



ROYAL
daughters
with
PRIESTHOOD
POWER

{ 7 WAYS LATTER-DAY SAINT
WOMEN RECEIVE *and*
EXERCISE THE PRIESTHOOD }

C. ROBERT LINE

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Part 1

WOMEN AND THE PRIESTHOOD

Chapter 1

Perspectives on Women and the Priesthood

Many years ago, I had an intriguing talk with my mother about certain gospel principles. It was just after my appointment as an institute director in the Midwest. The move took our family from Utah to a locale just three hours' drive from where she was living. As we got together for our visit, we quickly delved into myriad questions that had recently troubled her. I answered the best I could as we engaged in a wide range of subjects. Before long, the conversation turned to the priesthood. After discussing a few related issues, my mom made the most intriguing declaration: "I love the Church but just wish I could understand why women are not allowed to have the priesthood." Her statement wasn't intriguing because it was anything new. I had heard such statements before from others, usually in concerned, perplexed, and, at times, even in incensed tones. No, it was intriguing because of *the way* my mother said it. It was so honest, vulnerable, and sincere. Then she inquired of me, "Why are men the only ones who get to have the priesthood?" Her question, like her previous statement, was genuine, heartfelt, and devoid of criticism. Looking back on that day, I must admit that her question, not to mention her candor, caught me off guard. I was at a loss for words, and I probably gave

her the “we must take it on faith” answer, or perhaps I proffered some other cultural excuse that revealed my ignorance.

This and other similar experiences have led to me to realize that sometimes we err in understanding, not because the doctrine of Christ is not pure and true, but rather our cultural influences inevitably intertwine with that doctrine, making our understanding of it less clear. I feel the same could be said with an incorrect understanding of the divine role of women and the relationship they have with the priesthood. A recent study found that 70 percent of single women cited “women’s issues” as a significant reason they left the Church, and 63 percent of all women cited “women’s issues” as a significant reason they left.¹ I recently attended a class where an invited speaker (and gifted instructor, I should add) taught a class where she shared deep, heart-felt feelings regarding these issues, saying that “many women in the Church are in pain. Many women feel marginalized . . . this is a problem within our church culture!” She then shared a personal and somewhat distressing story to illustrate her point. I have asked her permission to share this experience in this book. She consented but asked to remain anonymous.

I live in what you might call a “powerhouse” ward. We have dozens of BYU professors, returned mission president couples, former stake presidents, bishops, etc. . . . This ward is strong. In Sunday School a few weeks ago, one of my former bishops—a man who I greatly admire—was giving the lesson. He is a man of incredible empathy and kindness, and is one of the most tenderhearted men I have ever met. During the lesson, he spoke of his wife’s conversion as a teenager. Although I do not remember the exact words he used, he made the comment that he felt sorry for those missionaries as they were teaching the “worst” kind of investigator/convert. Because, as a missionary, “You don’t want to be teaching a teenage girl. You want to baptize someone who would be a future stake president, or someone like that.” I sat in stunned silence. I was sitting by two strong and opinionated female BYU professors, who I also think were in shock. Did we really just hear that correctly? Did he really just say there was a hierarchy to the kingdom of God and that the “worst” and least important was a teenage girl? Whether or not that was the message he intended to convey, that is exactly the message I heard. Not a single person in that class—men and women of incredible spiritual strength—spoke up to correct or clarify what he had said. I think that bothered me almost as much as the comment itself. Perhaps we were all still trying to wrap our heads around what we had heard in a kind of “shocked stupor.” I don’t believe this good man intended to hurt my heart with his words, but he did. And I don’t believe that by allowing that kind of comment to stand without correction that we as a class intended to convey our agreement with it. But with our silence, I believe that’s exactly what we did.

She went on to say, “I may not be able to change how the world perceives our Church’s treatment of women, or how cultural practices in our Church can make women feel inferior, but I can clarify and boldly teach the doctrine Christ taught regarding women. In doing so, I can help [others] separate the doctrine from the culture in our day.”² I wholeheartedly agree with her assessment and hope to accomplish the same objective in this book. This woman’s story and that of my mother are just a few examples that illustrate a dilemma we face in the Church today.

That this difficulty really does exist can further be seen in this statement from President Ballard:

There are those who question the place of women in God’s plan and in the Church. I’ve been interviewed enough by national and international media to tell you that most journalists with whom I have dealt have had preconceived notions about this topic. Through the years many have asked questions implying that women are second-class citizens in the Church. Nothing could be further from the truth.³

Elder Richard G. Scott commented on this dilemma, even taking it a step further: “So many of our sisters are disheartened, even discouraged, and disillusioned.” He then said that

Satan has unleashed a seductive campaign to undermine the sanctity of womanhood, to deceive the daughters of God and divert them from their divine destiny. He well knows women are the compassionate, self-sacrificing, loving power that binds together the human family. He would focus their interests solely on their physical attributes and rob them of their exalting roles as wives and mothers. He has convinced many of the lie that they are third-class citizens in the kingdom of God. That falsehood has led some to trade their divinely given femininity for male coarseness.

One thoughtful Latter-day Saint scholar has concluded,

I’ve come to recognize as never before the importance of understanding the priesthood and its associated blessings for women. We’re living in a day when equality, power, fairness, and tolerance are touted—often above other virtues. What’s more, identity, authority, spirituality, and even God are topics of great confusion for many. Many women, not knowing what blessings they have access to, are not taking full advantage of the spiritual feast available to them. Many men are also confused on the topic.⁴

Over the past twenty-seven years as a religious educator, author, bishop, father, and husband, I have had conversations with many faithful women of the Church on this very topic. These include ward members, students, family members, daughters, relatives, and more. They too have expressed similar concerns, with just as much sincerity and faithfulness as did my mother. I have listened to them, pondered sincerely, prayed humbly, and have poured over inspired writings, both scriptural and prophetic, trying as best as I could to make sense of this sometimes difficult and most important topic. To be fair, my own anecdotal experience suggests that while some LDS women (perhaps many) are not particularly concerned about why women do not hold priesthood authority, many others do consider this a crucial issue.

So why am I writing this book? To be clear, honest, and to the point, I have observed that some important, if not vital, gospel principles are rarely taught or brought up when this topic is discussed, whether in talks, books, lessons, articles, or counseling. To be sure, the scriptures and our prophets have taught the vital points of doctrine discussed in this book. Yet I feel their words and counsel have yet to be assembled in a coherent, unified, and simplified way that will help both women and men truly understand some empowering principles that could, as President Boyd K. Packer has said, help change attitudes and behaviors.

Often when the theme of women and the priesthood is brought up or taught, the focus is usually on related or ancillary topics, which, in my opinion, are put forth as a panacea. While some of these topics are no doubt of vital importance, they often avoid the real issue as to why women supposedly do not participate in the priesthood. These topics include but are not limited to

1. Blessings that issue from the priesthood that everyone can receive.
2. The grandeur, importance, and vitality of womanhood and motherhood.
3. The importance of understanding gender role differences in the gospel plan.

4. Sisters have one of the largest and oldest women’s organizations in the Relief Society.

5. The special place that women have in God’s plan and heart.

The list goes on. Now, all of these are real, true, and wonderful concepts, but they are lacking in that they do not fully address the fact that Latter-day Saint women (and here is the point) do indeed participate in the priesthood, are given priesthood authority, and function with priesthood authority. Furthermore, they exercise priesthood authority and have in mortality (and can have in eternity) the power and authority of the holy priesthood. Each of the foregoing declarations will be explored fully and documented thoroughly in this book.



Women in the Church of Jesus Christ do indeed participate in the priesthood, are given priesthood authority, function with priesthood authority, exercise priesthood authority, and have in mortality and will have in eternity the power and authority of the holy priesthood.



This is not a stretching of the doctrine or a wresting of the scriptures. It’s not bending to social pressures that somehow force us to devise an acceptable narrative. Elder Dale G. Renlund recently taught that “women in the Church *frequently exercise priesthood power and authority*, though they are not ordained to priesthood offices.”⁵

Furthermore, these doctrines and principles, as we shall see in the coming chapters, have always existed. Let me give a brief analogy using another

doctrine. Over a lifelong study of the restored gospel, I have seen a wonderful, deliberate, and even miraculous focus on the doctrine of the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ and His saving powers. Gifted scholars, diligent teachers, and inspired leaders have led the charge to the doctrinal high ground and blessings of Jesus Christ's infinite Atonement through books, articles, songs, and even stage productions. Given the times we live in, this emphasis has been timely and needed. However, no serious student of the gospel would ever conclude that this doctrinal direction and renaissance of grace has been fabricated out of thin air. No, the scriptures that undergird the doctrine of salvation through grace have always been there, particularly and especially in the Book of Mormon. Perhaps we should say that we are now, with the aid of inspired prophets and apostles, getting a better and more complete view of what these scriptures have always meant. Thus, the Lord sees fit in His infinite wisdom to reveal, "line upon line" many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

One more doctrinal analogy is worth mentioning. In 1978, another needful and inspired doctrinal emphasis came about when the Church announced the revelation that came to President Spencer W. Kimball that "removed all restrictions with regard to race that once applied to the priesthood" (Official Declaration—2). Not long after this wonderful announcement, Elder Bruce R. McConkie gave a talk entitled, "All Are Alike unto God." These are some of his relevant words as they apply to our discussion at hand:

I would like to say something about the new revelation relative to the priesthood going to those of all nations and races. "He [meaning Christ, who is the Lord God] inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Nephi 26:33). These words have now taken on a new meaning. We have caught a new vision of their true significance. This also applies to a great number of other passages in the revelations. Since the Lord gave this revelation on the priesthood, *our understanding of many passages has expanded. Many of us never imagined or supposed that they had the extensive and broad meaning that they do have. . . .* There are statements in our literature by the early Brethren that we have interpreted to mean that [certain people] would not receive the priesthood in mortality. I have said the same things, and people write me letters and say, "You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?" And all I can say to that is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living,

modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or . . . whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. *We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.* We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter anymore. It doesn't make a particle of difference what anybody ever said about the . . . matter before the first day of June of this year, 1978. *It is a new day and a new arrangement, and the Lord has now given the revelation that sheds light out into the world on this subject.*⁶

Elder McConkie's reference to the scripture in 2 Nephi 26:33 is intriguing. This scripture was always there in the Book of Mormon, but, as Elder McConkie says,

These words have now taken on a new meaning. We have caught a new vision of their true significance. This also applies to a great number of other passages in the revelations. Since the Lord gave this revelation on the priesthood, *our understanding of many passages has expanded.* Many of us never imagined or supposed that they had the *extensive and broad meaning* that they do have.⁷

In recent years, the Church has further clarified and elaborated on Elder McConkie's sentiments and realizations. In the Church's official gospel topic essay entitled, "Race and Priesthood," the following declaration is given:

Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.⁸

I rejoice, as do many members of this Church, in these inspired changes that have come about with respect to priesthood; however, care should be taken not to construe these modifications as changes in doctrine. "Doctrines are eternal and do not change; however, the Lord, through His prophet, may change practices and programs, according to the needs of the people."⁹

I have often wondered if the changes that have occurred have less to do with the Lord's time and more to do with ours. We might ask ourselves,

“Are we ready to accept the Lord’s will? Are we ready to treat all his children—black and white, bond and free, male and female—with the same respect and love that he does? Could it be that some of these inequalities have more to do with man’s history and failings and less to do with God’s eternal love for all? Is He waiting for us to want to change, rather than us waiting for him to make the change?”

The point is this: what will be said in this book in regard to women and the priesthood is nothing new. The scriptures in the previous two analogies, the scriptures that will be cited herein, and the inspired statements from Church leaders in the past have always been there. This is to say that the doctrine has not changed, although our understanding over time perhaps does, individually and collectively as a church. (See D&C 1:30.) Furthermore, God often gives clarifying revelation to elucidate and more fully explain the doctrine that is taught in the scriptures. Such a pattern has occurred since the inception of the restoration. After being baptized, Joseph Smith related that he and Oliver Cowdery “were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced.” Then Joseph said, “Our minds being now enlightened, we *began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:73–74; emphasis added).

In summary, this book is simply my attempt to provide a clear and organized way of presenting these wonderful—albeit sometimes unrecognized—gospel truths. No doubt some who read this book will question the principles therein. That is fine. I only ask that the reader carefully examine the scriptures presented, along with the prophetic statements offered, and ponder them sincerely and with an open mind. Perhaps some will feel that current prophetic voices on the topic of women and the priesthood contradict other voices, friends, or trusted teachers they’ve had in the past. This might be the case, but let us remember this wise counsel from the Church in 2007:

Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole

Church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four standard works of scripture, official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith.¹⁰

Likewise, Elder Uchtdorf said,

Some struggle with unanswered questions about things that have been done or said in the past. We openly acknowledge that in nearly 200 years of Church history—along with an uninterrupted line of inspired, honorable, and divine events—there have been some things said and done that could cause people to question . . . And, to be perfectly frank, *there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes*. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine.¹¹

One final thought: this book will not necessarily alleviate any frustrations, afflictions, or pain that may have been unfortunately felt by some Church members over the years regarding issues related to this topic. As we have said, mistakes have sometimes been made; doctrines and principles at times have been incorrectly taught or applied; and most of all, imperfect, yet well intentioned members have *acted* in ways which are, unfortunately, at times flat out wrong. Recently, a wise and consecrated woman in my ward shared the following story at a Church meeting. I have asked her for permission to share this to illustrate my point.

Over the years, I think society has improved the equality between men and women, although gaps still remain. However, when I was in junior high and high school in the 80s, I definitely felt and fought to prove myself against many inequalities. I was always happy I was a girl. I didn't want to be a boy, but I wanted to do what the boys got to do. I loved to get the highest score on a math test just to prove to doubters that girls could do math as well as boys. I would never purposely lose a game to a boy just to make him feel better, although many of my friends did.

I don't even remember exactly what happened or who said it, but one particular Sunday when I was sixteen, something was said about boys and the priesthood that made me feel, once again, like women were a rung below men in the church. I lived in Hawaii at the time while my dad was the director of the library at BYU—Hawaii. After church, I walked up to campus, which was close to my house, and found a spot on the side of the rugby field to sit. I poured out my anger, frustration, and hurt to the Lord, although in the end, it was all summed up in the question, "Do you love, need, and value girls as much as you do boys?"

To this day, what occurred after my pleading to the Lord remains one of strongest answers to a prayer that I have ever received. I had no sooner said "amen" when my whole body was filled with overwhelming feelings, not only of love, but of power and value as well. When I finally recovered enough to head back home, I thought to myself, "If He prefers anyone, I'd have to say girls now!"

As the years have passed, I have gone back to that answer many times when faced with questions, chauvinistic comments, and feelings of being inferior. I don't know all the answers, but I do know, without a doubt, that women are equal partners with men in spiritual power, ability, intelligence, and strength as we work to move the work of the Lord forward in these latter days.

The inclusion of this story, and that of my mother's, is not to demean or disparage the Church nor its teachings. I only share to illustrate the fact that these are real issues that affect real people, many of whom love the Lord and honor and respect priesthood leaders. It is simply my hope in writing this book to share some things that I have learned over a lifetime of Church service. I wish to teach and help others see what I have seen—mainly, that while we do not have doctrinal, scriptural, or general Church leadership problems with the issue of women and the priesthood, we do, in my opinion, have some cultural problems. I realize that what I share in this work could be very sensitive, so I plead for patience, faith, and understanding as we begin this venture of discovering what our Father in Heaven has said through inspiration about His royal daughters having and exercising priesthood power. This book is a personal endeavor and is not intended to represent the official teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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 3. M. Russell Ballard, "Men and Women in the Work of the Lord," devotional address, Brigham Young University, Aug. 20, 2013; emphasis added. See speeches.byu.edu.
 4. Barbara Morgan Gardner, "I Have So Much to Learn about the Priesthood," *Ensign*, Mar. 2019.
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