

Mormon Associations

B. H. Roberts Society Meets

"Mormon Women and the Struggle for Definition" was the topic for the latest of the quarterly lectures sponsored by the B. H. Roberts Society. Organized to promote the pursuit of "intelligent discipleship," the society's lectures have focused on various aspects of the relationship between the institutional church and the individual.

The status and self-image of women in the early days of the church was discussed by Carol Cornwall Madsen, author of numerous historical articles on Mormon women and an associate of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at BYU. Early LDS women had a much different perspective on the priesthood than is common in the church today, according to Ms. Madsen, and regularly exercised spiritual gifts, most notably the gift of healing. This was done out of their understanding that the priesthood's power was available to any person possessed of sufficient faith to exercise it.

Ms. Madsen also commented that women in leadership positions in the early days of the church wielded more influence in the determination of practices and policies now decided entirely by men.

Lavinia Fielding Anderson, writer, editor, and member of the LDS church audio-visual committee explored the role of contemporary Mormon women. If the confidence once displayed by Mormon women is lacking in sister Saints today, it is largely due to the unresponsiveness of the growing church bureaucracy to gender-based inequities and the current identification of Priesthood with maleness.

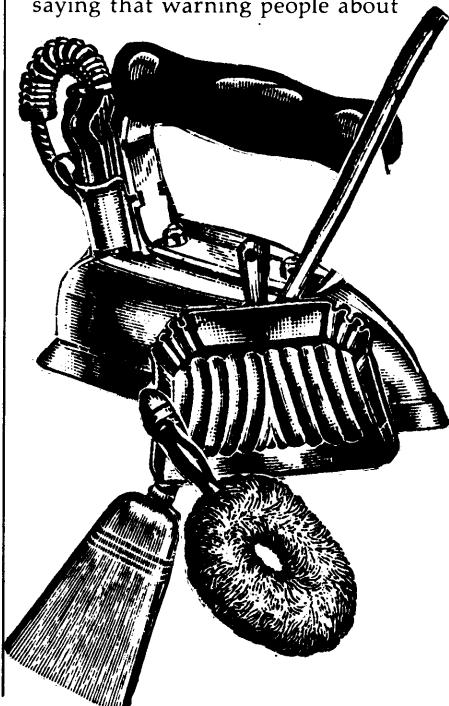
Dr. Anderson cited several factors which tend to stifle the development of women in the Church, including the lack of leadership positions available to them and the prescriptive roles assigned to women in Church manuals. She gave specific examples from handbooks and lesson manuals in which female members are taught deference to men. A particular passage cited from a YWMIA manual

advised an LDS girl to honor her brother's priesthood by shining his shoes, helping him learn scriptures, and leaving him the bathroom on Sunday morning.

While critical of such notions, Dr. Anderson admonished women not to attack the institution of the Church. Emphasizing the importance of serving people rather than programs, she urged women not to become involved in bureaucratic power struggles but to seek spiritual power in personal righteousness.

Francine Russell Bennion, a former Young Women's General Board member and currently a stake Relief Society president, gave an interpretive response to the other women's remarks. She pointed out that "the Church" means many different things to different people and warned against the danger of considering the opinion of individuals or committees within the Church as doctrinal, even when those opinions appear in lesson manuals.

Ms. Bennion described some of the ways in which the concerns of a few can become the policies of the many, saying that warning people about



specific temptations is one thing, but basing policy on the assumption that none of us can or should deal with those temptations is another.

Commenting also on the difficulty of distinguishing between the human and the divine in Church literature and pronouncements, Ms. Bennion joined Dr. Anderson in urging women to rely on personal testimony and promptings from the Lord as to their individual roles and callings in life.

AMCAP MEETS

The Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists held its seventh annual conference at the University of Utah LDS Institute on the 1 and 2 of October.

Gary Collins, professor of Pastoral Psychology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, was the first non-Mormon to be invited to conduct the association's annual workshop. Collins discussed the possibility of conceptualizing and applying Christian principles in counseling.

Past AMCAP president, Allen Bergin, delivered the Presidential Address on "A Philosophy of Therapeutic Change." Other participants included Mary Sturlaugson Eyre, the LDS church's first black female missionary, speaking about "The Black Experience," and BYU philosophy professor, C. Terry Warner, addressing the topic, "Thoughts on Personality and Change."

Elder L. Tom Perry referred to his experiences growing up in a closely-knit LDS family and expressed his concerns about today's society. With numerous problems threatening contemporary families, Elder Perry noted that Mormon counselors have their work cut out for them.

Mary Beth Raynes, from the Salt Lake County Division of Health, moderated a panel on human intimacy which included Dr. David Coombs, Dr. Val D. MacMurray, and Dr. Robert S. Stahmann.

The selecting of new officers and the awarding of the association's annual honors were among the items of business conducted at the conference. Carlfred Broderick was elected AMCAP president and Paul Cook, secretary. Ramona Morris, former editor of the association's newsletter, received this year's Service to AMCAP Award, and Lowell L. Bennion was presented with the association's Distinguished Service to Humanity Award for his work with the Mormon Volunteer Corps.