

## GIVE &amp; TAKE

The March 1998 *SUNSTONE* featured Boyd Petersen's article, "The Priesthood: Men's Last, Best Hope," in which he set forth his reasons why only men should hold the priesthood. Two individuals sent in short dissenting essays. Here are the views of Bob Woolley and Joanna Brooks, followed by Petersen's response.

## NOT LAST, BEST, OR EXCLUSIVE

By Robert J. Woolley



*"What Specifically does the priesthood add that cannot be had by a righteous man who is either not LDS or a non-priesthood-bearing member?"*

I AM PLEASED that my friend Boyd Petersen finally got around to publishing "The Priesthood: Man's Last, Best Hope."

Petersen argues that the conferral of priesthood on men "is an essential and divinely inspired component to celestial marriage. It gently pushes men into acts of compassionate service and provides them

with a feeling of connectedness with their families."

I don't understand this. I am unable to think of what the priesthood accomplishes (or is meant to accomplish) in the family, with the exception of performing ordinances, that is not encompassed in the righteous execution of one's roles as a husband and father. Consider a righteous, non-LDS man. Will he not be pushed into acts of compassionate service by virtue of his being a husband and father? Will he not feel connected with his family? And surely the light of Christ as well

as scriptural and prophetic teachings include all the instruction one could need to be compassionate toward one's family. What specifically does the priesthood add that cannot be had by a righteous man who is either not LDS or a non-priesthood-bearing member? To use a specific example, Boyd mentions how a man giving his child a blessing in Church was a critical bonding moment, how it made him realize that he'd do anything for that child. Are we then to believe that a father who, for example, only held the Aaronic priesthood and therefore couldn't perform that ordinance, would be *less* bonded to his child?

Incidentally, Petersen claims, erroneously, that giving his blessing was "something that only his father could do." But many children are given this ordinance by somebody other than their fathers.

He continues, "Priesthood compensates for the biological and societal conditions that otherwise hold men back from attaining essential Christ-like qualities."

Let's start with biological conditions. Boyd mentions only two female motherhood functions that "make women more prone to nurturing and intimacy": childbirth and breastfeeding. But this ignores that many women become mothers without either of these functions, by adopting children. Does the act of becoming a mother by adoption, rather than by childbirth, take away a woman's edge in developing Christ-like service qualities toward her children? This seems implausible, not to mention obviously demeaning to such women. And if those qualities can be developed in such women without the edge of those biological functions, why cannot the same be true of men? Furthermore, we are just at the end of an era when breastfeeding in American society has been viewed as peculiar, undesirable, reserved for lower-class women who couldn't afford to buy formula. Were the women who became mothers in this era and bottle-fed their children deprived of one of the two "biological . . . conditions" that give women an edge in Christ-like development?

Now for societal conditions that hold men back from attaining Christ-like attributes: Petersen's argument seems to be, in brief, that the reduction of the male's role in the family to one of a monetary provider has deprived him of the service and connectedness that he should have. He rightly stresses the need for men to spend less time with career and more with family.

But he also points out that things could be different; man as monetary provider is a relatively recent societal development. It is fur-

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thermore a condition we could change relatively easily. A man winning the lottery or inheriting wealth and thereby having no need to earn wages would have this handicap erased. Does he then not need the priesthood to compensate for what is no longer missing? If in my family my wife has the higher earning potential and we do the “Mr. Mom” switch, then should *she* be given the priesthood to compensate for the societal deprivation of being out of the house? And finally, why would God implement a system of giving priesthood only to men (which we are led to believe by current Church leaders is an eternal, unchangeable situation) simply to correct a temporary societal situation? The agrarian societies Boyd describes still exist in many parts of the world; do these men not need the priesthood?

To put these concepts together, imagine that I am financially secure and do not have to work to support my family, and that due to infertility, we have adopted our children. Is my priesthood superfluous? Is my wife now at a relative disadvantage in acquiring exaltation or in developing Christ-like characteristics, since she doesn’t have the biological edges Petersen describes, and I don’t have the societal handicaps he enumerates?

And carried to the extreme, what of the couple that never has children? Perhaps they are biologically infertile, and financial situations or a physical handicap or emotional disorder makes them unable to adopt. Essentially, their problems would negate everything Petersen has said about the importance of priesthood related to rearing children. If there are and will be no children, then is priesthood irrelevant?

Here is my final general objection to Petersen’s thesis: If God truly wishes for all his children to return to him, it follows that he would give all of his children any possible tool that would help them succeed in that quest. If priesthood increases men’s chances of attaining exaltation, why would it not have the same effect for women? For if it is true that, as Petersen argues, men must work to attain traditionally female characteristics such as mercy and patience, surely it is equally true that women must work to

attain traditionally male characteristics such as strength and power (as Petersen explicitly agrees). If so, then what better tool than the priesthood—God’s power—could there be for women? And if I am right that the priesthood would help women achieve these traits (just as Petersen says it helps men achieve the more feminine traits), and if the priesthood would thereby help women toward exaltation, why would a loving Father (or Mother) withhold this advantage from them?

Like Boyd Petersen, I have no divinely given answers. I cannot adequately answer such seemingly simple questions as “Why do men but not women have the priesthood?” let alone the more mind-boggling ones such as “What are the roles of males and females in the celestial kingdom?” But I would rather leave the questions unanswered than have them answered erroneously. And, much as I like Petersen personally, I think his essay does the latter. 



*“... yeah—and you can add home teachers who say, ‘Call me if you need anything,’ to that flippin’ list!”*