



The work of the Lord—the work of restoration—depends on faithful women and men.

“No More Strangers”: *LDS Scholars in Women’s Studies*

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Introduction

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History tells us very little about women; judging from its pages, one would suppose their lives were insignificant and their opinions worthless,” former general Relief Society president Emmeline B. Wells wrote. “Volumes of unwritten history yet remain, the sequel to the written lives of brave and heroic men. But although the historians of the past have been neglectful of woman, and it is the exception if she be mentioned at all; yet the future will deal more generously with womankind, and the historian of the present age will find it very embarrassing to ignore woman in the records of the nineteenth century.”¹

Wells’s counsel is haunting. In neglecting women in history, what insights and truths have we forfeited? What understanding do we lack? And thus how might studying the history of women enrich and deepen our sense of the past? How might it strengthen our sense of individual and collective identity?

Furthermore, how has historical forgetfulness limited our understanding of who men and women are and who they can become? How might having a history—indeed, having roots—matter?

In the September 2010 general Relief Society broadcast, Julie B. Beck, the current general president, shared a message that echoed the words penned by Wells nearly one hundred thirty years earlier. Sister Beck revealed the following: “Our presidency has prayed, fasted, pondered, and counseled with prophets, seers, and revelators to learn what God would have us do to help His daughters be strong in the face of ‘the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth.’ An answer has come that the sisters of the Church should know and learn from the history of Relief Society. Understanding the history of Relief Society strengthens the foundational identity and worth of faithful women. In consequence of this, a history of Relief Society for the Church is being completed. . . . The preparation of the history has been an inspired and revelatory experience.”²

Joseph Smith taught that the organization of the Relief Society was an essential part of the restoration of all things. He taught that women were to engage in the work of salvation and help build and strengthen the kingdom of God, as Sister Beck explained. We need to remember that the work of the Lord—the work of restoration—depended on and depends on faithful women and men.³

Knowing the history of Relief Society—the history of Mormon women—will dissolve the forgetfulness that Emmeline B. Wells and Julie B. Beck have identified. It will, as Sister Beck teaches, remind us of who we are and what we are to do. It will encourage unity and promote personal change through the Atonement of Christ. Indeed, it will provide “definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior.”⁴

Women’s studies can and should be the work of faithful Church members, as past and present general Relief Society presidents have taught. Recognizing the commitment others feel to studying the history of women—of all varieties—I have invited five scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds and with a plethora of research interests to share their stories and views about the subject of women’s history. The discussion begins with an autobiographical piece I wrote—a piece that explains implicitly why I decided to undertake this project, and then leads into the more specific contexts and approaches of the other contributors. Although each writes as an individual, our thoughts collectively demonstrate the very unity and commitment Sister Beck

encouraged us to cultivate. We hope our experiences and ideas will encourage future reflection and remembrance as we all, in our studies of the past, seek to engage with records about women.

Women’s History: A Field of Legitimate (and Faithful) Inquiry

RACHEL COPE

“You study women’s history?” my aunt asked incredulously. “They have that?” Although stunned that she would ask such a question, I managed to nod in the affirmative. In response, she simply mumbled, “Surely BYU doesn’t.”

Instead of being exasperated or offended by my aunt’s obvious disapproval and seeming unawareness, I found myself aching for her and many other women like her who do not realize they have a past and who fear it is somehow wrong to entertain the thought that they do. Furthermore, I felt sad for men and women who miss important dimensions of the human experience—past, present, and future—because they have been taught, often unwittingly, to see in halves rather than wholes, to sustain a history that is incomplete.

Why was it, I wondered, that my aunt was so afraid to acknowledge women’s history? Did she automatically equate a study of female life with radicalism, with extreme decisions, with immorality and selfishness? Did she assume that exploring women’s experiences would foster antireligious and antifamily sentiments? If so, how could I convince her that while some scholarship certainly fits these stereotypes, they alone do not define the field? Furthermore, how could I explain to her that she was allowing a vocal but limited minority to maintain ownership over how *all* women’s lives are perceived? Why, I questioned, was she allowing *them* to determine how *women’s* pasts are remembered and, ultimately, what she understands about herself?

By assuming women’s history should *not* exist, my aunt seemed to be bound by the idea that this academic discipline is (and only can be) a tool through which the adversary is destroying families—she could only see a catalyst that causes women to forget who they are. Certainly there are elements of truth in that conclusion—doesn’t evil try to appropriate all that is good?—but I wonder if a fear of a female interest in history is yet another tool through which the adversary keeps men and women from recognizing their full potential and from uniting together in the pursuit of “everything virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy.” If this is the case, and I think it is, might women’s history be threatening to the adversary because it reminds us who

women and men are and suggests that we are all engaged in the same work of salvation?

In what ways, then, might a more complete picture of history, one that explores the unity that exists between men and women, one that acknowledges gendered relationships in all their complexity, enhance our understanding of the plan of salvation? How might gospel truths—such as temple covenants—become more meaningful as we take male and female experience into account? Furthermore, how might women’s studies enrich our experiences as followers of Christ?

As a scholar of women’s history, my intellectual knowledge and my testimony have been strengthened simultaneously. Simply stated, my sense of self, family, and God have been enhanced as I have explored female as well as male experiences. And my understanding of spirituality—of faith, testimony, grace, conversion, sanctification—have become more vibrant, more poignant, more powerful and more personal as I have learned to see through a variety of lenses.

As an undergraduate at BYU, I read an article by historian Ann Braude titled “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History.” Her argument for inclusiveness, and her examples of female religiosity, indeed her conviction that women have always filled the pews and that their stories must influence and shape the larger historical narrative, opened my mind to a plethora of thoughts: how had I missed the importance of the obvious? Why had I failed to ask the types of questions she posed? Why had I never written a history paper about a woman, short of my sixth-grade report on Helen Keller? Could history be richer and deeper, as well as more inclusive and meaningful, than I realized?

The answer to my latter question proved to be a resounding yes! In graduate school, where I began a formal study of women’s history, I read two reviews that became catalysts for my own work and that also encouraged me to ruminate on my own spiritual development. In the first article, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese suggests that historians of religion and historians of women need to consider the importance of theology and examine the nature of female religious experiences rather than merely contributing to consensus history.⁵ In the eyes of religious women, she suggested, faith was central to personal identity. Those who overlooked or omitted this crucial sphere misunderstood the intricacies of their subject’s lives. Similarly, R. Marie Griffith demonstrated the importance of viewing female religious experiences as something of consequence.⁶ Permanently altered by the arguments made by

these scholars, I resolved to consider the "vital role" religion played in the lives of American women.⁷

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would focus my own research on female conversion in the early nineteenth century and that my work would encompass the extended nature of religiosity—almost immediately, I was drawn to process rather than event. For months I traveled from one archive to the next: friends and family members would call and say "Where are you this week?" Sometimes I had to think before I could provide an accurate response. I lived out of suitcases. But none of those inconveniences mattered to me because I had the privilege of pouring over endless manuscript pages that depicted personal spirituality. I knew the depth and breadth of women's religious experiences because I was privileged to read heartfelt expressions of belief day after day: I was aware of strengths and shortcomings, hopes and fears, certainties and doubts. As a result, Catherine Livingston Garretson, Emilie Royce Bradley, Caroline Ludlow Frey, and many others became real people to me; their experiences touched me, changed me, and inspired me. I became one with them as I learned to follow their examples. I began my dissertation as a believer who longed to live right; the lives of "my ladies" convinced me that longing was not enough. Their stories of extended conversion helped me discover my own path and to discover how constant transformation through the Atonement of Christ—even from good to better—is a daily necessity. I always believed that, always knew that, but in my research I embraced and grappled with and was transformed by that lovely truth. Academic work, I learned, can be spiritual.

My research also made it clear to me that I could challenge notions that nineteenth-century women diluted theology or that they used religion simply to attain social and political power. Instead, I could argue that religion was the means through which women sought to attain a personal relationship with Christ and that their quests for sanctification underlay every thought they expressed and influenced every action they performed. The very foundation of my work rested upon the importance of religion to women, and consequently to their families, their communities, and their churches. Religion mattered; it shaped the individual and the collective. Not only is women's history American history, I discovered, but women's religious history is American history, in part.

I will never forget the day of my dissertation defense (will any PhD recipient?). I sat before a group who could be described as relatively skeptical

scholars. One of my professors, in particular, believed religious history should have political or economic explanations. I wondered how he would respond to my work. The questions began: to my relief, the answers came easily to me, particularly to his queries. As our time drew to a close—a surprisingly pleasant experience—I realized that I had been able to use the evidence I had gathered from manuscript sources to convince him that women’s religious experiences should be acknowledged as an important part of their lives. A skeptical mind had accepted work about conversion as academically credible.

As I think back to my conversation with my aunt, and as I continue to pursue women’s history, I recognize that the risks of forgetting are more serious than the risks of remembering. More completeness can be woven into the traditional narratives we are all familiar with if we commit ourselves to exploring female as well as male experience. As we make this happen, our views of self, others, and God will become deeper and richer. Family, the temple, and the plan of salvation will become more meaningful. And, most importantly, our need for the Savior will become more pressing and powerful. Unity, rather than separation, will reside at the center of our stories. As the Book of Mormon teaches, we should be “one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God” (4 Nephi 1:17).

Representing Our Past

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Who will tell the history of Latter-day Saint women? In 1871, Latter-day Saint women founded the *Woman’s Exponent* and proudly proclaimed it the first journal “owned by, controlled by and edited by Utah ladies.” The stated impetus of the *Exponent* was to build one another through the “diffusion of knowledge and information” and to correct the “gross misrepresent[ations]” of Latter-day Saint women found within the popular press by providing them with a means of representing themselves. Latter-day Saint women had a complex and unique understanding of what it meant to be a woman in nineteenth-century America, but as the editor of the *Woman’s Exponent*, Louisa Lula Greene recognized the journal was often misunderstood and misrepresented by others. Consequently, she proclaimed, “Who are so well able to speak for the women of Utah as the women of Utah themselves? ‘It is better to represent ourselves than to be misrepresented by others!’”⁸

As we think about the future of Mormon women's studies, Greene's words take on added significance. The study of Mormon women is still in its early stages. Such scholars as Jill Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher have set the initial parameters of this field. However, with religious studies gaining popularity, scholars of various theoretical and political orientations will increasingly tell the stories of Mormon women and shape these narratives according to their perspectives. In its opening edition, the *Woman's Exponent* acknowledges the power wielded by whoever decides to tell the story, and we, as Latter-day Saint scholars, must do the same. Writers, authors, critics, and scholars have authority to shape the narratives they tell and will usually infuse them, to some degree, with their perspectives and biases.

This fact became clear to me as I sifted the scholarship within the field of women's studies during my time in graduate school. I soon realized that many women were being left out or misrepresented. I noticed that female scholars of today have sought to locate their own predecessors in the lives and stories they have recovered; consequently, the vast majority of women recovered have either naturally fit an acceptable feminist model or scholars have taken the liberty to present them in a distorted light by emphasizing aspects they approve of and suppressing those they do not. Women and works that scholars perceive as religious, didactic, or conservative continue to receive only minimal attention in comparison with the few women and texts that apparently prefigured the dilemmas facing "modern" women.

A desire to provide underrepresented women a voice in the scholarly conversation motivates my own scholarship. Central to many of my projects is an appeal for today's feminist scholars to continue to open up women's history to incorporate all women—to give voice not merely to the exceptional woman but also to the everyday woman, to understand her choices, sacrifices, and triumphs. Simply recovering these women, however, is not sufficient: we must recover them fairly and accurately. As one scholar acknowledges in the biography she wrote, her own interpretations "have more to do with me and my moment in history than with hers."⁹ This tendency reiterates the power held by the storyteller. While multiple ways of reading an event or individual will always exist, scholars—though they most often strive for objectivity—will regularly create narratives based upon their personal standards.

For this reason, scholars of faith must take the lead in the initial stages of Mormon women's studies. If Latter-day Saint scholars choose not to engage in women's studies, we cede ground and allow others to interpret our past.

Our past prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, encouraged members of the Church to be the vanguards in their chosen fields: “I do not advocate a retreat from society. On the contrary, we have a responsibility and a challenge to take our places in the world of business, science, government, medicine, education, and every other worthwhile and constructive vocation. We have an obligation to train our hands and minds to excel in the work of the world for the blessing of all mankind.”¹⁰

As Latter-day Saint scholars and teachers, we have an obligation to ensure that women of the past and present are represented fairly and accurately. In committing a portion of our scholarship to these ends, we will gain new truths and knowledge. For instance, studying nineteenth-century politics and culture has enhanced my comprehension of men and women’s divine attributes. By recognizing that many aspects of gender are socially conscribed, I now see more clearly the inherent gender differences that do exist and in turn am able to argue convincingly for the benefits society accrues when individuals of either gender embrace these differences and use them to promote the social good. Regarding women’s present situation, I have often found myself explaining in classes why a woman’s decision to stay at home and raise her children is not only a valid but also an intelligent decision. Abundant scholarship validates the wisdom of this choice, but unless scholars write these women’s stories from a position of appreciation or at least acceptance, other scholars will have the only voice in the conversation.

In 1888, Bishop Orson F. Whitney called for the Latter-day Saints to become more involved in the production of knowledge to show “that this people are the friends, not the foes, of education; that they are seekers after wisdom, lovers of light and truth.”¹¹ We, as Latter-day Saint scholars, will fulfill this mandate as we engage critically with women’s stories of the past and honestly and openly assess what their lives reveal about themselves and their communities. Women’s studies will go on with or without scholars of faith, but the contours of the field will be determined by whoever decides to tell the story.

Taking Faith Seriously and on Its Own Terms

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I don’t consider myself a feminist, but not because I think it’s a dirty word. I don’t resist the label because I’m a man, either. Frankly, I support much of the

feminist project, particularly efforts by historians and others to recover the experiences and voices of women from our past, to say nothing of the fight for gender equality. At the same time, I believe that "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" is a divinely inspired document and that men and women play different and unique roles in bringing about God's plan for his children, a belief that some feminists might view as antiquated and chauvinistic. I suppose that this is part of the problem so many members of the church have with feminism; feminism, or at least some versions of it, can be hostile toward religion generally and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints specifically. When visiting with other scholars at professional conferences, I'm sometimes reluctant to tell them that my wife stays home with our five children, fearing they might be critical of such a traditional arrangement. In fairness to most of these folks, they've never given me any real reason to feel this way.

I've also often wondered how I might respond to a professional colleague who questioned my core beliefs regarding marriage, gender roles, and the family. In imagining such a scenario—particularly in the wake of Proposition 8—I've come to realize that the argument would probably not go well. Even if the discussion remained collegial, we would likely not get past the fact that we would be arguing from two different registers of experience—a faith-based position and a more secularized position. I would likely struggle to rationalize attitudes and behaviors informed by faith to a person who may not subscribe to metaphysical realities. Generally speaking, the academic world, particularly higher education, has had an uneasy relationship with religion for decades, and feminism's relationship to religion is merely symptomatic of a larger problem.

Part of the issue is that scholars, and some feminist scholars, have a difficult time taking faith seriously and on its own terms. Religion and religious experience are often politicized in academic conversations. Take, for example, the way scholars have approached women's religious involvement over the last several decades. Gail Malmgreen's introduction to *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930* effectively defines the scope of a good number of these studies: "Perhaps the most important task confronting the historian of women's spirituality is to keep alive the central paradox, the complex tension between religion as 'opiate' and as an embodiment of ideological and institutional sexism, and religion as transcendent and liberating force."¹² But regarding religion as "institutional sexism" or "liberating force" distorts the analysis of women's religious experiences. Certainly, religion might prove

oppressive in some cases, and women may well experience forms of liberation as a result of religious involvement; but stressing the political consequences of religious activity may mean that scholars lose sight of religious activity as just that, religious activity—a sincere expression of faith that, from the point of view of the religiously devout, overshadows the political. Many members of the Church who campaigned for Proposition 8, after all, did so because of their religious convictions, not for political reasons.

Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti's comments regarding the state of early modern studies in 2004 are relevant to my point here. Jackson and Marotti suggest contemporary critics and historians are apt to translate "religious issues . . . into social, economic, and political language," "assuming that religion itself is a form of 'false consciousness.'" Jackson and Marotti go on to argue that "there is often a relentless 'presentism' in political readings of early modern culture. The otherness of early modern religious agents and culture(s) is translated into (for us) more acceptable modern forms conformable to our own cultural assumptions."¹³ Accordingly, women from the past who exercised their spiritual gifts in public and perhaps even political ways become profeminists, a designation that likely would have seemed alien to the very women to whom it is applied.

We might consider, for example, the experiences of Methodist women in eighteenth-century Britain. Methodism originated in England during the 1730s when a group of Oxford students, all of whom were men, began meeting together to study religious texts and to practice a regimented form of religious observance. The movement eventually moved into the wider society when George Whitefield and John Wesley began preaching in the open air about the "new birth" and salvation by faith and when Wesley began to organize his followers into religious societies. Whitefield and Wesley, both ordained clergymen in the Church of England, set out to revitalize the church, not to create a new denomination. Methodism did not become an independent sect in Great Britain until the 1790s.

From the outset of the revival, women gravitated toward Methodism, and they came to outnumber men by two to one in many Methodist societies. The high profile of women in early Methodism has led some historians to describe the revival as a women's movement.¹⁴ Women were not only drawn to the heartfelt religious experience Methodism promoted, but they also found a kind of fulfillment in the opportunities Methodism afforded for public ministry. Women were encouraged to visit the sick and the poor,

they served as leaders within the Methodist societies, and they even preached to large congregations. Such activity occurred at a historical moment when women were admired most for an unassuming modesty and the work they did in the domestic sphere as wives and mothers. Needless to say, those outside the movement criticized Whitefield and Wesley for encouraging this kind of activity among their female followers, and the anti-Methodists drew attention to the ways women supposedly disrupted the social order by neglecting their wifely and maternal duties as a result of their religious involvement. Critics of the revival, then, tended to view the women of early Methodism as willful and even rebellious, not as faithful and devout.

As I have suggested, modern scholars similarly politicize women's religious experience; rather than see public ministry as a sincere expression of faith, they choose to focus on the sociopolitical outcomes of women's religious involvement. The problem, Phyllis Mack explains, is that some modern scholars are "tone-deaf to religious sensibilities."¹⁵ The reality is that most of the women who participated in the Methodist revival during the eighteenth century were motivated more by faith than a desire to turn the social order on its head. Most of these women, in fact, were reluctant to exercise their spiritual gifts in ways that transgressed social norms and boundaries. Most would have preferred to stay on the sidelines; or, as one Methodist woman explained, "I had rather be obscure. But I dare not."¹⁶ Ultimately, spiritual conviction compelled these women to overcome their anxieties relating to public ministry.

Having said this, I do not mean to suggest that we should ignore or discount the sociopolitical outcomes of women's religious involvement. Clearly, there was a political dimension to the activity of Methodist women. I also do not mean to suggest that sexism doesn't exist in religious circles or that religion isn't used for political ends. But to be fair to the women whose lives and experiences have become the focus of historical study, we need to attend to the religious as religious, in addition to examining the social and political dimensions of women's religiosity.

This brings me to my point: as people of faith who do serious scholarship, religious educators are uniquely positioned within the academy to contribute something meaningful to the feminist project and the larger academic community. We aren't (hopefully) "tone-deaf to religious sensibilities," even sensibilities that do not completely accord with our own, whether it be the feelings and experiences of Methodist, Catholic, or Muslim women. And in

giving faith serious scholarly attention, we may even create a space in which our own faith is respected and taken seriously by others.

Learning to Hear Others' Voices

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As I began contemplating possible dissertation topics, I found myself at a loss. During this time, I had a conversation with my mother in which she mentioned, rather randomly, that she had read about fellowships offered by BYU's Women's Research Institute for those working in women's studies. My initial reaction was dismissal. I didn't do women's history. But then I started reflecting on some of my previous work and realized that the culmination of my study of late medieval Jerusalem pilgrimage had been the study of the religious experiences of Margery Kempe—a woman—as depicted in her autobiographical writings. Although I did not apply for the fellowship (I believe they were only for full-time faculty), I did have a dissertation topic, as well as an additional framework through which I would approach my study of the past.

And thus Margery Kempe and, at some level, a dimension of women's studies shifted from being one paper written for one class during one semester, to becoming the intellectual quest that would drive me for the next five years. By the time of my dissertation defense in the fall of 2002, I had been influenced deeply by one of the central contributions of women's history: I had learned to consider the specifics as well as the whole.

For some, the particularity of individuals' stories is what captures their attention and draws them into the study of the past. For me, the initial pull of history was its focus on patterns and explanation. But in trying to explain Margery Kempe and her extraordinary behavior in her pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the early fifteenth century, I came to realize both that her particular story was illustrative of a pattern of Franciscan-inspired Passion piety and also that she was an individual who had made unique choices and had her own distinctive attitudes. These choices and attributes made sense in the cultural context in which she lived, but, I realized, they were not determined by it. Margery Kempe's crying and weeping at the thought of Christ's suffering was informed by the context of Passion piety, and thus was understandable to her contemporaries; nonetheless the intensity of her devotion also stood out in her time and place.

When I studied Margery Kempe, I was examining practices of late medieval Catholic piety that had very little to do with my life as a contemporary Latter-day Saint. At the same time, as a woman of faith with a love for the Savior, I recognized that I can understand and connect with Margery Kempe’s emotional meditations on Christ’s suffering and death in a way that may be inaccessible to those for whom the Savior is merely an academic or historical figure. I know that I don’t see everything the way that she did, but I can understand the importance of her faith and beliefs about reality in shaping her actions.

As a professor, I seek to help my students be able to understand the reality of others’ experiences and to be able to understand them in their own terms. As I attempt this, I recognize that one source of anxiety or tension for a Latter-day Saint scholar or professor, particularly at a Church school, might not be the topic studied but rather how the topic is perceived by others. And thus, for some undergraduates, women’s history or women’s studies may seem dangerous because it is unfamiliar and thus suspicious, sounding radical or threatening. In his famous interviews in the video, *The Faith of an Observer*, Hugh Nibley commented on students who were shocked that he was trying to teach them something that they didn’t know before—imagine that!

In some ways, then, seeking to teach something new and unfamiliar has become a pedagogical question for me, rather than a question of subject matter. We know for ourselves what we’re studying and teaching is important and meaningful, but it is easy to become defensive when we feel as though our choices or judgment are being questioned. The challenge in the classroom becomes how to present the topic to others in a way that opens up the possibility of a new perspective rather than having them feel stymied by the initial lack of information.

While I haven’t taught courses in women’s history *per se*, I’ve encountered resistance to what seems new and threatening as I have taught history classes to students at BYU and BYU–Hawaii. I’ve taught a number of history and religion classes over the years in which the students’ perceptions of “apostate Catholicism” seem to resist any of my efforts to offer a nuanced approach to sympathetically understanding Christianity after the death of the Apostles.

This challenge arises in scripture classes when we are talking about how different passages have been understood and practiced in different Christian traditions. To many students, any divergence from what they know as scriptural truths or the gospel is interpreted as a religious worldview that should be

shunned and ignored as apostate. It is initially more satisfying for them to be right and to know that others are wrong than to try to understand why others believe and teach what they do.

I've learned through sad experience that it's not the *logos* of my argument that persuades them to be more open-minded, but the *ethos* of my presentation. When I look down at my students as benighted and ignorant and, internally, belittle their concerns, I am very unlikely to get them to see things from a more informed perspective. When, however, I do succeed in helping them have confidence in my faith in the restored gospel, along with my respect for others who have sought to be true to the light they have, I have found I can also help the students be more sympathetic to people for whom they might have previously only had disparaging thoughts.

As I express my faith and gratitude for the truths and leaders that we have and point out the struggles brought on by the loss of authority, the students become less defensive and more teachable. I have seen attitudes shift as they learn to see the practice and teaching through others' eyes. When, for example, we can see the second- and third-century Christians immersed in a Hellenistic worldview and struggling to make sense of scriptural passages without having help from authorized apostolic leaders, it becomes more evident that they are not villains. Doctrinal changes and the introduction of new practices no longer have to be something that we feel threatened by, but something that we can sympathetically understand in context.

To those seeking to better understand the lives of others from a sympathetic point of view, the field of women's history and women's studies offers an important opportunity to practice these intellectual skills and dispositions. One experience with this came in a medieval history class that I taught during which we examined late medieval piety through the study of Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Some of the seemingly outlandish beliefs and extreme devotional practices of this era were difficult for the undergraduates to fathom. But at the same time, as we gradually worked through the connections between their understanding of how to get access to the Atonement and the behavior of these women, students were able to have a sympathetic perspective into lives of women who lived in a very different world.

The *ethos* of humility in teaching finds a parallel in the willingness to learn from other people's perspectives as we explore the lives of women and men in the past and the present. As I look at what I know and what I do and

then I look at others in the past, I continue to seek to understand them and hear their voices. Because of the Apostasy, I know more about the fullness of the doctrine of Christ than Margery Kempe had access to in the later Middle Ages, but the sincerity and intensity of her love and devotion humbles me and invites me to learn more and become more. My hope is that as we all seek to pursue the paths of research and teaching we feel called to pursue, we can do so with humility and respect for each others' differences and contributions.

My Sister's Keeper—This Too "Should Be Written"

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Calling twelve disciples. Healing the sick. Instituting the sacrament. Blessing the children. When Christ visited Lehi's descendants in the promised land, his days were filled with teaching, blessing, and organizing. But before the Savior left, before his work among them was complete, he asked to see the Nephite records (see 3 Nephi 23:7). Nephi brought the records to Christ, who examined them and found them unacceptable because the fulfillment of the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite had not been recorded (see 3 Nephi 23:8–11). The Savior asked, "I commanded my servant Samuel, the Lamanite, that he should testify unto this people. . . . Was it not so? . . . How be it that ye have not written this thing, that many saints did arise and appear unto many?" (3 Nephi 23:9, 11). After this undoubtedly painful peer (superior?) review, Nephi remembered and admitted that it was left out (see 3 Nephi 23:10, 12). Samuel's prophecy and the Nephite people's individual accounts of its fulfillment were witnesses of Christ and of the reality of the Resurrection. Their omission would have been a great loss. Christ did not belabor the source of the omission; he did not accuse anyone of carelessness, racism against a Lamanite prophet, or poor editing. He did not condemn the record keepers. Instead, Jesus merely commanded, "It should be written" (3 Nephi 23:12–13).

This is not the only lacuna, or place where sacred records contain a gap. It is, however, evidence of the Savior's concern over omissions in the historical record, where inclusion of an individual voice could strengthen others and lead them to Christ. Another significant and problematic lacuna in ancient and modern records is the omission of women's experiences, omissions that deny readers access to a powerful source of strength and inspiration. The field of women's studies addresses a similar concern contained in Christ's ancient

instruction to Nephi and his fellow historians by making women's experiences accessible to current and future generations.

Women's experiences are part of the human experience and offer instructive examples of faith, courage, discipline, and every other virtue. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we place great emphasis on our historic and sacred records as a source of instruction, inspiration, and identity. We are commanded to read the scriptures daily, to "liken all scriptures," and then await the promised "profit and learning" (1 Nephi 19:23). We are encouraged to keep journals and family histories, for "the angels may quote from it for eternity."¹⁷ Women's experiences are an essential part of these records, just as women represent at least half of the audience to be benefitted by them. It is fitting that the Relief Society recently renewed its emphasis on its history to strengthen and unify women of the Church by giving them a sense of purpose.¹⁸

The accounts of women that are extant in the scriptures illustrate how women's experiences can strengthen modern readers and bring them to Christ. All Christian denominations look to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an example of tremendous faith, humility, and spirituality. We find powerful examples in the strengths and weaknesses of Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Anna, Martha, and Tabitha/Dorcas. Scriptures of the Restoration give us missionary-minded Abish and solace-seeking Emma (see Alma 19; D&C 25). Indeed, the Latter-day Saints include many women of courage, kindness, creativity, ingenuity, and every other virtue. Giving voice to these women cannot help but strengthen current and future Church members.

Women need women's examples—and so do men. Scriptural and historical accounts of individual women can pique the interest of a youth, giving them inspiration where a parent's admonition falls on willfully deaf ears. With the many detractive voices in today's world, every positive, strengthening voice is needed. Media and popular culture provide an overabundance of female celebrities, rock stars, and idols that scream for attention and imitation. If we find these role models unsatisfactory, we must provide our women and men with powerful alternative examples of what womanhood can and should be.

Until recently, the historical record tended to omit women's experiences. Unfortunately, women's lives and experiences are extremely fragmented in ancient scriptural and historical records. Most often women, if mentioned at all, are peripheral characters in the accounts chosen for inclusion in these ancient histories. The named women in the scriptures are the exception,

rather than the rule: we read of many named fathers and husbands and sons, with a few mothers, daughters, and female servants thrown in.

Of those women who are included, details regarding them are sketchy; additional information would have tremendously added to the insights available for modern readers. We may read and appreciate, but wonder: Was Noah's wife ever depressed in that dark, damp, and smelly ark? How did the daughters of Onitah strengthen themselves amid the terrible wickedness? Why, exactly, did Abish keep her conversion secret? How many other times did Sariah complain to Lehi, and did he help her with laundry? Did anyone do laundry? How long had Anna waited, and did she ever lose faith? Who taught Huldah to read, and was that normal? What sort of family home evenings did the mothers of the stripling warriors have, and what did they feed those boys?!

Certainly the very different cultures of antiquity, the difficulty of record-keeping, and the scarcity of the extant records help explain omissions from the record. They couldn't write everything. The self-aware Book of Mormon authors repeatedly tell us that they wrote "but a small part" of their experiences—and then Mormon had to abridge that! I don't know how many words per minute Mormon could inscribe on the gold plates, but certainly it was a different world from today's, with our extreme proliferation of blogs, tweets, and podcasts. I imagine that Nephi might have struggled to inscribe on metal plates during the chaotic days of thick darkness when Samuel's prophecies were fulfilled. Compounding the problem, in ancient times women were often illiterate, so few left their own records. Few of the scriptural accounts focus on the domestic sphere where women's influence was most prominent.

The stories of women in later eras are often similarly fragmented; official histories may refer only to a few extraordinary women, may include only small pieces of women's experiences as deemed relevant by traditional historians, or may omit women's experiences entirely. Fortunately, however, it is still much easier to recover the voices of these more recent generations than those of the ancient past.

Yet many of these women's experiences must be preserved now, or they will be lost forever. This recovery effort often requires a different kind of research than traditional archival research, because many women are either underrepresented or unrepresented in the records and histories. Women's letters and diaries provide a wonderful resource, but external sources also illuminate women's experiences. Relief Society and other organizations'

cookbooks provide insights into the economic, social, and spiritual life of women and families. Material studies examine artifacts of daily life—textile patterns, cookware, or a Christmas ornament—to illustrate the experiences of the artifact owner. Studies in folklore trace the oral histories passed from mother to child when the mother did not keep a written record. Studies in art reveal that for millennia, women have left their stories in paintings, rose gardens, quilts, and lullabies. These diverse methodologies allow women's stories to be told, even in the absence of a written personal history.

The field of women's studies thus documents women's lives, rewarding the searcher with new understanding. These efforts illuminate Isaiah's personification of Zion as a woman, Christ's parable of the woman seeking a lost coin, Mary's experience as Jesus's mother, the suffragist zeal of the early Relief Society, and God's love for all of his children. Women's studies gives us the experiences of LDS pioneer women—not just the wives of the prophets and their close associates, but also the lay members of the Church who sacrificed everything to build Zion. These studies strengthen, and then preserve, the faith and courage of modern women and their families throughout the world.

Placing blame for past omissions is not as important as the recovery of these women's voices. As a scholar, I am more concerned with triage—getting the factual pieces of women's histories put back together—than I am with pointing fingers over whom is to blame for past losses. Christ did not condemn any of the Nephite record keepers for omitting Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies; he pointed out the problem and asked them to fix the records. I find that filling in the historical record is the most useful and productive outlet for my energies. By seeking women's voices for inclusion in our histories, scholars in women's studies remedy some of these past losses, thereby strengthening individuals and families of today and tomorrow.

As an aspiring Saint, I am most concerned with achieving a perfect “unity of faith” (Ephesians 4:13). This unity of faith requires inclusion of all God's children. God teaches that “all are alike unto [him],” and “he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female” (2 Nephi 26:33). God has repeatedly asked that we record our histories and has shown continued interest in the records kept. His divine version of history includes all people. Christ took time to correct the Nephite records when they failed to record the fulfillment of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecy. We should try to be sure that our own histories contain no such omissions.

Through faithful women’s studies we can recover, record, and preserve women’s experiences that would otherwise be lost. When our sisters throughout history become familiar to us, we will obey the exhortation to be “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). This helps us to be “of one heart and one mind, and [dwell] in righteousness” (Moses 7:18). These are records that, as Christ said, “should be written.”

“Unto All”

JANIECE JOHNSON

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My master’s thesis at BYU examined the experience of the earliest Mormon women. As I reviewed the extant research, I struggled to understand why some religious historians seemed to equate LDS patriarchy with the oppression of women. These historians assumed that no woman would ever unite themselves with Joseph Smith’s church and his return to the patriarchal fathers except under duress. This was a completely foreign concept to me. My research did not align with such assumptions; nor did my experiences. So I adeptly argued with these historians in lengthy dramatic footnotes.

I then went to the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University, and my naïveté was shattered. In my feminist theology class, I quickly learned that patriarchy was *the* great evil in the world.

Prior to that time, it never occurred to me that for some, patriarchy could only ever be seen as a negative. I knew that the written history of the world is still essentially the history of men the world terms great—and oftentimes greatness and ruthlessness went hand in hand. Much of this history includes tales of men exploiting, oppressing, and terrorizing others—men who “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men [and women], in [m]any degree[s] of unrighteousness” (D&C 121:37).

I knew that all this existed, yet I did not equate patriarchy with this history.

I grew up in a church that some said was oppressively directed by men, yet I didn’t feel oppressed. On the contrary, I felt cared for, I felt loved, I felt encouraged, and I felt like I could contribute. I felt I could do whatever the Lord and I decided to do together.

The world's version of patriarchy is one plagued by unrighteous dominion. Though my experience was certainly not perfect, in contrast to the world's view of patriarchy, I grew up in an environment where neither my father nor my priesthood leaders tried to "exercise control or dominion or compulsion" on my soul. This nurturing environment was created by "persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned" from the men in my life working in conjunction with the strong women who stood equally at their sides (D&C 121:37, 41).

Unfortunately, most of the women in my feminist theology class could not envision such an environment. Sadly, in too many families and wards, members likewise cannot envision such an environment.

Joseph's vision of the three degrees of glory tells us of a celestial kingdom where all those worthy of celestial glory are "equal in power, and in might, and in dominion" (D&C 76:95). We all have the potential to become joint heirs with Christ. As we stand amidst consistent inequality in mortality, it is difficult to fathom absolute divine equality. Yet equality reigns in the celestial kingdom and should stand as our goal in earthly things. As the Lord taught the Saints the law of consecration, he made it clear that the goal was equality in "heavenly things." Equality in "earthly things" expedites the "obtaining of heavenly things" (D&C 78:5).

Everything we can do to understand and teach that equality in mortality will help us better understand our roles and ourselves now and in eternity—when all of us might ultimately "receive [our] inheritance and be made equal with him" (D&C 88:107).

Those who only see Latter-day Saint history as a history of leading despotic men see an engorged caricature defined by the world's ideals of power. They miss the whole point of the Restoration. They miss God speaking to prophets and God speaking to individuals—truth and power revealed and individuals knowing of that truth for themselves. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that revelation is the "fundamental fact of the Restoration"¹⁹—revelation to prophets and revelation "unto all" (D&C 25:16).

Our history is an aggregate of individuals who felt God speak to them individually. They asked, they received, and it changed their lives. If we tell our history only as the history of the men who led the Church, we miss valuable parts of the greater story of revelation and truth restored.

We miss the powerful testimony of Phebe Crosby Peck as she implored her sister-in-law Anna—who ran off to get married rather than leaving New

York with the Colesville Saints—to give up all and follow her Lord. Though the widow Phebe had been through great hardships as the Colesville Saints moved from New York to Ohio and then on to Missouri, she wrote to Anna, firm in her conviction. She declared to Anna, “Did you know of the things of God and <could you> receive of the blessings I have from the hand of the Lord you would not think it a hardship to come here.” Her letter shares her amazement at the truths she was learning and the mysteries being revealed.²⁰

We miss the fantastic story of the visionary Laura Clark Phelps, to whom the Lord revealed a plan to free her husband Morris, Parley P. Pratt, and King Follett from Columbia Jail in Missouri. Parley had the same dream, and the plan burst forth. The escape was successful, though no one considered what would happen after Laura was left without a horse and a mob began to form outside the jail.²¹

We likewise miss the testimony and dedication of Sally Phelps as she shares her own experience hearing Hyrum powerfully testify of the Restoration in a “beautiful” discourse to a small branch on the periphery of Mormondom. And her bold declaration to her brother and sister-in-law that though she was far from the Maine of her childhood, she could “niver have wish [her]self back.”²²

The valuable parts we miss don’t just include women, but Saints in distant lands, Saints of different ethnicities, Saints who would never meet Joseph or ever make it to Salt Lake City—average members of the Church. All of these testaments of faith improve our own testimonies and ourselves as they help us create a richer tapestry of the Restoration based in revelation “unto all.”

As I grew up reading the scriptures I saw Nephi as a good example as much as Sarah or Ruth. I believed the Lord when he said “this is my voice unto all” as much when he said it to Hyrum as when he said it to Emma (see D&C 11:27, 25:16). Yet as I began to learn more about women’s lives, I hungered for their example.

Seeing Rebecca Swain Williams hope against hope that her father would come to truth and work unflinchingly to share her testimony with him gives me hope and strength to share the gospel. Reading Melissa Morgan Dodge’s eloquent scrawl pouring forth gratitude to God for the “feast of fat things” she had been blessed with, despite the desperate trials of Missouri makes me reconsider my trials and my sometime lack of gratitude. Reading Mary Fielding Smith’s words of trust and faith as she experienced personal and collective chaos in Kirtland gives me hope that I too can continue faithful and find peace amidst chaos.²³ Learning of these examples makes a powerful

impression not only for women, but it likewise teaches men to recognize and value the experiences and contributions of all.

As a missionary, I served in Buenos Aires. Sister Margareth Costa came to teach us in a Zone conference with her husband Elder Claudio Costa. Elder Costa was a member of our Area Presidency, and the Costas lived near my area. It was not uncommon to see them, but for me this day was not common. I clearly remember where I sat as Sister Costa powerfully dissected and expounded Alma 27. I still remember the light that poured into that chapel—Argentine sunshine and spiritual illumination filled the room and my soul. Seeing a woman put the Lord’s admonition to Emma to expound scripture into practice so specifically and so powerfully made a deep impression on my soul that remains with me. Sister Costa became an influential model for how I read the scriptures and how I teach. Women grow stronger through examples with whom they can identify.

In the 2010 general Relief Society meeting, Julie B. Beck taught that “the sisters of the Church should know and learn from the history of Relief Society.”²⁴ She argued that “we study our history to learn who we are. There is a worldwide hunger among good women to know their identity, value, and importance.” Though we may not be able to reach every hungry woman in the world, the more readily we offer examples of strong and faithful women, the more opportunities we give for all of our students to “know their identity, value, and importance.”

We all know Joseph’s, Brigham’s, and Wilford’s narratives. They will always necessarily be a central and inspiring part of the story of the Restoration—we can all learn from them and their examples. But they alone do not make up the story of the Restoration. The blessings of testimony and faith are offered “unto all.” It requires effort to expand the way that we tell our history. But as we extend the scope of the gospel we teach, we offer all of our students more possibilities to be inspired and to see themselves and the pattern of their own lives in the tapestry of the Restoration more clearly. **RE**

Notes

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3. Beck, “Daughters in My Kingdom,” 113–14.

4. Beck, “Daughters in My Kingdom,” 114.

5. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: New Questions and Old Models in the Religious History of American Women," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 3 (1985): 465–71.
6. R. Marie Griffith, "American Religious History and Women's History: Old Divides and Recent Developments," *Reviews in American History* 25, no. 2 (1997): 220.
7. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Two Steps Forward," 471.
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9. Jean Pfaelzer, introduction to *A Rebecca Harding Davis Reader: "Life in the Iron-mills," Selected Fiction and Essays* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1995), 4.
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11. Orson F. Whitney, "Home Literature" (speech, YMMIA Conference, June 3, 1888).
12. Gail Malmgreen, introduction to *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930*, ed. Gail Malmgreen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 6–7.
13. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," *Criticism* 46, no. 1 (2004): 167–68.
14. See, for example, David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 149–50, 137ff.
15. Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.
16. Bathsheba Hall, *The Diary of Bathsheba Hall*, in *Her Own Story: Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 105.
17. Spencer W. Kimball, "'The Angels May Quote from It,'" *New Era*, October 1975, 4.
18. See Julie B. Beck, "'Daughters in My Kingdom': The History and Work of Relief Society," *Ensign*, November 2010, 112–15.
19. Jeffrey R. Holland, "Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence," *Ensign*, March 2000, 11.
20. Janiece Johnson, "*Give It All Up and Follow Your Lord*": *Mormon Female Religiosity, 1831–1843* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2008), 25–27.
21. Johnson, "*Give It All Up*," 73–79.
22. Janiece Johnson, "'The Scriptures Is a Fulfilling': Sally Parker's Weave," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 111–22, 114.
23. Johnson, "*Give It All Up*," 29–33, 63–69, 41–48.
24. Julie B. Beck, "'Daughters in My Kingdom': The History and Work of Relief Society," *Ensign*, November 2010, 114.