AN ESSAY ON TRUTH AND DISCIPLESHIP

SUSTAINING WITHOUT SURRENDER

A Doctrinal Case for Faithful, Orderly Disagreement

> *"The recent change to the Young Women age-group names has exposed a recurring confusion in Latter-day Saint culture."*

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The recent change to the Young Women age-group names has exposed a recurring confusion in Latter-day Saint culture. Many members have treated any negative reaction to the names as evidence of spiritual weakness or failure to sustain the prophet. Yet that conclusion is too simple. The First Presidency's stated purpose for the new names is to help young women understand their divine place in God's work, represent their spiritual dignity as daughters of God, and highlight progression. That is a serious and worthy purpose. But it does not follow that every faithful Saint must instantly admire the wording, find it compelling, or suppress honest reservations. The question is not merely whether one likes the names. The deeper question is what it actually means to sustain.

In the restored gospel, sustaining is not empty ceremony, nor is it personal surrender to another man's preferences. The Lord declared that "all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith" (Doctrine and Covenants 26:2). The Church's own explanation of common consent teaches that those who vote in favor seek to sustain leaders and programs not only by uplifted hand but by their actions, faith, and prayers, while those who cast opposing votes are referred to local leaders to discuss their concerns. That means the Church's own order leaves room for concern, discussion, and moral agency. Sustaining is real support for divine order, but it is not the abolition of conscience.

At the same time, the Restoration is equally clear that revelation for the Church belongs to those appointed to receive it. In Doctrine and Covenants 28, the Lord said that "no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith, Jun." The principle is reaffirmed in Doctrine and Covenants 43, where the Lord taught that there is none other appointed to receive commandments and revelations for the Church through the one He has designated. This same principle has been restated in modern times: revelation for the whole Church belongs to the living prophet. Members do not get to countermand the prophet for the Church as a whole, nor do they get to rise up as rival voices claiming authority over the body of Christ. Ordered revelation is part of the Lord's pattern, and faithful Saints should honor that order.

But honoring that order is not the same as forbidding all honest judgment. The New Testament does not teach a mindless discipleship. Paul wrote, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The Savior Himself said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). In other words, covenant disciples are not asked to become intellectually or spiritually inert. They are asked to be humble, prayerful, and discerning. There is a great difference between saying, "I do not yet see the wisdom in this," and saying, "I reject the Lord's ordained servants." The first may be a form of wrestling before God. The second is a challenge to divine order.

That distinction matters because charity and truth are not enemies. Paul taught that charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6), and he also taught that the Saints are to be "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Moroni defined charity as "the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7:47). That means Christian love is not flattery, denial, or emotional coercion. Love does not

require a person to call bitter things sweet, or to pretend that every administrative decision is beautiful simply because it came from above. Charity should soften our tone, govern our motives, and restrain contempt. But charity does not require dishonesty. In fact, truth spoken in love is one of the scriptural marks of maturity in Christ.

This is especially important in a Church that takes priesthood order seriously, because the Lord also gave a pattern for how influence is to be exercised. Doctrine and Covenants 121 teaches that “the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven” and that when men use authority to gratify pride or exercise control “in any degree of unrighteousness,” the Spirit is grieved (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:36–37). The Lord then gives the positive pattern: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (Doctrine and Covenants 121:41). That standard applies not only to dramatic abuses, but also to the subtler impulse to compel sentiment, shame disagreement, or use sacred language as a cudgel. A member may be wrong in his opinion, but he should be persuaded, not bullied. Likewise, a leader may call for faith and patience, but he should not treat every reservation as rebellion.

For that reason, there is a meaningful doctrinal difference between concern and opposition. Official Church sources on common consent teach that concerns can be raised and discussed. Likewise, Church leaders have distinguished between private worry, sincere uncertainty, or difficulty with a particular doctrine on the one hand and open, public, repeated opposition on the other. The line is crossed when a person begins organizing resistance, gathering opposition, and publicly laboring to undermine the Church and its leaders. That is a far more serious thing than merely saying, “I do not like this decision,” or, “I struggle to see the strength of these names.”

Applied to the present case, a faithful Latter-day Saint may say, “I understand the intent behind these Young Women names, and I sustain the Brethren, but I find the names awkward, sentimental, or unhelpful.” That is not the same as refusing to sustain. It may be blunt. It may even be shortsighted. But it is not identical with disloyalty. By contrast, a person who says, “No one should follow this change,” or who seeks to rally others into defiant resistance, has moved into a different moral category. The same distinction applies in reverse. A member who insists that any contrary opinion is proof of pride or lack of faith has also gone too far. He has quietly replaced sustaining with emotional compulsion. He has turned loyalty into silence. That is not the law of common consent; it is a distortion of it.

There is also a scriptural warning here about flattery. In the Book of Mormon, dangerous men repeatedly gain influence through flattering words. Gadianton “did flatter them” with promises of power (Helaman 2:4), and Amalickiah likewise led many by his flatteries (see Alma 46:10). Scripture does not treat flattery as harmless praise. It treats it as a way of clouding judgment, protecting ambition, and drawing people into error. In a religious setting, flattery can take the form of exaggerated pious language that shields leaders from honest evaluation. Respect for leaders is righteous. Gratitude for

leaders is righteous. But to act as though every criticism is immoral simply because it is criticism is not reverence. It is a sanctified version of imageprotection.

The truest Latter-day Saint path is therefore narrower and more demanding than either reflexive criticism or reflexive deference. We are to sustain the Lord's servants, honor the order He has established, pray for understanding, and refuse the spirit of contempt. We are also to prove all things, judge righteous judgment, speak truth in love, and remember that charity rejoices in truth. Real sustaining is not noisy rebellion, but neither is it the burial of conscience. It is faithful support offered by disciples who still believe that Christ, not mere human preference, is the head of the Church. When that balance is lost, one side drifts toward insubordination and the other toward flattery. The gospel asks for neither. It asks for faith, order, truth, and charity together.

Selected Sources

- Doctrine and Covenants 26:2; 28:2; 43:3–7; 121:36–42
- John 7:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 13:6; Ephesians 4:15; Moroni 7:47; Helaman 2:4; Alma 46:10
- "Young Women Age-Group Names," Church Newsroom, April 20, 2026
- "Common Consent," Church History Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Dale G. Renlund, "A Framework for Personal Revelation," General Conference, October 2022