

Father married to Heavenly Mother, but there is virtually no role for, reference to, or depiction of the Heavenly Mother in Mormon liturgy and practice, and among some Mormons it is still considered taboo to talk about her. If God is both male and female, why is the female aspect of God not recognized in contemporary Mormonism? Second, and closely related, is the unresolved issue of the spiritual value of gender roles. In the 1970s through the first decade of the 2000s, LDS Church leaders assigned increasing spiritual value to what Europeans and Euro-Americans regarded as “traditional” gender roles, with women defined by mothering and caregiving responsibilities and men defined as “presiders” in home and church; in 1995, the Church’s “Proclamation on the Family” declared that these gender roles were eternal and an essential feature of the soul, even though LDS scripture provides little information on this subject. Are the “traditional” European and Euro-American gender roles that order the operations and culture of the contemporary LDS Church a reflection of the essential nature of God and godliness, or a projection of our own human understanding onto the divine? Is it possible, as LDS Church leaders state, for men and women to have different forms of access to power and different levels of authority within the Church and yet be equal? Third, there is the unresolved issue of polygamy. The LDS Church officially stopped performing plural marriages in 1890 under tremendous pressure from the United States government. However, the Church has never renounced the *doctrine* of eternal polygamy—that in the highest levels of heaven a man may be married to more than one woman—as introduced by Joseph Smith. Eternal plural marriages, with one man “sealed” to more than one woman in the afterlife, continue to be performed in Mormon temples. Is this a remnant of a rejected theology, or are Mormons to believe that polygamy will be the order of the heavens? Fourth, the question of women’s access to priesthood also remains unresolved. When he developed Mormon temple liturgies in the 1840s, Joseph Smith incorporated ritual elements that suggest he viewed women as holders of a form of priesthood. But this vision was never fully realized, owing in part to Smith’s early death, and many Mormon women reject the notion that they hold the priesthood, even though temple rites symbolically vest them with priesthood authority. Do Mormon women hold the priesthood, and if so, how will they use it? Fifth, there is the unresolved issue of racial privilege and bias within the LDS Church. From the late nineteenth century through 1978, Mormons of Black African descent were excluded from full participation in the lay priesthood and in LDS temple ceremonies. Since that time, LDS leaders have renounced racism but have never fully rejected theologies generated by Mormon leaders and laypeople to justify the segregation. If Mormonism was wrong to exclude Black women and men from full participation, why have leaders been so reluctant to acknowledge and address the fallibility of the tradition?

These paradoxes, inconsistencies, and ambivalences around gender, equality, and power in Mormon theology produce a palpable tension that Mormon women