



Eliza Roxcy Snow (1804-1887). Daguerreotype taken about 1856. Courtesy Photographic Archives, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

The Significance of “O My Father” in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow

When Eliza articulated her attachment to the eternal household where she had resided and would yet dwell, she defined the polestar by which she would orient herself the rest of her life.

Jill Mulvay Derr

On January 21, 1910, the Relief Society General Presidency and board gathered for the first time in their rooms in the imposing four-story Bishop’s Building directly east of the Salt Lake Temple.¹ Formal dedication of the structure—erected to house the Presiding Bishopric and general officers of the Relief Society, Primary Association, and Young Men’s and Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Associations—would take place six days later on January 27. But the women could not wait.

January 21 is the anniversary of Eliza R. Snow’s birthday. Her friends had celebrated the event during Eliza’s lifetime, and since her death in 1887, it had been customary for a circle of her sisters to “recognize in some way” the occasion. At this “first social gathering in the Relief Society rooms,” the sisters exchanged reminiscences of “Aunt” Eliza, whom some of the women had known intimately.² She was more widely remembered, however, as the celebrated Sister Eliza R. Snow, a woman who “was a legend before half her effective life was done, and lived that legend for the rest of it.”³ Known for her poetry, her ministrations in latter-day temples, and her authoritative counsel as general head of all three Latter-day Saint women’s organizations, she was greeted by one sister in 1881 as “President of all the feminine portion of the human race.”⁴ The unique place granted her by nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints is evident in the *Juvenile Instructor’s* admonition to Primary teachers in 1890 to cultivate in

Mormon children “a reverence for the Prophet Joseph Smith, Sister Eliza R. Snow and the Holy Priesthood.”⁵

The *Woman's Exponent*, in featuring news of the 1910 birthday celebration, praised her work and hymns and noted simply: “The one hymn, ‘O My Father,’ would, if she had written no other, keep her memory green in the hearts of the Saints.”⁶ The sisters assembled in their new rooms commenced the anniversary program by singing “O My Father.” It was a fitting invocation, perhaps even extraordinarily appropriate under the circumstances. The singing of the familiar words not only honored the remarkable woman who penned them, but also served to locate the cluster of sisters within the divine expanse of time and space. “O My Father” is primarily a hymn of orientation. It speaks of place, habitation, sphere, wandering, residing, and dwelling. Eliza R. Snow’s first-person declaration of her relationship to God through primeval past, earthly present, and eternal future becomes the personal affirmation of each one who sings the hymn. Thus, the invocation sung by the sisters confirmed their place not only within the Bishop’s Building, but also within the cosmos.

For the past 150 years, prophets and Saints have prized the simple eloquence with which “O My Father” captures some of the most profound truths of the eternal gospel. Eliza R. Snow’s journey to a personal integration of those truths led to her writing of the hymn and later to her discovery that those truths could be drawn upon to lift up herself and her sisters. Written in 1845, at the virtual midpoint of her eighty-three-year lifetime, “O My Father” marks a critical confluence in Eliza’s life. Her faith and reason, her Nauvoo experience, and Joseph Smith’s most expansive teachings fused with a new and profound spiritual witness of her connectedness to God. The poem represents the deep sense of harmony and wholeness that became Eliza’s wellspring.

Journey to Wholeness and Connection

Titled “My Father in Heaven,” the poem appeared in the November 15, 1845, issue of the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons* under the signature of “Miss Eliza R. Snow.” The four stanzas are followed by the subscript “City of Joseph, Oct. 1845.”⁷ If Nauvoo was the

City of Joseph for Latter-day Saints generally, it was particularly so for Eliza Snow. "To narrate what transpired within the seven years, in which we built and occupied Nauvoo, the beautiful, would fill many volumes," she wrote in the life sketch she copied for historian Hubert Howe Bancroft in the early 1880s. "Some of the most important events of my life transpired within that brief term, in which I was married, and in which my husband, Joseph Smith, the Prophet of God, sealed his testimony with his blood!"⁸

Eliza's close relationship to Joseph Smith as one of his plural wives was the center of her Nauvoo experience, as Nauvoo was the pivot point of her life. After Joseph's death, Eliza became a plural wife of Brigham Young, but her relationship to Joseph—"my beloved husband, the choice of my heart and the crown of my life"⁹—remained at the core of her personal identity. Beginning in 1880, following the deaths of Brigham Young (1877) and Emma Smith (1879), she chose to be known as Eliza R. Snow Smith, the name that appears on her gravestone in Brigham Young's private cemetery.¹⁰

Eliza Snow's prayerful decision to enter into plural marriage at the time it was being first introduced intensified the sense of displacement that characterized much of her life in Nauvoo. A thirty-five-year-old "maiden lady" when she arrived there in 1839, she, like other single women of the era, either remained with her family's household or resided with another family. In 1838, Eliza had moved with her father and mother, Oliver and Rosetta Pettibone Snow, from Ohio, where they had lived for more than three decades, to Adam-ondi-Ahman, Missouri. The Snow household included Eliza's three younger brothers, Lorenzo, Lucius, and Samuel; her older sister, Leonora; and Leonora's two daughters.¹¹ After the Saints evacuated Missouri, Eliza began a series of moves: to Quincy and then Lima, Illinois, where she lived with Leonora, then on to Commerce (Nauvoo) to teach the family school of long-time family friend Sidney Rigdon, then to rejoin her parents and brothers through three moves in and around Nauvoo until June 1842. When her family decided to settle some ninety miles north of Nauvoo, she reported, "I lived with the Prophet's first wife, and taught a school of 65 scholars. Before its close, I went and boarded with brother and sister Holmes for a short time, and previous to

the exodus of the Saints from Ill. I lived in the family of Col. Stephen Markham.”¹² Her upstairs room in the home of Stephen and Hannah Markham is where Eliza Snow composed “O My Father.”

In contrast to the displacement Eliza felt as she moved from one household to another is the position of prominence she was achieving within the Nauvoo community. In March 1842, she was elected secretary of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, and four months later, she accompanied Emma Smith and Amanda Barnes Smith to Quincy to present Illinois Governor Thomas Carlin with an ultimately unavailing Relief Society petition for protection of Joseph Smith.¹³ By then Eliza’s poetry had already made her a figure of considerable renown. Exactly when the Prophet Joseph appointed her “Zion’s Poetess” is not clear, but between 1839 and 1846, she seriously assumed that role, speaking to and on behalf of the Saints through her poetry.

Eliza, who previous to her baptism in April 1835 had published numerous poems in the *Ohio Star*, published two hymns in the *Messenger and Advocate* during 1835 and 1836.¹⁴ Then she fell silent for three years—until April 1839, when stopping at Quincy, Illinois, with other refugee Saints she published eighteen poems in the *Quincy Whig*, mostly on general topics (friendship, home, nature), although a few of her poems address the plight of the Mormon refugees.¹⁵

Publication of a Mormon periodical recommenced in Commerce (Nauvoo), Illinois, in November 1839 with the first issue of the biweekly *Times and Seasons*. The second issue, filled with the history of the Missouri persecutions, carried Eliza Snow’s poem on the Haun’s Mill Massacre, “The Slaughter on Shoal Creek, Caldwell County, Missouri.” The many historical and occasional poems she began composing in Nauvoo made her “a lyrical commentator on the struggles of the Mormons in the Midwest,” as historian John Hallwas observed.¹⁶ Her poetry forms a compelling, if incomplete, chronicle of her people’s experience, whose epic significance she hoped to convey. For example, her “Two Chapters of the Life of Joseph Smith,” written mostly in blank verse, describes the religious world in the nineteenth century and Joseph’s childhood and first vision. An even more ambitious work was “Time and Change,” a 638-line poem summarized by Eliza as “A Historical Sketch,

commencing with the Creation, and extending to the year 1841, the time the Poem was written." The poem attempts to set the work of the Saints within the context of the world's history, ultimately looking forward to the return of Adam, the Ancient of Days, and the millennial reign and the coming of "*the great Messiah and his glorious train.*"¹⁷

Eliza filled the Nauvoo papers—the *Times and Seasons*, the *Wasp*, and the *Nauvoo Neighbor*—with poetry that reflected a growing sense of community identity and intimacy. There were poems on the temple, the Relief Society, the Nauvoo Legion, and even a poem for Orson Pratt's nascent Nauvoo University. In addition to her epics, psalms, and hymns (including "The Word of Wisdom," "Though Deep'ning Trials," "Awake! Ye Saints of God, Awake!" and "Celestial Glory"), she began publishing lines addressed to or in memory of specific individuals. Most were friends, but some were local or national figures. There is even a poem for Queen Victoria, to whom Eliza's missionary brother Lorenzo anticipated presenting a Book of Mormon.

And yet, behind the well-positioned public poetess speaking with increasing regularity and new authority was a woman struggling to find her place in private life. Eliza's plural marriage to Joseph Smith on June 29, 1842, unsettled her, despite the personal spiritual witness she had received that the marriage was according to God's will. "If I had understood *Plural Marriage* when I embraced it as I do to-day, it would have been no trial to me; but I am thankful to God that his grace was sufficient for me," she explained forty years later.¹⁸ It is doubtful that even Eliza's parents knew of her forthcoming marriage when they decided to leave Nauvoo in June 1842, but they were well aware of John C. Bennett's scandalous tales of "spiritual wifery." From their new home in Walnut Grove, Eliza's father, Oliver Snow, wrote his brother Franklin, "Eliza cannot leave our Prophet. Mother did not like to. For my part I am very glad, at present, to be away. Turmoil and confusion, these stalk abroad at noon day."¹⁹

Eliza's Nauvoo journal commences on her wedding day—"a day of much interest to my feelings"—with heavily veiled references to her marriage and sealing, as all participants were under covenantal obligations of secrecy. The June 29 entry is disconnected and

obscure, but she is clear about “the removal of my father’s family,” indicating with precision that “one week and two days have transpired since the family left.”²⁰ She was to be part of Joseph Smith’s family now, although his wife Emma almost certainly had not been informed of Eliza’s inclusion.

It seems the marriage simultaneously brought Eliza a sense of connectedness and isolation, deep assurance and confusion. Her poems for this period both convey her deep admiration, concern, and affection for Joseph Smith and reveal her frustration and disorientation in trying to be part of a secret marriage.

Eliza prized the Prophet’s soaring understanding of divine truth. One of her Nauvoo poems referred to Joseph’s mind as a “rich jewel.”²¹ Another prayerfully praised the man and the prophet

from whose lips have flow’d
The words of life thy Spirit has bestow’d—
A depth of thought no human art could reach,
From time to time roll’d in sublimest speech
From the celestial fountain through his mind.²²

Eliza feasted upon the precious doctrines Joseph introduced in Nauvoo as the Saints focused their efforts on building a temple where the Lord promised to reveal sacred ordinances and “things which have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world, things that pertain to the dispensation of the fulness of times” (D&C 124:40–41).²³ She listened to Joseph’s sermons, conversed with him, and carefully kept the official record of his addresses to the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. The Prophet personally instructed the sisters in their callings and the exercise of spiritual gifts, invited them to “move according to the ancient Priesthood,” and prepared them for the forthcoming introduction of the temple endowment.²⁴

The profusion of expansive doctrines Joseph taught in Nauvoo shed new light upon essential gospel precepts and practices: the character of God and his relationship to humanity, the premortal existence, the power of the priesthood, the plurality of gods, celestial marriage, and temple ordinances for the living and the dead. “From the celestial fountain” through the Prophet Joseph Smith came a comprehensive theology that extended to include

and exalt all the daughters and sons of God. Before leaving Nauvoo, Eliza Snow would discover and memorably proclaim her own place within that theology. Years later she still marveled at the glorious precepts Joseph had taught, quoting him repeatedly and continuing to honor "the greatness of [his] soul, the superhuman wisdom with which he was endowed."²⁵

At the request of Joseph and Emma, Eliza lodged in their Nauvoo Homestead from August 17, 1842, until February 11, 1843, teaching school part of the time. During that six-month period, she composed at least sixteen poems, almost all of which, as Maureen Ursenbach Beecher has shown, reveal her personal attachment to Joseph.²⁶ Eliza openly expressed concern for Joseph's safety as he sequestered himself to avoid arrest by Missouri officials trying to implicate him in an assassination attempt on Lilburn Boggs. In "Invocation" she wrote:

O hide him in thy secret fold
When on his path they tread;
Safe as Elijah, who of old,
Was by the ravens fed.²⁷

Most often her expressions of affection were interwoven with her frustration at the confusion of the times—"a deep intricate puzzle, a tangle of strings." "The raging storm of persecution" she described might have referred to the unrelenting efforts of Missouri authorities. However, in the wake of rumors intensified by John C. Bennett's exposés, Nauvoo was buzzing with accusations against Joseph Smith and secret plural marriages—almost certainly the "human rage" and "strife of tongues" of which Eliza also wrote.²⁸

"In the trying scale of rapid change" that accompanied the introduction of celestial marriage, Eliza struggled "to stand, with nerve and sinew firmly steel'd." In the process, she felt "friends withdraw their love" and came to know the stinging "blast that strikes at moral character."²⁹ In a poem addressed to Joseph and Emma, she demanded:

Tell me, what will it be, and O, where will it end?
Say, if you have permission to tell:
Is there any fixed point unto which prospects tend?
Does a focus belong to pell-mell?

From the midst of confusion can harmony flow?
 Or can peace from distraction come forth?
 From out of corruption, integrity grow?
 Or can vice unto virtue give birth?

Will the righteous come forth with their garments unstained?

With their hearts unpoluted with sin?
*O, yes; Zion, thy honor will still be sustained,
 And the glory of God usher'd in.*³⁰

Eliza affirmed her faith that she would ultimately find the “focus,” the “fixed point,” the sacred and glorious pattern in the seeming whirlwind of new doctrines and practices being introduced by the Prophet Joseph, doctrines and practices which estranged her from worldly traditions and approbation. Her pointed questions convey the emotional turmoil and dislocation she and other Saints felt as they tried to live the new marriage principle without disclosing it publicly. Like other references to plural marriage during this period, her questions in verse were ambiguous. These lines and others Eliza wrote during her six months in the Smith household might be read as the expressions of a dedicated disciple, a family friend, or a loving wife. Eliza R. Snow was all three.

When she left the Smith residence in February 1843, she noted tersely in her journal, “Took board and had my lodging removed to the residence of br. J. Holmes.”³¹ She apparently never elaborated the circumstances of the move, but over the years apocryphal stories circulated about an angry altercation between Emma and Eliza, sparked perhaps by Emma’s realization of the close connection between her husband and her friend.³² Evidence of the affinity between Joseph and Eliza does not abound, but some of her poems certainly imply it. A stanza from “*To Who Needs Consolation*,” written after her marriage and almost certainly addressed to Joseph, reads:

I feel thy woes—my bosom shares,
 Thy spirit’s agony;—
 How can I love a heart that dares
 Suspect *thy* purity?³³

That the closeness of the association between Joseph and Eliza was understood by those he trusted is suggested in a warm tribute Wilford Woodruff addressed to her in 1857:

Many an hour has Joseph spent in gloom and sorrow because of Fals Brethren and wicked men. Even the hearts of the saints were so barred by fals tradition that He Could not unbosom his soul in the House of His Friends. This Caused him pain. Then thou dist Comfort him. Thy frendly thoughts and acts and words inspired by Gods Eter-nal truth was like a flaming shaft. Though launch by a female hand, that hand was nerved by faith and power that it pierced the walls of Darkness fear and death and gave the Prophet Joy.³⁴

As Eliza forged her way through the sea of controversy in Nauvoo regarding plural marriage, she was trying not only to integrate the multiple voices in herself, but also to maintain some unity in her divided family. Her parents in Walnut Grove, some ninety miles away, were increasingly removed from the faith to which she held fast. She noted the distance she felt when she and Lorenzo visited there in May 1843:

The care and anxiety which I have experienc'd for the difficulties to which my parents have been subject since our expulsion from our home in Mo. have been a source of much bitterness of feeling; and that bitterness has been aggravated by the reflection that they did not in their trials draw out from the springs of consolation which the gospel presents that support which was their privilege, and which would have enabled them to rejoice in the midst of tribulation & disappointment.³⁵

Leonora and Lorenzo stood firm in the faith, and Eliza enjoyed long visits with each when she could, but they had families and responsibilities of their own. By the end of 1843, Leonora had entered plural marriage as a wife of Isaac Morley. Numerous missions frequently took Lorenzo from Nauvoo, and by the end of 1845, he, too, had married. Visits to other family members and friends, schoolteaching, meeting going, writing, and handwork occupied Eliza's time, but nevertheless, she sometimes found "a lonely feeling will steal over me before I am aware," and she languished more than once in a "sorrowful mood."³⁶

According to her journal, "being invited to do so," Eliza moved in with Hannah and Stephen Markham on April 14, 1844. Scanty journal entries before that date do not contain her reaction to the April 7, 1844, funeral sermon Joseph preached for Elder King Follett. Further she left no personal record of the momentous eighteen months between April 14, 1844, and October 1845,

when “O My Father” was composed in her attic room at the Markham home. But the “principles of consolation” Joseph taught during the spring of 1844 were not far removed from her private reflections during this critical period for Latter-day Saints. Indeed, Joseph’s teachings seem to have combined with two devastating personal events—the death of her husband and the death of her father—to shape her writing of the hymn.

Eliza Snow’s only recorded response to the martyrdom of Joseph Smith is an eighty-four-line public eulogy dated four days after the tragedy and published both as a broadside and an item in the *Times and Seasons*. In her “Lines on the Assassination of General Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith, First Presidents of the Church of Latter-day Saints, Who Were Massacred by a Mob in Carthage, Hancock County, Ill., on the 27th of June, 1844,” she expressed with passion and anger the grief of the sorrowing Saints. She extolled the two great men as “the noblest of mankind,” lamenting, Zion “mourns an earthly head: / Her Prophet and her Patriarch are dead!” And she importuned:

Thou God of Jacob, in this trying hour
 Help us to trust in thy almighty power;
 Support thy Saints beneath this awful stroke—
 Make bare thine arm to break oppression’s yoke.³⁷

An article in Andrew Jenson’s 1901 *Biographical Encyclopedia*, written by “L.G.R.” (probably Lula Greene Richards), recounts that Eliza was “prostrated with grief” following Joseph’s death and she fervently prayed to die and rejoin him. She prayed, the article states, “until the Prophet came to her” and told her that she yet had a great mission to accomplish in carrying forward the work he had established.³⁸ The uncorroborated anecdote conveys the grief Eliza never disclosed for public record.

The number of poems she published significantly diminished following Joseph’s death, hinting perhaps at the depth of her sorrow. From April 1839, when the Saints left Missouri, until February 1846, when they left Nauvoo, she wrote at least ninety-four poems, nearly one quarter of her life’s poetry. Only seven of those followed her public eulogy to Joseph and Hyrum Smith—three to members of the Smith family, one to John Taylor, one to Brigham

Young, and one to a young immigrant sister.³⁹ "O My Father," or as she titled it, "My Father in Heaven," was her last Nauvoo poem.⁴⁰ Dated "Oct. 1845," it was probably composed just after the death of Eliza's own father.

Oliver Snow died at Walnut Grove, Illinois, on October 17, 1845. How quickly news of his impending death or passing reached his daughters and son is not known. Eliza, Lorenzo, and Leonora may well have made the ninety-mile journey to their parents' home to help comfort their ailing and grieving mother and then returned to Nauvoo. The two sisters and their brother would have then separated—Leonora returning to her daughters and husband, Lorenzo to his wives, and Eliza to her attic room at the Markhams.

Surely the "lonely feeling" that would sometimes "steal over" Eliza in her "beloved City" pained her then. The unfinished upstairs room, Bathsheba Smith recalled, was "so low that she could almost reach the rafters as she lay in bed; without carpet on the floor, perhaps a chair or two, a small trunk, a stand or table, perhaps a candlestick and a tallow candle."⁴¹ She had been bedridden there for five weeks during June and July 1845, and a year before that, she had mourned Joseph's death in the same room.⁴² But in the fall of 1845, it seems to have become the place where, in the midst of renewed mourning, she found solace, wholeness, and connection.

Form, Feeling, and Theology in "O My Father"

Rarely in Eliza Snow's poetry do form, feeling, and theology come together as powerfully as they do in "O My Father." She was wont to be complex, even erudite, clever, occasionally sentimental, but seldom plain and simple. Her choice of form, alternating lines of four and three trochees, allowed her space for reflection and ease in expressing whole thoughts without unnatural choppiness:

O my Father, thou that dwellest
 In the high and glorious place;
When shall I regain thy presence,
 And again behold thy face?

The opening lines carry with them a profound sense of longing that is unusual in Eliza's poetry. Spirited nationalism boosting either "Columbia" or the kingdom of God, anger and indignation,

humility and resignation, respect, concern and hope—these are the primary sentiments Zion’s Poetess usually expressed. But in “O My Father,” Eliza longs, leading with her heart, looking heavenward to lost loved ones, and posing the question that her grief wants answered. The queries continue, but the tone becomes more reflective:

In thy holy habitation
 Did my spirit once reside?
 In my *first* primeval childhood
 Was I nurtur’d near thy side?

These hopeful questions are answered in the next two stanzas as the poet affirms her own faith and intuition:

For a wise and glorious purpose
 Thou hast plac’d me here on earth,
 And withheld the recollection
 Of my former friends and birth:
 Yet oft times a secret something
 Whispered you’re a stranger here;
 And I felt that I had wandered
 From a more exalted sphere.

The poet’s questions and affirmations blend to form an eloquent statement of Joseph Smith’s recent teaching regarding premortal existence.⁴³ Yet, it is the poet, the “I,” who hears the whispering and intuitively feels her glorious past. Her poem moves forward, weaving together the other means of knowing available to her: personal revelation through the Holy Spirit, the “key of the knowledge of God” administered through the priesthood (D&C 84:19), and finally, reason:

I had learn’d to call thee father
 Through thy spirit from on high;
 But until the key of knowledge
 Was restor’d, I knew not why.
 In the heav’ns are parents single?
 No, the thought makes reason stare;
 Truth is reason—truth eternal
 Tells me I’ve a mother there.

All the poet’s means of knowing come together in “truth eternal,” the comprehensive vision in which reason accords with revelation and both witness the “mother there.”

The poem's closing stanza looks forward to life after death, the return to the "exalted sphere." Its wording and questions echo the preceding lines. In the first stanza, the poet asked when she would regain God's presence, a question answered here in phrases also introduced by the word "when." "The wise and glorious purpose" is recapitulated here as "all you sent me forth to do." The terms "father" and "mother" of the third stanza are repeated, and the sense of their partnership and union resounds in the poet's use five times of the plurals "you" and "your":

When I leave this frail existence—
 When I lay this mortal by,
Father, mother, may I meet you
 In your royal court on high?
Then, at length, when I've completed
 All you sent me forth to do,
With your mutual approbation
 Let me come and dwell with you.⁴⁴

While the movement of the poem is clearly from premortal to mortal to postmortal existence through time linear, there is roundness to it, reflecting God's "eternal round" and providing a deep sense of continuity and connection. Unity is accentuated by the harmonious coming together of opposites: heaven and earth, parent and child, male and female. Such a profound expression of wholeness suggests that a fragmented and grieving Eliza had found peace.

For Saints who had been feasting upon the doctrines taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, Eliza's poem did not call up literary complexities, but rather evoked the plan of salvation in its entirety: the existence of intelligences, the council in heaven, the foreordained mission of Jesus Christ and of each individual, the possibility of godhood, and an everlasting union of man and woman with eternal increase. It elicited a sense of intimacy with God. It pointed to truths emphasized in the temple endowment, which the Saints would begin to receive in the nearly completed Nauvoo Temple less than a month after the poem appeared. (Eliza Snow, who received her own endowment December 16, 1845, would be among those who officiated there for her sisters.)⁴⁵ Beyond the poem's personal meaning to Eliza, "My Father in Heaven" was a fitting celebration of the truths Saints would carry forth from the City of Joseph.⁴⁶

Two months after its initial publication in the November 15, 1845, issue of the *Times and Seasons*, the poem was published in Liverpool in the Saints' *Millennial Star*. In March 1849, editor Orson Hyde featured it in the Kaneshville (Iowa) *Frontier Guardian* for the benefit of Saints trekking westward, though Eliza herself was by then well settled in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Exactly when the Saints began singing the poem is unclear, but in 1851 it was included without a title in the *Hymns* published in Liverpool.⁴⁷ Indeed, in 1855, the *Deseret News* noted that "O my Father, thou that dwellest" was Brigham Young's favorite hymn. Affection for the hymn has been enduring.⁴⁸

While "O My Father" makes reference to a number of doctrines important to Latter-day Saints, it often has been best remembered for its mention of Mother in Heaven. Eliza's declaration of the reality of Mother in Heaven is unforgettable because it is simple and personal, because it comes from a woman, and because there is a paucity of references to the concept elsewhere.⁴⁹ In the writings and recorded discourses of Joseph Smith, there is no mention of Mother of Heaven. Indeed the doctrine has become more closely associated with Eliza R. Snow's hymn than with any subsequent official statement. To what extent did she help define the doctrine? Both men and women have repeatedly asked that question, and it must be explored. But a fresh question more relevant to Eliza's personal journey must also be addressed: To what extent did the doctrine help Eliza define herself?

How did Zion's Poetess learn of the existence of Mother in Heaven? Speaking at the October 1893 general conference, President Wilford Woodruff declared:

With regard to our position before we came here, I will say that we dwelt with the Father and with the Son, as expressed in the hymn, 'O my Father,' that has been sung here. That hymn is a revelation, though it was given unto us by a woman—Sister Snow. There are a great many sisters who have the spirit of revelation. There is no reason why they should not be inspired as well as men.⁵⁰

Joseph F. Smith, however, emphasized the importance of acknowledging Joseph Smith as the source of the doctrine. A counselor in the First Presidency at the time when he spoke at a stake conference in Franklin, Idaho, he said:

Our Heavenly Father has never yet to my knowledge revealed to this Church any great principle through a woman. Now, sisters, do not cast me off nor deny the faith, because I tell you that God has never revealed any great and essential truth for the guidance of the Latter-day Saints through any woman. "Oh! but," says one, "what about Eliza Snow's beautiful hymn, 'O my Father, Thou that dwellest,' etc? Did not the Lord reveal through her that great and glorious principle that we have a mother as well as a father in heaven?" No. God revealed that principle to Joseph Smith; Joseph Smith revealed it to Eliza Snow Smith, his wife; and Eliza Snow was inspired, being a poet, to put it into verse.⁵¹

Susa Young Gates, who grew up in her father Brigham Young's household with "Aunt" Eliza, observed in 1911 that "no one thought to ask Sister Snow in life to recount the incidents connected with the [hymn's] composition" and then provided "a possible glimpse of the thought-kernel which grew into such fragrant bloom in the full-voiced poem of Sister Snow."⁵² Susa indicated that she and others had heard Zina D. H. Young recount the Prophet's comforting words to Zina after her mother, Zina Baker Huntington, died July 8, 1839:

"Will I know my mother as my mother when I get over on the Other Side?"

"Certainly you will," was the instant reply of the Prophet. "More than that, you will meet and become acquainted with your eternal Mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven."

"And have I then a Mother in Heaven?" exclaimed the astonished girl.

"You assuredly have. How could a Father claim His title unless there were also a Mother to share that parenthood?"⁵³

About the same time, Gates assumed, Eliza "learned the same glorious truth from the same inspired lips, and at once she was moved to express her own great joy and gratitude in the moving words of the hymn, 'O My Father.'"⁵⁴ Susa could not have grown up near Aunt Eliza without knowing of her love for Joseph and his expansive understanding.

In 1916, David McKay, patriarch and father of a later prophet, shared with a Relief Society sister in Scotland memories of a long conversation with Eliza R. Snow he had when he was asked to take her by buggy from Huntsville to Eden, Utah. He had decided he

“wanted information on some things that was not clear to my mind.” “Did the Lord reveal that doctrine of motherhood in heaven to you?” he asked Eliza. He remembered her saying, “No indeed.” Rather, the Prophet had taught the Relief Society sisters “many things that transpired in our Spirit home. . . . I got my inspiration from the Prophets teachings [and] all that I was required to do was to use my Poetical gift and give that Eternal principal in Poetry.”⁵⁵

A 1988 study by Charles R. Harrell clearly shows that published mention of the concept of Mother in Heaven occurred in Nauvoo as early as December 1844, when the Seventies Hall was dedicated and a W. W. Phelps hymn was sung. It contained the following couplet:

Come to me; here's the myst'ry that man hath not seen:
Here's our Father in heaven, and Mother, the Queen:⁵⁶

Further, Harrell observes:

With the basic preexistent family organization being delineated near the end of 1844, the idea of humankind originating as spirit children of heavenly parents became a subject of great interest throughout 1845. Eliza R. Snow's 'O My Father,' written in October 1845, is significant only in that it so eloquently captures the essence of this already developed thought.⁵⁷

Wilford Woodruff's declaration that Eliza Snow's hymn “is a revelation” is not inconsistent with the idea that she discussed with Joseph Smith and others the concept of heavenly parents. President Woodruff's statement, like the poem itself, suggests that Eliza received her own personal confirmation of the doctrine by revelation. The poem is powerfully personal, written in the first person to reflect the poet's own spiritual search and witness. By itself, an intellectual grasp of the doctrines could not have transformed Eliza's sense of displacement, loneliness, and grief into the testimony of divine design, association, and joy that pervades “O My Father.” The hymn represents Eliza's epiphany; like the magnificats of Hannah and Mary, it fuses knowledge of God and intense personal rejoicing.

In a sense, the writing of “O My Father” initiated Eliza R. Snow's leadership of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint women. As she and other Saints prepared to evacuate Nauvoo in the fall of

1845, she was forced to come to terms with her own identity as never before. Her relationships with the men in her life, of primary importance to most nineteenth-century women, had unalterably changed. The daughter of Oliver Snow had become the secret plural wife of Joseph Smith, but with husband and father dead, who was she? She had been attached to several different Nauvoo households and was about to be displaced again during the Saints' removal from the city. Whatever importance she assigned to being Zion's Poetess, that role could not fully identify her. How was she to locate herself amidst displacement and change? When Eliza soulfully articulated her personal connectedness to Father and Mother in Heaven, her attachment to the eternal household where she had resided and would yet dwell, she defined the polestar by which she would orient herself for the rest of her life.

The poem's original title, "My Father in Heaven," suggests the poet's conceptual move from "my father's family" to "my Father in Heaven's family." But dwelling in the "royal court on high" are both Father and Mother, a fact Eliza emphasizes in the final stanza by repeating the plurals "you" and "your," a contrast to the singular "thou" and "thy" in the first stanza.

Recognizing "a mother there" allowed Eliza to understand Joseph Smith's famous King Follett Discourse as an affirmation that women as well as men could achieve exaltation, godhood. "God Himself, the Father of us all, once dwelled on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did in the flesh," the Prophet Joseph explained on April 7, 1844, admonishing Saints "to learn how to be Gods yourselves . . . by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as doth those who sit enthroned in everlasting power."⁵⁸ The concept made it possible for Eliza to identify with a holy woman thus exalted, a female far beyond herself, her own mother, or the classical heroines whose names had served as Eliza's pseudonyms when she was a young poet. Certainly it allowed her to project her own marriage to Joseph into eternity, where husband and wife, as revelation to Joseph promised, might ultimately "be gods" whose "glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19, 20).

Affirmation of Woman's Eternal Worth and Destiny

It would be nearly a decade before Eliza R. Snow would publicly revisit the importance to her of “a mother there.” The connectedness to deity Eliza expressed so eloquently in “O My Father” and the glorious doctrines by which she had begun to define herself in Nauvoo would enable her to inspire her sisters in Utah with a sense of woman's eternal worth, equality in the sight of God, and divine destiny. But her remarkable leadership from 1867 to 1887 followed years of navigating her way through a sea of contrary definitions regarding her position as a woman. During the 1850s, as she pondered her place within the community of Saints, Eliza's witness of a Mother in Heaven, of potential exaltation, and of the importance of personal revelation oriented and steadied her and, beyond that, enlightened and energized her for the leading role she assumed in 1867.

During the 1850s, heightened interest in the question of woman's position or calling or role sparked discussion in both the Church and the broader American culture. Eliza's thoughtful searching of the question is evident in her poems, the only personal documents available for this complicated period of her life. Her 1850s poems dealing at length with woman's status reveal that she, like most Latter-day Saint women and men, brought to the Salt Lake Valley traditional ideas about men's and women's roles within marriage, applying them even to plural marriage.

As Brigham Young and other Church leaders coped with the complaints and uncertainties surrounding plural marriage, they emphasized the importance of keeping traditional marital roles and duties intact. The father was to be “the master of his own household,” President Young declared. Wives and children were to “say amen to what he says, and be subject to his dictates, instead of their dictating the man, instead of their trying to govern him,” though he advised husbands and fathers not to rule with “an iron hand.”⁵⁹ Praise for woman's submissiveness resounded from many of the nation's pulpits. Indeed, for most white Americans of the period, it was axiomatic that the married woman was “to direct her household affairs, raise up children, be subject unto her husband, and use all due benevolence toward him.”⁶⁰

Rising to oppose this traditional view were the woman's rights activists, who had first gathered in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York. Their mounting campaign for educational opportunities, political and economic power, and legal recognition for women inflamed national debate regarding woman's rights and woman's sphere. Many early suffragists objected to interpretations of scripture that taught women "that God created them inferior, and designed them to occupy an inferior and subordinate position, and to rebel against man's rule was to rebel against God."⁶¹

At the close of 1851, presumably in response to newspaper accounts, Eliza criticized the woman's rights convention held earlier that year. Echoing the teachings of Brigham Young and other Church leaders, she affirmed scriptural tradition, attesting that Eve had indeed "led in the transgression, and was plac'd / By Eloheim's unchangeable decree, / In a subservient and dependent sphere." Then she invited the "female conventionists" to come to Utah, where they might find "noble men, / Whom woman may be proud t'acknowledge for her own superior."⁶² Eliza would always be uncomfortable with the movement for woman's rights, which, she believed, encouraged women to work in opposition to rather than in harmony with men.⁶³ On the other hand, after 1852 she began to reshape her own rhetoric to elevate women by emphasizing their eternal worth and destiny rather than speak of the superiority of men.

Her willingness to abandon whatever notions she may have had of woman's inferiority and her increasing commitment to speak for woman's eternal equality may have been spurred by the denigrating treatment Mormon women received in the popular press following the Church's public acknowledgment of plural marriage in August 1852. Branded "female dupes of the priesthood," the presumedly "degraded" and "downtrodden" women were not considered acceptably "subject to" their husbands, but instead were believed to be subjugated. For the rest of the century, the world would view Latter-day Saint men and women through the lens of caricature: tyrants and slaves, oppressors and oppressed, deceivers and deceived. The portrayal was unfair and insulting, but it had an impact. The Saints would battle unsuccessfully against the series of antipolygamy laws it spawned. And the

women, especially, would fight against the stigma of victimization it imposed.

Eliza refused to be seen as victim or to deem herself down-trodden. Her earliest efforts to defend the standing of Latter-day Saint women appear in several addresses she composed for the Polysophical Society, a sort of lyceum or study group sponsored by her brother Lorenzo in Salt Lake City between 1854 and 1856.⁶⁴

Women might have broached the subject of their status privately in their family and friendship networks and at the sewing meetings of ward Relief Societies, which functioned briefly from 1854 to 1857.⁶⁵ How often it was discussed publicly among women or in mixed groups of men and women like the Polysophical Society has yet to be determined. However, diaries and Tabernacle sermons make it clear that woman's status was an issue among Latter-day Saints during the 1850s. "Women are made to be led, counselled, and directed," opined Heber C. Kimball.⁶⁶ Understandably, some women found such rhetoric harsh and hurtful. Although over time Brigham Young's rhetoric and actions became more inclusive, Martha Spence Heywood solemnly recorded in her diary what she understood him to say in 1856: "God never in any age of the world endowed woman with knowledge above the man and when a woman has in any instance a message from God to man 'tis because of the Priesthood."⁶⁷

Church leaders, in their efforts to order and regulate the rapidly expanding community in Utah, repeatedly emphasized the necessity of obedience to the hierarchical order of priesthood government. Even so, the possibility that through the newly reestablished Relief Societies women might claim for themselves organizational authority outside priesthood channels apparently concerned Church leaders. In 1855, in the midst of the complex discussion of men's and women's roles, they revised Eliza's original record of Joseph Smith's sermons to the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Before the minutes were approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve for inclusion in the official history of the Church, all passages referring to authority and keys in connection with women were reworded to clarify the obligation of the sisters to work under the presiding authority of priesthood leaders. The changes repudiated the authority Emma Smith had claimed in using her calling as Relief Society president to promote

opposition to plural marriage.⁶⁸ Eliza seems to have struggled privately with the revision of her record, an event that may have underscored her sentiment that woman might feel "at times, neglected now, / Misjudg'd and unappreciated too," a rare admission all but hidden in her Polysophical poem entitled "Woman."⁶⁹

In "Woman," Eliza acknowledged the "noble aim" of the advocates of woman's rights, though she rejected their efforts as ultimately ineffectual since they lacked the saving and transforming power of the priesthood.⁷⁰ She was certain that only through the keys and ordinances of the holy priesthood could earth be renewed and each individual woman and man receive a fulness of life—eternal life. Thus she remained committed to working according to priesthood power, patterns, and order. "In order to arise in the scale of being, that we may mingle in the associations of high and holy ones who dwell in the mansions of light, we are to become as little children, and in all things be instructed by the Holy Priesthood," she affirmed in "Good Society," a prose address to the Polysophical Society.⁷¹

The poetry and prose Eliza wrote and read before the men and women of the Polysophical Society reflect her careful search for ways to wholly honor the authority and power of the holy priesthood without attributing to men superiority and diminishing herself. For example, nearly all of the Polysophical addresses echo and amplify the concepts and feelings she presented in "O My Father," particularly the sense of divine worth derived from a knowledge of her place in time and eternity. They emphasize more explicitly the importance of obedience and the possibility of becoming "as the gods," and like Eliza's earlier epiphanic poem, they affirm personal revelation and carry a profound sense of connectedness to a heavenly home and heavenly parents.

Indeed, as she wrote these poems, she was probably preparing "O My Father" for publication in her first volume of poetry. *Poems: Religious, Historical, and Political*, published through the Latter-day Saints' printing office in Liverpool in 1856, featured her Nauvoo poem on page one. The poem bore neither its original title, "My Father in Heaven," nor its popular hymn title, "O My Father." Rather, its new title reflected Eliza's growing eagerness to bear personal witness of the place of woman within the eternal scheme: "Invocation, or the Eternal Father and Mother."

Eliza's post-Nauvoo works contain few direct references to Mother in Heaven. She more often spoke in general terms of "the holy ones" or specified "Mother Eve," a term that captured the essence of what Eliza understood—that the Divine Mother had once experienced mortality, like mortal Eve, and, in the language of Joseph Smith, had gone "from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation."⁷² For Latter-day Saints, the name *Eve* signifies not only the first woman to live on this earth, but also the prototype of every woman throughout time and eternity who progresses in righteousness through mortal life to completeness, perfection, motherhood, and eternal godhood.

The critical personal importance of these concepts to Eliza is evident in one of her most carefully crafted poems, "The Ultimatum of Human Life," which was delivered as an address to the Poly-sophical Society in March 1855. The poem recounts how the pondering poet, seeking divine instruction, received a vision, a seraph who identified himself as "the Priesthood—he who holds the key / T'unlock the portals of Eternity." The poet asks the angel a twofold question: What is the cause of suffering among mortals, and what is the result of human life—its final point or end, its ultimatum? The angel counsels the poet against prying into "the secrets of the worlds on high," the "decrees, organizations, laws—/ Form'd by the Gods," but declares that "the more immediate cause of all the woe / And degradation . . . Is *disobedience*."⁷³

"This life's an ordeal," a test, the seraph advises:

Earth is your Father's workshop: What is done—
All that's attain'd, and what achievements won,
Is for the Parents: All things are their own—
The children now hold nothing but by loan.⁷⁴

It is not earthly station, the seraph confirms time and again, but a willingness to obey the will of the Father that assures Saints "a fullness in his legacy" and will ultimately renovate the earth. If disobedience brought disorder and degeneracy into the world, obedience will bring order and regeneration. Through the seraph, the poet emphasizes the common destinies of women and men. "'Tis important that each one prepare / To be with Christ, a joint, an equal heir," the angel advises and then emphasizes that every faithful

Thus said the Seraph: Sacred in my heart,
I cherish all his precious words impart;
And humbly pray, I ever may, as now,
With holy diff'rence, in his presence, bow.

The field of thought he open'd to my view,
My wonder rous'd, and admiration too:
I marvel'd at the silly childishness
Of saints, the heirs of everlasting bliss —
The candidates for Godheads and for worlds,
As time on time, Eternity unfurls.

I felt my littleness, and thought, henceforth
I'll be myself, the humblest saint on earth;
And all that God shall to my care assign,
I'll recognize and use as His — not mine.
Wherever He assigns to me a place,
That, will I strive, with diligence, to grace,
And, for my Parents, whereso'er my lot,
To work with all my might, and murmur not:
I'll seek their highest interest, till they come,
And, as a faithful daughter, take me home.

Stanza from "The Ultimatum of Human Life" by Eliza R. Snow. Holograph dated March [1855], in Eliza R. Snow Journal and Notebook, 1842–1882, LDS Church Archives.

Saint “is an acknowledg’d heir, / . . . When God a patrimony shall bestow / Upon his sons and daughters here below.”

Adam and Eve are prototypes of such faithfulness because of their obedience in mortality and their eventual exaltation and eternal life (D&C 138:38-39). The ultimate goal of life for all men and women—and it can be accomplished only jointly—is to be exalted and to reign over both their earthly posterity and their eternal increase, as will our first earthly parents:

To stand as Adam and as Eve, the head
Of an inheritance, a new-form’d earth,
And to their spirit-race, give mortal birth—
Give them experience in a world like this;
Then lead them forth to everlasting bliss.

Significantly, the poet writes ten lines to describe Father Adam and all men like him and ten lines to describe Mother Eve and all her righteous daughters. The parallel descriptions extol each person who magnifies callings and through obedience progresses to exaltation and godhood:

Adam, your God, like you on earth, has been
Subject to sorrow in a world of sin:
Through long gradation he arose to be
Cloth’d with the Godhead’s might and majesty.
And what to him in his probative sphere,
Whether a Bishop, Deacon, Priest, or Seer?
Whate’er his offices and callings were,
He magnified them with assiduous care:
By his obedience he obtain’d the place
Of God and Father of this human race.

Obedience will the same bright garland weave,
As it has done for your great Mother, Eve,
For all her daughters on the earth, who will
All my requirements sacredly fulfill.
And what to Eve, though in her mortal life,
She’d been the first, the tenth, or fiftieth wife?
What did *she* care, when in her lowest state,
Whether by fools, consider’d small, or great?
'Twas all the same with her—she prov’d her worth—
She’s now the Goddess and the Queen of Earth.⁷⁵

The exalted Mother Eve, according to Eliza’s understanding, is a celestialized being who through her faithfulness has obtained “the *power of reigning, and the right to reign.*”⁷⁶ With the divine

Father Adam, she reigns over their posterity in the patriarchal order of the priesthood, that priesthood whose blessings are "given only to husbands and wives together."⁷⁷

In "The Ultimatum of Life," Eliza Snow bore witness of males and females becoming gods. But more explicitly than she had in 1845 with "O My Father," she affirmed herself a god in embryo. That was enough. She could, by comparison with what lay ahead, feel her own "littleness" and agree to be "the humblest saint on earth," trying, "with diligence, to grace" her appointed place, seeking the interest of her Parents "till they send or come, / And as a faithful daughter take me home."⁷⁸

At least one other poem, undated but probably written in the 1850s, confirms the comfort Eliza gleaned from her knowledge of the existence of Heavenly Mother. This personal poem, addressed to an unnamed sister, touches, as do many of Snow's 1850s poems for individual women, on questions of status and position. "To me, it matters little now, / To where I rise—to what I bow," the poet tells her friend. Glimpsing "at data far behind / What now is tangible to mind," she confirms "our existence, ere / The Gods had formed this nether sphere." And then comes her soul-enlivening witness:

Adam, our father—Eve, our mother,
And Jesus Christ, our elder brother,
Are to my understanding shown:
My heart responds, *they are my own*.
Perfection lifts them far from me,
But what they *are*, we yet *may be*.⁷⁹

Earlier in the poem, Eliza speaks of the divine source of her understanding and its inexpressible comfort:

We find a radius in the soul,
Illumined by th'eternal pole,
And thro' the heart's deep sympathy,
We taste of immortality.

Revelation to her, Eliza confirms here and again and again elsewhere, is dependent on her own obedience, her "*constant yes*" to God's requirements. She writes:

And when I'm all in all resigned—
In very *heart* as well as *mind*,
I'm filled with light—I've eyes to see
His kind parental love for me.⁸⁰

She wrote of personal revelation through the Holy Spirit as a sixth sense, “a pow’rful telescope, whereby / We look beyond the stretch of mortal eye,” gaining a view “of origin and destination too.”⁸¹ It was not sublime doctrine alone that energized Eliza Snow, but her own knowing, by reason and revelation, that gave her such anchoring surety, such cause for rejoicing. She attempted to describe the feeling in another Polysophical Institute address:

Like rich clusters of grapes on a desolate plain,
 Or cool streams on the desert, is what we obtain
 From the presence of God when his spirit unbinds,
 And with holy inspirings, gives scope to our minds.
 And our minds must expand, and our hearts be enlarg’d,
 Or with “line upon line,” they will be overcharg’d:
 Small vessels, when fill’d, can but little contain—
 All that each can receive, we are sure to obtain.
 But the eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard,
 Nor hath enter’d the heart, what the Lord has prepar’d
 In the heavens, for the saints, who their faithfulness prove,
 And in keeping his statutes, exhibit their love.
 Yet sweet foretastes flow down, like refreshings of dew
 On our pilgrimage here, to encourage us through.⁸²

For Eliza, obedience and personal revelation were inseparable. She understood that if her eye were “single” to the glory of God her whole body would be “full of light” (D&C 88:67). Her connection to deity was affirmed in both the obedience she gave to God’s holy principles and priesthood and in the divine gifts of the Spirit she received.

The sense of connectedness and wholeness Eliza achieved before leaving Nauvoo was enlarged in Utah in the 1850s as she resolved for herself questions about woman’s position. Rather than polarizing obedience and personal revelation, submissiveness and power, she searched for the connections between them. Jesus Christ was her model, he who through “strict obedience . . . won the prize with glory rife.”⁸³ She believed that his life evidenced the course taken by the Eternal Father and Mother, the course Eliza was seeking to follow with faith that she might become “with Christ, a joint, and equal heir.” Aligning herself with neither side of the contemporary debate on woman’s role, she spoke of woman’s obedience and submissiveness in conjunction with woman’s access

The holy Spirit which a saint receives
Is one sense added to what nature gives,
And 'tis a powerful telescope whereby
We look beyond the stretch of mortal eye.
Its keen perceptive vision takes a view
Of origin and destination too.

Instructed by this spirit-sense, we learn
What our corporeal senses can't discern.
It shows we are not natives of this earth—
We pre-existed—had an earlier birth—
A clime and habitation highly pure
Beyond what these gross senses can endure.

Stanza from "Nationality" by Eliza R. Snow. Holograph dated February 27, 1855, in Eliza R. Snow Journal and Notebook, 1842–1882, LDS Church Archives.

to personal revelation and her potential for worthily entering the presence of the heavenly parents and becoming like the Eternal Mother.

Indeed, the submissiveness and power Eliza harmonized conceptually were fused in the life she lived. Her intense obedience and loyalty to the Church and its leaders gained her a position of trust and authority in teaching, directing, and ministering to the women of the Church that is without parallel in Mormon history. During the 1850s, her powerful addresses to the Polysophical Society reached only a small circle of women and men, an audience expanded by publication of some of the addresses in the *Deseret News* and *Millennial Star*. But the greatest impact of her ideas and example would be felt from 1867 to 1887, when through the reorganization of the Relief Society and her appointment as general president she was able to speak personally in hundreds of congregations to thousands of Latter-day Saint women.

In multiplying circles of sisters, many of them gathering in Relief Societies for the first time, she was able to encourage, bear witness, and inspire. As she traveled throughout the territory, conscientious secretaries tried to capture in their local minutes the power of her words to the women. "While sit[t]ing here I have been looking upon the faces of my Sisters and can See the form of Deity there and I have been Reflecting of the Great work we have to perform, Even in helping in the Salvation of the Living and the Dead," she told sisters of the Lehi, Utah, Relief Society in October 1869. "We want to be ladys in very deed not acording to the term of the word as the world Judges but fit Companions of the Gods and Holy ones."⁸⁴ A month earlier, she had been in Provo asking:

Who are these my sisters they are the daughters of the most high God, and we are here in this dispensation to cooperate with God and our brethren in saving the human family. We read that one hundred & forty-four thousand Saviours are to stand upon Mount Zion, has women anything to do in this great work of salvation, or are the sisters merely machines to be saved by the brethren, In these last days woman has her part to perform, which is a significant part, we are apt to think little of the responsibilities that rest upon us. Woman is designed to be a help meet for man, and the work of the last days cannot be accomplished without our assistance.

She counseled, "In your lives seek to refine and elevate, that you may be prepared to come into the presence of holy beings, and associate with Gods, we do not know our own abilities until they are brought into exercise."⁸⁵

Brigham Young's 1867 reorganization of the Relief Society inaugurated a new era for Latter-day Saint women as they began to exercise their abilities through callings as officers in newly organized ward Relief Societies, Young Women's Mutual Improvement Associations (1869), and Primary Associations (1878). The increasing responsibilities were new to many women who had never assumed duties beyond their own households. To eager sisters, to reluctant sisters, to sisters overwhelmed, Eliza Snow provided instruction regarding rapidly increasing stewardships, including care of the poor, retrenchment and home industry, grain storage, silk culture, medical training, visiting teaching, and the teaching of children and youth. More importantly, she recognized that their intensifying temporal labors required the spiritual context that would give the work deeper individual and collective meaning.

"God bless you, my sisters, and encourage you, that you may be filled with light, and realize that you have no interests but in the welfare of Zion," she assured Ogden women in August 1873.

Let your first business be to perform your duties at home. But inasmuch as you are wise stewards, you will find time for social duties, because these are incumbent upon us as daughters and mothers in Zion. By seeking to perform every duty you will find that your capacity will increase, and you will be astonished at what you can accomplish. You have been astonished at what duties you have done. The Lord help us. The Lord is with His Saints and helps them to do His will, and He watches over them by night and by day. Inasmuch as we continue faithful, we shall be those that will be crowned in the presence of God and the lamb. You, my sisters, if you are faithful will become Queen of Queens, and Priestesses unto the Most High God. These are your callings. We have only to discharge our duties. By and by our labors will be past, and our names will be crowned with everlasting honor, and be had in everlasting remembrance among the Saints of the Most High God.⁸⁶

Temporal responsibilities were a small part of a much larger eternal picture. "It is the privilege of each young lady here before me to become a queen in Heaven. This is the design of our Heavenly

Father,” she explained in 1874 to young women in the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward. Such doctrines would by the end of the nineteenth century be woven into the lessons for young women, but the unceasing ward and stake visits of Eliza Snow and her sisters predated formal lessons for women, youth, and children, filling the need for doctrinal teaching powerfully fortified by personal witness. Women and men remarked upon the incredible stamina of aging Eliza Snow, and they were often deeply moved by the unforgettable spirit of her preaching. “I attended the R. S. Conference which I enjoyed myself exceedingly,” recorded Mary Ann Freeze in her diary March 9, 1883. “Felt like shouting hallelujah; while listening to Sister Eliza R. Snow, H. M. Whitney. I never heard the sisters speak with such power as they did that afternoon.”⁸⁷

Many of her sermons, instructions, articles, and poetry were featured in the *Woman's Exponent*, the semimonthly, semiofficial newspaper she encouraged her sisters to edit and publish. Through every medium at her disposal, Eliza R. Snow tried to help Mormon women grasp how the “solemnities of eternity” (D&C 43:34) pertained to them. “The Latter-day Saint women of Utah occupy a more important position than is occupied by any other women on the earth,” she assured her sisters through the *Woman's Exponent*.

Associated, as they are, with apostles and prophets inspired by the living God—with them sharing in the gifts and powers of the holy Priesthood by which, through the merits of our Great Redeemer, we have access to, and hold communion with the Father of our spirits—participating in those sacred ordinances, without which, we could never be prepared to dwell in the presence of the Holy Ones. Who can fully appreciate our blessings; and who is capable of realizing the weight of the responsibilities resting upon us?⁸⁸

Looking ever to the “exceeding and eternal weight of glory” promised faithful Saints (2 Cor. 4:17), Eliza R. Snow was able to lift the vision and spirits of her sisters. Her writing of “O My Father” in 1845 marked her own profound recognition of her connectedness throughout time to the Holy Ones, “the Eternal Father and Mother.” Her personal witness of these truths deepened during the last half of her life, enabling her to resolve natural personal quandaries about her status and position and to weather the storm of criticism she and her sisters incurred for their involvement in

plural marriage and support of priesthood leaders. Her understanding energized her extraordinary contribution as a leader and inspired her spiritual nurturance of Mormon women.

Catherine Albanese, a non-Mormon scholar of American religion, commented on the theology of "O My Father" in terms unfamiliar and somewhat inharmonious to most Mormons but striking nonetheless:

From the mystical world view [Latter-day Saints] have taken a host of powerful symbols, typified in their affirmation of the Father-Mother God. These symbols do for them what they do for every group or individual in the history of religions who has genuinely encountered and entered them: they transform and energize; they provide a rationale and a power that reaches from beyond and transports people beyond their ordinary human capacities.⁸⁹

Transformed, energized, and transported beyond ordinary capacity, Eliza R. Snow became a leader of mythic proportion. Traveling extensively from ward to ward during the last twenty years of her life, she organized Relief Societies for women, Retrenchment or Mutual Improvement Associations for young women, and Primary Associations for children and directed most of the work of all three organizations until her death in 1887. She compiled recitations, catechisms, and hymns for Primary children. She promoted women's home manufacturing and superintended their commission store, championed medical training for women, and chaired the governing board of the sisters' Deseret Hospital. She presided over women's temple ordinance work, laboring both in the Endowment House and St. George Temple, and she preached endlessly.⁹⁰

Her contemporaries recognized and praised her unique ministry. "Our sister [is] entitled, in a certain sense, to be designated the mother of this people," remarked John W. Taylor at her funeral in 1887. Certainly, she was the female voice heard more widely, clearly, and consistently than any other, she the witness of divine relationship and connection, she the herald who memorably affirmed the reality of Mother in Heaven and woman's capacity to become like Her. Sister Eliza nurtured with strength, nourished with truth, and touched with the Spirit.

Her life unfolded in unpredictable ways, yet almost precisely as promised in the patriarchal blessing given her in Nauvoo in 1843:

Thy influence shall be great—thy examples shall not be excel'd. Thou hast a heart to be enlarg'd, and a mind capable of expansion; and for thy comfort remember in thy retired walks, that yonder sun is typical of a crown of glory that shall be seal'd upon thy head: The stars that twinkle in yonder sky shall show to thy mind the workmanship of thy Creator, and by those glories thou shalt read the destinies of man and be capable with thy pen to communicate, to thy fellow man the blessings & glories of futurity: and thy blessing shall roll and continue to thee until time is lost in eternity: and thy name shall be handed down to posterity from generation to generation: and many songs shall be heard that were dictated by thy pen and from the principles of thy mind, even until the choirs from on high and the earth below, shall join in one universal song of praise to God and the Lamb.⁹¹

The sisters who met on January 21, 1910, to remember Eliza R. Snow and sing “O My Father” celebrated their cherished sister and their sisterhood. “She taught us life’s great lessons,” wrote Emmeline B. Wells in a poem for the occasion, “precious truths,”

Rarest, sweetest songs of Zion
That are sung with sacred feeling—
Given her through inspiration,
Holy principles revealing.

Calling her queen, “regnant-mother . . . Poet! Priestess, Prophet too,” Emmeline continued and affirmed, “Zion’s daughters down the ages / Will her messages be telling.”⁹²

For most Latter-day Saints, Eliza R. Snow will be remembered primarily as the author of the “doctrinal hymn and anthem of affection, ‘O My Father.’”⁹³ That is entirely appropriate. When her sisters and brothers remember her, they rediscover their own holy place within the cosmos and their eternal connection to their heavenly parents. Her journey is in part their own.

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NOTES

¹Latter-day Saint women's contribution to the building's construction is discussed in Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of the Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 174-78.

²"Eliza R. Snow," *Woman's Exponent* 38 (February 1910): 52.

³Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The Eliza Enigma," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11 (spring 1978): 31.

⁴The greeting was addressed to Eliza R. Snow and her friend and counselor Zina D. H. Young. M. Elizabeth Little, "A Welcome," *Woman's Exponent* 9 (April 1, 1881): 165.

⁵"Review of Primary Associations, and Instructions," *Juvenile Instructor* 25 (November 15, 1890): 685.

⁶"Eliza R. Snow," *Woman's Exponent* 38 (February 1910): 52.

⁷"My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 15, 1845): 1039.

⁸Eliza R. Snow, "Sketch of My Life," in *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 16. The original forty-page holograph is located in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, California. Beecher explains that most of the sketch was written in 1870 for Edward Tullidge (2-4).

⁹Eliza R. Snow, "Past and Present," *Woman's Exponent* 15 (August 1, 1886): 37.

¹⁰The change of name may well have been prompted by "The Last Testimony of Sister Emma [Smith]," published in the RLDS *Saints Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289-90, some six months following her death, April 30, 1879. After reading the printed testimony, including Emma's statement that Joseph Smith "had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have," Eliza R. Snow responded through the columns of the *Deseret News*:

I once dearly loved "Sister Emma," and now, for me to believe that she, a once honored woman, should have sunk so low, even in her own estimation, as to deny what she *knew* to be true, seemes [*sic*] a palpable absurdity. If what purports to be her "last testimony" was really her testimony she died with a libel on her lips—a libel against her husband—against his wives—against the truth, and a libel against God; and in publishing that libel, her son has fastened a stigma on the character of his mother, that can never be erased. ("Letter on Plural Marriage," *Woman's Exponent* 8 [November 1, 1879]: 84-85, signed "Eliza R. Snow, A wife of Joseph Smith the Prophet"; italics in original)

By July 1880, Eliza's name consistently appeared in the *Woman's Exponent* and elsewhere with "Smith" attached.

¹¹Eliza's younger sister, Percy Amanda McConoughey, remained in Ohio with her husband Eli. Her youngest sister, Melissa, died in 1835. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Leonora, Eliza, and Lorenzo: An Affectionate Portrait of the Snow Family," *Ensign* 10 (June 1980): 65-66.

¹²Snow, "Sketch of My Life," in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 18.

¹³A description of the organization of the Relief Society by the Prophet Joseph Smith and its subsequent workings in Nauvoo is found in Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 23–62. The petition to the governor has been published in Carol Cornwall Madsen, *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 131–33. The visit to the governor is described in the same work (38) and in Snow, “Sketch of My Life”: “Soon after our return, we learned that at the time of our visit, and while making protestations of friendship, the wily Governor was secretly conniving with the basest of men to destroy our leaders” (17, 52). Joseph Smith was arrested August 8, 1842, “on a warrant issued by Governor Carlin, founded on a requisition from Governor Reynolds of Missouri,” naming Joseph as an accessory to Orrin Porter Rockwell’s alleged attack on former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 5:86.

¹⁴The twenty-three poems Eliza Snow published in the *Ravenna Western Courier* and *Ohio Star* were over the signature of various noms de plume, including Narcissa, Tullia, Cornelia, and Pocohontas. The two hymns were the first published works bearing her own signature.

¹⁵Several of Snow’s poems laud American democracy and freedom and protest by contrast the treatment of Mormons in Missouri. “Columbia—My Country” celebrates the virtue of Columbia, the United States, over other foreign lands, concluding ironically:

But O, I find no country yet,
Like my Columbia dear;
And oftentimes, almost forget
I live an exile here. (*Quincy Whig*, November 14, 1840)

¹⁶John E. Hallwas, “The Midwestern Poetry of Eliza Snow,” *Western Illinois Regional Studies* 5 (fall 1982): 139.

¹⁷The poem was printed in 1841 by Ebenezer Robinson as an eighteen-page pamphlet. “It is the production of a well cultivated, chaste, and pious mind,” the *Times and Seasons* noted. “Let the young commit it to memory, and thus transmit it as a useful and pleasing lesson to future time.” *Times and Seasons* 2 (April 15, 1841): 383. Copies of the pamphlet are extremely rare. Eliza published the poem in her *Poems: Religious, Historical, and Political* (Liverpool: Latter-day Saints Printing Office, 1856), 1:237–61.

¹⁸Eliza R. Snow’s remarks at a special conference in Provo, November 15, 1881, “R.S., Y.L.M.I.A. and Primary Reports, Provo,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10 (March 1, 1882): 151; italics in original.

¹⁹Oliver Snow to “My Dear Brother and Family” [Franklin Snow], August 13, 1842, photocopy of holograph in files of Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

²⁰Eliza R. Snow, “Nauvoo Journal and Notebook,” in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 52. The original holograph is in the Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

²¹Eliza R. Snow, “Your Portrait,” *Wasp*, August 27, 1842.

²²Eliza R. Snow, "Lines on the Assassination of Generals Joseph Smith & Hiram Smith," July 1, 1844, broadside, LDS Church Archives. Later published in Snow, *Poems*, 1:142-45, and in *Times and Seasons* 5 (July 1, 1844): 575.

²³During the Nauvoo period, the Saints worked to assimilate many new doctrines relating to the temple that were introduced by the Prophet. The celestial order of marriage was just one of them. Larry C. Porter and Milton V. Backman Jr., "Doctrine and the Temple in Nauvoo," *BYU Studies* 32, nos. 1, 2 (1992): 41-56.

²⁴"A Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," March 30, 1842, LDS Church Archives; see also Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 39-56.

²⁵Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 78.

²⁶Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "Inadvertent Disclosure: Autobiography in the Poetry of Eliza R. Snow," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (spring 1990): 94-107.

²⁷Eliza R. Snow, "Invocation," *Times and Seasons* 3 (September 1, 1842): 910.

²⁸These phrases are taken from three different poems: "To President Joseph Smith; and His Lady, Presidentess Emma Smith," *Wasp*, August 20, 1842; "Saturday Evening Thoughts," *Times and Seasons* 4 (January 2, 1843): 64; "O how shall I compose a thought," untitled and unpublished poem in "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (September 23, 1842), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 57. With reference to the practice of plural marriage in Nauvoo, Eliza Snow told Relief Society sisters in 1872, "Polygamy did not hurt me, but to be looked upon as a woman of light character that did hurt me, the very idea of my not being a virtuous woman." Payson [Utah] Ward Relief Society Minutes, September 26, 1872, LDS Church Archives; spelling and punctuation standardized.

²⁹These phrases are taken from two of Eliza's poems: "Saturday Evening Thoughts"; and an untitled poem, "The noblest proudest joys that this," in "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (November 16, 1842), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 60-63, later published as "True Happiness," in Snow, *Poems*, 1:47-48.

³⁰Snow, "To President Joseph Smith." Misspelling of *polluted* is in the original.

³¹Snow, "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (February 11, 1843), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 64.

³²Evidence for a disagreement between the two women is discussed in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, Linda King Newell, and Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Emma and Eliza and the Stairs," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 1 (1982): 87-96.

³³Eliza R. Snow, "To *Who Needs Consolation*," *Wasp*, September 10, 1842.

³⁴Journal of Wilford Woodruff, December 16, 1857, LDS Church Archives.

³⁵Snow, "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (May 23, 1843), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 75. The holograph reads: "~~has~~ have been a source of much bitterness of feeling."

³⁶Snow, "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (June 29, 1842, and February 11, 1843), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 52, 65.

³⁷Snow, "Lines on the Assassination."

³⁸L. G. R., "Snow, Eliza Roxey," in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. Andrew Jenson, 4 vols. (1901; exact photo reproduction, Western Epics: Salt Lake City, 1971), 1:695.

³⁹"To Elder John Taylor," *Times and Seasons* 5 (August 1, 1844): 607; "Lines Addressed to Miss Frances Jessie Swan," *Millennial Star* 6 (June 15, 1845): 16, dated September 4, 1844; "Lines Written on the Birth of the Infant Son of Mrs. Emma [Smith]," *Nauvoo Neighbor*, December 4, 1844; "To Mrs. Mary, Consort of the Late Hyrum Smith," Snow, *Poems*, 1:209, dated "Nauvoo, 1844"; "To President Brigham Young," *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 15, 1845): 815; "The Venerable Lucy Smith," *Times and Seasons* 6 (May 15, 1845): 911. A poem entitled "A Song for the Latter-day Saints" was published in *Times and Seasons* 5 (October 1, 1844): 671, but was apparently written a year earlier since all stanzas but the last appear in Eliza's journal. Snow, "Nauvoo Journal and Notebook" (October 5, 1843), in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 85.

⁴⁰Additionally, in a short note with a cut paper insignia, Snow addressed four lines "for the President Brigham Young and his lady Presidentess Mary Ann Young," dated "Temple of the Lord, Jan 7th 1846," Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.

⁴¹Artistic and hospitable Bathsheba reflected that if Eliza "had had a splendidly furnished room with every comfort, perhaps she would not have been inspired to compose that hymn ['O My Father']." Bathsheba W. Smith, "An Item of History," *Woman's Exponent* 30 (June 1901): 3. Susa Young Gates mentioned a Bible and Book of Mormon on the table and a "braided rug mat" on the floor and described the bed as "exquisitely neat with its valance of white and its cover of snowy home-woven linen." Susa Young Gates, "Eliza R. Snow Smith," *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from November 1869 to June 1910* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 15.

⁴²Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "'All Things Move in Order in the City': The Nauvoo Diary of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 3 (1979): 315.

⁴³Charles R. Harrell, "The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830-1844," *BYU Studies* 28, no. 2 (1988): 75-96; Donald Q. Cannon, Larry E. Dahl, and John W. Welch, "The Restoration of Major Doctrines through Joseph Smith: The Godhead, Mankind, and the Creation," *Ensign* 19 (January 1989): 30-31.

⁴⁴Eliza R. Snow, "My Father in Heaven," *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 15, 1845): 1039. The *Times and Seasons* misspelled *recollection* (line 11). Unlike the version of "O My Father" found in current LDS hymnals, this version and that in Eliza's first book of collected poetry use the singular "court" in "your royal court on high."

⁴⁵Nauvoo Endowment Record, typescript, Family History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; Emmeline B. Wells, "Pen Sketch of an Illustrious Woman," *Woman's Exponent* 9 (October 15, 1880): 74.

⁴⁶Edward W. Tullidge described the hymn as "a divine drama set to song. And as it is but a choral dramatization, in the simple hymn form, of the celestial themes revealed through Joseph Smith, it will strikingly illustrate the vast system of Mormon theology, which links the heavens and the earth." Edward W. Tullidge,

The Women of Mormondom (New York, 1877; lithographic reprint, Salt Lake City: n.p., 1973), 188.

⁴⁷*Millennial Star* (February 1846): 64; *Frontier Guardian* (Kanesville, Iowa), March 21, 1849; *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs, for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in Europe*, 9th ed., rev. and enl. (Liverpool and London: F. D. Richards, 1851), 143.

⁴⁸"Deseret Theological Institute," *Deseret News*, June 20, 1855. J. Spencer Cornwall noted that "'O My Father,' according to fan letters received by the Tabernacle Choir, ranks second as the most popular and most beloved LDS hymn sung by the choir. 'Come, Come, Ye Saints' came first." J. Spencer Cornwall, *Stories of Our Mormon Hymns* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 146.

⁴⁹In a 1909 statement entitled "The Origin of Man," the First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) declared the following: "All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity." James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:203; originally published in the *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 78. In a 1991 address to women, Gordon B. Hinckley referred to "O My Father" and added, "Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me. However, in light of the instruction we have received from the Lord Himself, I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven." "Daughters of God," *Ensign* 21 (November 9, 1991): 100.

Two studies that survey Church leaders' comments on the concept of Mother in Heaven are John Heeren, Donald B. Lindsey, and Marylee Mason, "The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven: A Sociological Account of Its Origins and Development," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23 (December 1984): 396-411; and Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 64-77.

⁵⁰"Discourse by President Wilford Woodruff, October 8, 1893 (in Salt Lake)," *Millennial Star* 56 (April 9, 1894): 229; also in *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 61-62.

⁵¹Joseph F. Smith, "Discourse Delivered at the Oneida Stake Conference, Franklin, Idaho, Sunday Afternoon, January 20th, 1895," *Deseret Evening News* (February 9, 1895).

⁵²Gates, "Eliza R. Snow Smith," 15-16.

⁵³Gates, "Eliza R. Snow Smith," 16.

⁵⁴Gates, "Eliza R. Snow Smith," 16.

⁵⁵David McKay to Mrs. James Hood, March 16, 1916, photocopy of holograph, LDS Church Archives. It appears that Eliza may have responded similarly to inquiries from Edward Tullidge. She helped Tullidge collect Mormon women's autobiographies for *Women of Mormondom* and very probably reviewed and certainly promoted the volume, which includes a discussion of "O My Father" and the doctrine of Mother in Heaven. According to Tullidge,

the revelation of our Mother in heaven—co-existent and co-equal with the eternal Father . . . was left, among the unrevealed truths, to

the present age, when it would seem the woman is destined by Providence to become very much the oracle of a new and peculiar civilization. The oracle of this last grand truth of woman's divinity and of her eternal Mother as the partner with the Father in the creation of worlds, is none other than the Mormon Church. It was revealed in the glorious theology of Joseph. . . . The Father is the first in name and order, but the Mother is with him—these twain, one from the beginning. Then came our Hebraic poetess [Eliza R. Snow] with her hymn of invocation, and woman herself brought the perfected idea of deity into the forms of praise and worship. Is not this exalting woman to her sphere beyond all precedent? (Tullidge, *Women of Mormondom*, 193-94)

⁵⁶W. W. Phelps, "Come to Me," *Times and Seasons* 6 (January 15, 1845): 783, quoted in Harrell, "Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence," 88-89.

⁵⁷Harrell, "Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence," 89. Harrell's brief discussion of the concept of heavenly parents makes reference to the concept of God as mother and father in "the esoteric teachings of the Kabbalah, which intrigued Christian mystics at the time of Joseph Smith," but does not refer to the idea of a father-mother god in nineteenth-century American culture. Harrell, "Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence," 90. Prior to 1845, the semi-monastic Ephrata community in Pennsylvania, the Shakers, and the Rappites or Harmonists all expressed belief in a god possessing both maleness and femaleness. John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community of Perfectionists as well as Mary Baker Eddy and the Christian Scientists later taught of divine Father-Mother. Catharine L. Albanese mentions these groups and the European roots of some of their beliefs in "Mormonism and the Male-Female God: An Exploration in Active Mysticism," *Sunstone* 6 (March-April 1981): 52-58. Mary Baker Eddy's formulation of Father-Mother God can be found in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1875; reprinted, Boston: Christian Science Publishing Society, 1906), 332, 516-17. A recent careful analysis of the concept among the Shakers is Linda A. Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine, and God: The Shakers and Contemporary Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

⁵⁸"Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5 (August 15, 1844): 614. See also Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations* (Provo, Utah: BYU Printing Service, 1983).

⁵⁹Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855-86), 4:55, 57, September 21, 1856 (hereafter cited as *JD*).

⁶⁰The description is from C[atherine] V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; or, An Authentic History of Brigham Young, His Numerous Wives and Children* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1866), 217. "The position of woman, and her duties in life, are well-defined in the New Testament Scriptures," wrote Waite, in an effort to make a contrast with family life among the Mormons. See Ephesians 5:22. Ironically, the lack of contrast is striking. Barbara Welter examines the widespread emphasis on woman's submissiveness in contemporaneous American culture in "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in her *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21-41.

⁶¹Letter of Amelia Bloomer read at the woman's rights convention held at Akron, Ohio, May 28 and 29, 1851, quoted in Donna A. Behnke, *Religious Issues in Nineteenth Century Feminism* (Troy, N.Y.: Whiston, 1982), 108.

⁶²Eliza R. Snow, "The New Year, 1852," in Snow, *Poems*, 1:212, first published in *Deseret News*, January 19, 1852. Eliza never abandoned the traditional idea that the Fall had placed woman in a subordinate position and required her to be obedient to her husband (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15), although she cast it in terms of obedience to husbands with priesthood authority. The Fall, she believed, had altered the primeval unity and equality shared by men and women, and through woman's righteousness and submission to priesthood authority, that unity and equality would ultimately be restored. She told Bountiful Ward sisters in November 1870:

For before the fall the Lord gave Conjointly to both but after the Fall Man and Woman had her orders given separately, and it has never been reversed, and never will be till the Curse is taken off. My sisters we are placed in a position so that the Curse may be recalled by obedience, for it will be by obedience, and by fulfilling that law, that we shall be called forth to a State of Glory. Though we may feel humiliated, yet the Lord has shown a way to come out of that, So that we can enjoy perfect union again, For union will be restored between Man and Woman. (Relief Society Minutes of the Bountiful [Utah] Ward, 1868-1875, November 7, 1870, LDS Church Archives)

See also Jill C. Mulvay [Derr], "Eliza R. Snow and the Woman Question," *BYU Studies* 16 (winter 1976): 261, 264. Latter-day Saint leaders, male and female, became increasingly silent on the matter of the "curse" toward the turn of the century. For the views of two contemporary Mormon women about Eve, see Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, "The Redemption of Eve," in Beecher and Anderson, *Sisters in Spirit*, 3-36; Jolene Edmunds Rockwood, "Eve's Role in the Creation and the Fall to Mortality," in *Women and the Power Within: To See Life Steadily and See It Whole*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 49-65; and Beverly Campbell, "Eve," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:475-76.

⁶³Eliza Snow commented to Relief Society sisters in 1880, "We are not only helpmeets to our husbands as wives, but we are helpmeets to the Priesthood. The women of the world are working against the men of the world, and will never accomplish what they aim at, though they may do some good." Unity was always paramount for her. Gunnison [Utah] Ward Relief Society Minutes, 1879-1887, August 13, 1880, LDS Church Archives. See also Mulvay [Derr], "Eliza R. Snow and the Woman Question," 250-64.

⁶⁴The group's membership and activities are discussed in Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The Polysophical Society: A Phoenix Infrequent," *Encyclia: The Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 58 (1981): 145-53. See also Maureen Ursenbach [Beecher], "Three Women and the Life of the Mind," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (winter 1975): 31-32.

⁶⁵See Richard L. Jensen, "Forgotten Relief Societies, 1844-67," *Dialogue* 16 (spring 1983): 105-25; also, Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 75-80.

⁶⁶Heber C. Kimball, in *JD*, 5:29, July 12, 1857.

⁶⁷*Not by Bread Alone: The Journal of Martha Spence Heywood, 1850-56*, ed. Juanita Brooks (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1978), 122; for a time, Martha attended the Polysophical Society. During the 1860s and '70s, Brigham Young fostered more extensive public involvement for women. See Jill Mulvay Derr, "Brigham Young and the Awakening of Mormon Women in the 1870s," in *Lion of the Lord: Essays on the Life and Service of Brigham Young*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 312-37.

⁶⁸Emma Smith's use of her position as president of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo to oppose plural marriage and the revision of the record of Joseph Smith's instructions to the Relief Society are discussed in Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 59-63, 74.

⁶⁹Eliza R. Snow, "Woman," in Snow, *Poems*, 2:176; first published in *The Mormon*, December 27, 1856. Snow's uneasiness with the reworking of her record might be read between the lines of a poem composed in March 1855, the month she was invited to take her minutes to the Historian's Office and informed that they would be revised. Historian's Office Journal, March 29 and 30, 1855, LDS Church Archives. Her unpublished poem, "The Will" (Eliza R. Snow, Nauvoo Journal and Notebook, 1842-1882, holograph, LDS Church Archives), lists the sacrifices a Saint might make and the spiritual manifestations she might have, concluding:

Yet our labors, our tithings & offerings
Will to little or nothing amount,
If that one—just that one little item
Is withheld from the gen'ral account.

Though we keep every other commandment
In the one, we may be lacking still;
Not to sell and impart our possessions,
But to lay on the altar, the will.

⁷⁰Snow, "Woman."

⁷¹Eliza R. Snow, "Good Society," in Snow, *Poems*, 2:133-38.

⁷²"Conference Minutes," 614.

⁷³Eliza R. Snow, "The Ultimatum of Human Life," in Snow, *Poems*, 2:5-6; italics in original. The poem was published in the *Deseret News*, February 20, 1856, 394, under the title "Instructions of the Priesthood"; when it was reprinted in *Poems*, the original title of "The Ultimatum of Human Life" was used. See holograph dated March, in Eliza R. Snow Journal and Notebook, 1842-1882, LDS Church Archives.

⁷⁴Snow, "The Ultimatum of Human Life."

⁷⁵Snow, "The Ultimatum of Human Life."

⁷⁶Snow, "Woman"; italics in original.

⁷⁷Lynn A. McKinlay, "Patriarchal Order of the Priesthood" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1067; Arthur A. Bailey, "Adam," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:16-17. In calling Adam "God . . . of the human race," Eliza also reflects the understanding that Adam and Eve set the pattern for all to follow and that through divine investiture, Adam had conferred upon him "all essential keys, titles, and dominions possessed by the Father" necessary for Adam to perform his work. Bailey, "Adam," 1:17. In "[Adam] arose to be / Cloth'd with the Godhead's might and majesty," Eliza draws a clear distinction between Adam and the Godhead.

⁷⁸Snow, "The Ultimatum of Human Life."

⁷⁹Eliza R. Snow, "To Mrs. ———," in Snow, *Poems*, 2:194; italics in original. The lines are reminiscent of the well-known couplet later formulated by Eliza's brother Lorenzo Snow: "As man now is, God once was: / As God now is, man may be." Lorenzo's account of his gaining an understanding of the doctrine and discussing it with Joseph Smith and his sister is contained in Lorenzo Snow, "The Grand Destiny of Man," *Deseret Evening News*, July 20, 1901; and LeRoi C. Snow, "Devotion to a Divine Inspiration," *Improvement Era* 22 (June 1919): 653–62.

⁸⁰Snow, "To Mrs. ———"; italics in original.

⁸¹Eliza R. Snow, "Nationality," *Deseret News*, June 25, 1856; *Millennial Star* 18 (September 13, 1856): 591; Snow, *Poems*, 2:39; holograph dated February 27, 1855, in Eliza R. Snow Journal and Notebook, 1842–1882, LDS Church Archives.

⁸²"Original Address Delivered by Eliza R. Snow, Jan. 9, 1855, at a Social Party in Lorenzo Snow's Hall," *Deseret News*, January 18, 1855; *Millennial Star* 17 (May 19, 1855): 320; holograph in Eliza R. Snow Journal and Notebook, 1842–1882, LDS Church Archives.

⁸³Snow, "How Great the Wisdom and the Love," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1985* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), 195. "How Great the Wisdom and the Love" first appeared in the hymnal in 1871.

⁸⁴Lehi Ward, Utah Stake Relief Society Minutes, 1868–1879, October 27, 1869, LDS Church Archives.

⁸⁵Provo Second Ward, Utah Stake Relief Society Minutes, 1869–1882, "Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Female Relief Societies of Provo held at the Meeting House September 1869 Eliza R. Snow Presiding," LDS Church Archives.

⁸⁶"An Address by Miss Eliza R. Snow . . . August 14th, 1873, Reported by James Taylor," *Woman's Exponent* 2 (September 15, 1873): 62–63.

⁸⁷Diaries of Mary Ann Burnham Freeze, March 9, 1883, holograph in Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁸⁸Eliza R. Snow, "Position and Duties," *Woman's Exponent* 3 (July 15, 1874): 28.

⁸⁹Albanese, "Mormonism and the Male-Female God," 57. Herren, Lindsey, and Mason reject Albanese's thesis; they consider the "range of functions" the Mother in Heaven doctrine fulfills from theological, sociopsychological, and sociopolitical perspectives; and they claim that the concept reinforces the "patriarchal authority among Latter Day Saints [which] provides for an extreme separation or division of labor between men and women." Heeren, Lindsey, and Mason, "The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven," 407–9. Their interpretation might be used to explain the allegiance of Eliza R. Snow to priesthood principles and leaders and to plural marriage, but Albanese comes closer to capturing the essence of Eliza Snow's spiritual power.

On the other hand, the present article makes clear that Eliza R. Snow's understanding of Mother in Heaven combined with other factors such as her close relationships with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, her role and renown as a poet, and her spiritual gifts and ministry in the temple. This combination, not simply her understanding of Mother in Heaven, is what shaped her extraordinary leadership. As Linda Mercadante concludes from her case study of the

Shakers, “Formalized changes in religious imagery are not adequate alone to powerfully and directly shape changes in experience. Imagery must emerge from, confirm, and relate to changes in experience, and be encouraged and reinforced by changes in social structure.” Mercadante, *Gender, Doctrine, and God*, 155.

⁹⁰For Snow’s account of her labors, see “Sketch of My Life.” See also Beecher, “The Eliza Enigma”; and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “The Leading Sisters: A Female Hierarchy in Nineteenth Century Mormon Society,” *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 25–39; and Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, 83–126.

⁹¹Snow, “Nauvoo Journal and Notebook,” in *Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow*, 90.

⁹²Emmeline B. Wells, “Quest and Message, E. R. Snow’s Anniversary,” in Emmeline B. Wells, *Musings and Memories*, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1915), 323. For information on women as prophetesses, see David R. Seely, “Prophecy,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1160–62; Daniel H. Ludlow, “I Have a Question: Could You Explain the Meaning and Use of the Term ‘Prophetess’ As It’s Used in the Bible?” *Ensign* 10 (December 1980): 31–32; Dean Sorensen, “I Have a Question: Is the Gift of Prophecy Limited to Those Whom We Sustain As Prophets, Seers, and Revelators?” *Ensign* 20 (April 1990): 53–54.

⁹³Spencer W. Kimball, “The True Way of Life and Salvation,” *Ensign* 8 (May 1978): 6. The passage containing President Kimball’s response to Eliza’s hymn states:

When we sing that doctrinal hymn and anthem of affection, “O My Father,” we get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return there?