative accounts of spiritual experience and divine intervention throughout the history of her family, Sister Smith referenced her readers with her own divine role, which, she stated, may “tax the credulity of such as do not bear witness of the fact as I do who are not a few. . . . But what I say here I say with reference to Eternity and the judgment seat of the allmighty where I shall again meet my readers as a testater of the same.” Near the end of her account, she wrote, “As I hasten to the end of my story, the reader will be able to form an opinion with regard to the correctness of my conclusion.” Thus along with the role of recorder, she assumed the role of divine witness before God, following the counsel given by Joseph Smith as testimony “recorded in heaven” (D&C 62:3). The command to witness is an incumbent responsibility of testimony.

The crux of Lucy Smith’s testimony is the prophetic role of her son in light of her own search for religious truth. “I began to feel the want of a living instructor in matters of salvation,” she wrote following the death of her sister. “I was totally devoid of any satisfactory knowledge or understanding of the laws or requirements of that Being.” She then linked this sense of lacking with the fulfillment of the Restoration. “I had always believed confidently that God would raise up some one who would be able to effect a reconciliation among those who desired to do his will at the expense of all things else—But what was my joy and astonishment to hear my own son though a boy of fourteen years of age declare that he had been visited by an angel from Heaven.” Her writing, then, reflected her personal testimony and understanding of the Restoration.

Sister Smith had a unique position from which to report the unfolding of the Restoration. Because of her proximity to events such as the First Vision, the subsequent visits of the angel Moroni, the reception of the gold plates, the organization of the Church and its resulting persecution, and the martyrdom, she was able to mingle a chronicle of events of the Restoration with her own stirring testimony of its truth. She hefted the breastplates as a physical witness, and she boldly proclaimed her spiritual allegiance. For example, when Joseph Smith Sr. was imprisoned by a Quaker neighbor for debt, Lucy testified, “God has raised up my son to bring forth a book,
which was written for the salvation of the souls of men, for the sal-
vation of your soul as well as mine." Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs
noted the use of personal testimony as evidence to validate inter-
pretation of personal experience. As “a mother in Israel,” Lucy Mack
Smith embedded the chronicle of events she witnessed with her per-
sonal conviction. Her voice, as a result of proximity, is a valuable tes-
mimony of the Restoration.

“ZION’S POETESS”—ELIZA R. SNOW

Renowned women’s leader and poet Eliza R. Snow was well
acquainted with Joseph Smith. She boarded with his family in
Kirtland and Nauvoo, taught his children, served in the Nauvoo Relief
Society, and was sealed to him as a plural wife. She had great respect
and love for him, calling him the “choice of my heart and the crown
of my life.” As a practiced and published poet before joining the
Church in 1835, it was natural for her to express her innermost con-
victions through verse. In the fall of 1838, Joseph Smith appointed
her to write poems for and in behalf of Latter-day Saints in a role
defined by historians Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson as
Mormon “poet laureate,” and she subsequently published more than
seventy-five poems in Illinois. She was later known as “Zion’s
Poetess,” and her poems rallied the Saints in their celebration of a
modern Prophet. Many of her pieces about Joseph Smith were pub-
lished during his lifetime in the Times and Seasons, the Nauvoo
Neighbor, the Wasp, and the Millennial Star; some were published again
later in the Frontier Guardian of Iowa and the Deseret News in Utah,
indicating her poetic popularity as well as a continuing commemora-
tion of the Prophet long after his death. Unlike Lucy Smith’s reminis-
cent biography of Joseph written after his death, Snow’s
contemporaneous efforts to laud his prophetic role had an immedi-
ate impact on readers.

Snow had not always held such a revered position. Her conver-
sion as a Saint occurred after much time, observation, and study, fol-
lowing the universal process outlined in Moroni 10:3–5. Her unique
proximity to the Prophet and her detailed study of the Bible provided
her with the relevance and context of his work in the Restoration. Her poetry reveals knowledge gained as she carefully examined the ancient prophetic pattern. In “Psalm,” for example, she compared
Joseph Smith to ancient prophets with likewise humble beginnings, such as David and Elijah. In these last days the Lord hath call’d his servant Joseph . . . to be a prophet and a teacher: yea, to be a mighty instrument in rolling forward and establishing that kingdom which ‘shall fill the whole earth.’ Her grand epic poem, “Two Chapters in the Life of President Joseph Smith,” was written in 1843 after she left Nauvoo for the nearby Morley settlement, where she had the time and solitude to pursue serious poetic endeavors. Like Lucy Smith’s biography, this piece bears the metaphoric imprimatur of Snow’s role as testator. The poem opens invoking the muse of the “Great Eternal of Eternity,” asking him to “warm my minstrel with celestial fire.” The Seer and Prophet of the latter days / Is now my theme—his history help me trace; / For thy approval, Lord, shall prompt my pen, / Regardless of the praise or blame of men.” Snow’s words clearly indicate her prominent sense of mission in writing, echoing Alma’s heartfelt desire to “speak with the trump of God” (Alma 29:1).

Eliza Snow and Lucy Smith both wrote to chronicle the divine interventions in the life of the Prophet, indicating their own connections to divinity, their personal testimonies, and their consequent witnesses. Their words have provided sustenance for subsequent retellings of now famous Joseph Smith stories. Following a grand sweeping history of the Apostasy and ancient prophecy of a restoration in “Two Chapters,” Snow highlighted the Prophet’s divine role as one upon whom Jehovah’s “eye was fix’d.” The event of the First Vision is captured:

A pillar, brighter than the noon-day sun,
Precisely o’er his head, descending, fell
Around him; and he felt himself unbound. . . .
He saw two glorious personages stand
Above him in the air; surrounded with
The light that had envelop’d him. . . .

One of the
Bright personages whom he saw, referr’d
Him to the other, and address’d him thus,
“Joseph, this is my well beloved Son,
Hear him.”
According to Derr and Davidson, this poem revealed Snow’s “passionate conviction of the importance of Joseph’s prophetic calling and the preeminent position of the First Vision in Mormonism’s historical narrative.” Phrases in this poetic account may have influenced George Manwaring’s well-known hymn, “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.” Snow’s testimony of Joseph as Prophet as revealed through her poetry indicates her personal conviction of the hand of God throughout the events of the Restoration and her participation as a witness.

Snow’s poetry dramatized the events of the Restoration as they happened, creating a communal form by which to understand, laud, and mourn Joseph Smith. “Jubilee Song,” written January 18, 1843, was printed as a broadside and distributed throughout Nauvoo. The poem commemorated Joseph’s triumphant return from a trial in Springfield, Illinois, and was recited at a celebratory dinner in his honor. “That deed—that time we celebrate,” she chronicled, “the Lord who guides the Prophet’s cause.” The ballad “The Kidnapping of Gen. Joseph Smith” reenacts an equally exciting event. After being illegally arrested by secret order of Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs, this poem described how Smith “bared his breast” before the “rude ferocity” and “savage wildness,” again coming out triumphantly according to the will of God. The excitement of the events is clear, and the community celebration revering Joseph’s prophetic role is apparent. Snow captured the immediate events in which she participated, recording the veracity from her valuable perspective.

Snow’s poetic commemoration of Joseph’s martyrdom was published just one week after the June 27, 1844, event. At a time most difficult for her personally, perhaps she found solace in penning words the community of Saints could share. “Ye heav’ns, attend! Let all the earth give ear! / Let Gods and seraphs, men and angels hear— / The worlds on high—the universe shall know,” she began. The poem became a site of community mourning: “We mourn thy Prophet, from whose lips have flow’d / The words of life. . . . Now Zion mourns—she mourns an earthly head.” The poetic textual form allowed for immediate communal grieving, and as it was republished later, the poem reflected community memory re-creation. Following the sons of Mosiah, Snow “did impart much consolation to the church, confirming their faith, and exhorting them with
longsuffering and much travail to keep the commandments of God” (Mosiah 27:33). As Snow consecrated her poetic talent to express her own testimony and to speak for the Saints, she was “fixed” as a stalwart witness of the Restoration. She participated in the Restoration according to her own ability, and in so doing, she witnessed the universal access to study, understanding, and sharing.

**Political Commentator—Helen Mar Whitney**

The third example of female rhetoric commemorating Joseph Smith comes from Helen Mar Whitney. The daughter of Heber C. Kimball, counselor and close associate of Joseph Smith, Helen Mar experienced the founding era of the Church from a child’s point of view. As a young woman, she became one of Joseph’s plural wives, and in her adult years, she was respected as a writer and Relief Society leader in Utah. Whitney’s editorial-style reminiscences were published in the *Woman’s Exponent* from May 1880 through August 1886, certainly physically and temporally removed from Joseph Smith’s lifetime. Although her mode of communication varied from that of Lucy Mack Smith and Eliza R. Snow, who both wrote from a much closer standpoint and for an intended audience of Latter-day Saints, Whitney filled a different political need dictated by her later context.

In a time marked particularly by antipolygamy legislation for the fledgling Utah territory, Whitney wrote with a specific purpose in defense of her institutional allegiance. Her audience was composed of a variety of readers, some of whom were not members of the Church and were deeply antagonistic towards its peculiar beliefs. In an attempt to connect with these readers, she wrote of her task, “I often find it a very difficult one to gather up the many broken threads of the almost forgotten past, and weave them into a shape for the perusal of others, and it is a pleasant relief, like a cooling draught to the thirsty traveler, to find here and there a scrap of our history interwoven with that of others, bringing before us objects and scenes which were once familiar, but had become dim and nearly effaced from our memory by the hand of time, which has been to me unsparing in its ravages.” She later wrote, “I am willing, nay, anxious, that they should know the true history.” Whitney’s words echoed the efforts of Joseph Smith to write his own history: “Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation”
(Joseph Smith—History 1:1). She felt a strong need to defend as well as find common ground with and connect with those not of her faith, a position often experienced for modern as well as historical participants in the Restoration.

Like Sister Smith and Sister Snow, Helen Mar Whitney boldly testified of revelation. To readers within the Church of a younger generation without the personal relationship to Joseph Smith to influence their own convictions, Whitney's testimony crossed generational lines, and she joined past testimony in declaring her own witness: “I truly rejoice that I have had the privilege of being numbered with those who have come up through much tribulation and gained a knowledge for myself that this is the work of God.”38 Historian Nathan Wachtel noted such a role as a living link between generations within a social group.39 She defined the Church as “our glorious religion, the pure gospel of Christ, revealed through Joseph, the Prophet of God, by which, instead of bringing us into bondage, every soul is made free.”40 Whitney's joy in her membership of the restored Church declares her own personal testimony and reflects heartfelt conviction and active participation years after the defining moment of conversion.

As with Smith’s and Snow’s accounts, Whitney’s personal experience with Joseph Smith indicated the hand of God in the events of the Restoration. Throughout her writing, Whitney listed personal recollections of the Prophet. “Those scenes,” she wrote, “are fresh in my memory.”41 For example, she remembered an occasion in Kirtland praying as a young child when Joseph Smith was so touched by her earnest efforts that he wept.42 She also remembered watching the Prophet bless and administer to the sick—a tender, Christ-like act of service that testified to Whitney of Joseph Smith’s divine connection. Such accounts also made for her mixed audience a portrait of a concerned citizen rather than the manipulative sycophant often portrayed in anti-Mormon literature of the time. Whitney’s record of personal proximity to the Prophet is one that may not be found in institutional records, yet it bears an important view of his compassionate and personable character. And an intimate connection with the Lord’s prophet reveals an even deeper respect and closer understanding of the Lord Himself.
The words of these three women invaluably commemorate Joseph Smith, for each speaks of him from a different perspective, for a different audience, and with a different purpose. Lucy Mack Smith's efforts to testify and remind members of the prophetic role of her son, Eliza R. Snow’s work to rally the community, and Helen Mar Whitney’s movement to defend Church beliefs all witness a close connection to the Prophet and a committed allegiance to the Restoration. Their varying ages, media, and purposes reveal the richness of historical experience and the need to witness. Deeper analysis reveals modern application to gospel principles.

These intimate, individual relationships with Joseph Smith indicate the value of personal experience, personal participation in the Restoration, and personal voice. One common theme among these three women’s accounts is an assertive notion of self-placement within institutional history. Women’s history in general, according to historians Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, serves a “consciousness-raising” function with special attention to the individual. Each woman had a strong personal experience producing personal testimony, and each accordingly became an active participant in the events of the Restoration—a pattern still asked of every member. It is a common religious experience, as noted by anthropologist Susan Friend Harding, to transform self and share with others. Spiritual and personal implications follow.

Lucy Mack Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Helen Mar Whitney bore record of Joseph Smith as the Lord’s Prophet. Each of these women responded to her personal conversion, transforming self and sharing with others. The Lord promises all an individual conversion experience and relationship: “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me” (D&C 88:63). As these women testify of the Lord’s hand in preserving Joseph Smith, they also testify of His hand in their own lives. He promises to stand by each individual in times of trouble: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee” (Isaiah 43:2). As Lucy Mack Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Helen Mar Whitney note the Lord’s hand in guiding and protecting His prophet, they in turn report how He has guided and protected
them as Saints. He then charges His recipients, “Ye are my witnesses” (Isaiah 43:10).

Subsequently, these women, in the deepest sense, precipitate readers to witness of their own experiences and become active participants. “When thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren” is the apostolic counsel (Luke 22:32). Elder M. Russell Ballard taught: “We as members of the Church arise individually and collectively, with dedication and action, to help build the kingdom of God. Our duty lies in assisting others, through the power of the Spirit, to know and understand the doctrines and principles of the gospel. Everyone must come to feel that the doctrines of the Restoration are true and of great value. And everyone who accepts the message must strive to live the gospel by making and keeping sacred covenants and by participating in all of the ordinances of salvation and exaltation.”

As these three women worked in their own way to witness, they utilized their individual talents and voices. As a result, their reminiscences, poetry, and editorials reached different audiences and affected different purposes in their active roles in building the kingdom.

NOTES
3. These accounts are taken from “Joseph Smith, the Prophet,” Young Woman’s Journal, December 1905, 548–58.
9. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church Archives, Salt Lake City, October 8, 1845, 1. Lucy Smith
also spoke at a family meeting called by Brigham Young earlier that year.


The Prophet’s “Daily Walk and Conversation”

Personal (Liverpool: F. D. Richards; London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1856), 15–27; lines 1, 14, 5–8, 118, 206–8, 223–27.


29. Eliza R. Snow, Broadside, January 18, 1843, titled “Part Second” under general heading, “Jubilee Songs,” LDS Church Archives, lines 1, 49. Also printed in Times and Seasons, February 1, 1843.


34. See Derr and Davidson, “A Wary Heart Becomes ‘Fixed Unalterably,’” 127.


37. Woman’s Exponent, July 1, 1880, 18; cited in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, A Woman’s View, 14.

38. Woman’s Exponent, May 15, 1880, 188; cited in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, A Woman’s View, 1.


40. Woman’s Exponent, March 15, 1881, 154; cited in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, A Woman’s View, 81.

41. Woman’s Exponent, May 15, 1881, 188–89; cited in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, A Woman’s View, 3.
42. Woman's Exponent, 15 November 1880, 90; cited in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, A Woman's View, 52–53.