

## PROPHET'S TALK PROMPTS EXAMINATION OF ROLE OF WOMEN

"Contrary to conventional wisdom, a mother's calling is in the home, not in the marketplace," said President Ezra Taft Benson at the 22 February Church-wide parents' fireside. His unequivocal address, "To the Mothers in Zion," which praised mothers as "the very heart and soul of the family," prompted intense discussions of the "God-ordained" role of mothers.

The prophet counseled healthy mothers to "have your children and have them early," and not to limit their family's size for personal or selfish reasons, including material possessions, social convenience and professional advantages.

"The Lord clearly defined the roles of mothers and fathers in providing and rearing a righteous posterity," he stated, and then quoted the late President Spencer W. Kimball: "It was never intended by the Lord that married women should compete with men in employment." In fact, some of the more controversial passages of the address were quotes from a 1977 fireside President Kimball gave in San Antonio, Texas, including: "Too many mothers work away from home to furnish sweaters and music lessons and trips and fun for their children. . . . Wives, come home from the typewriter, the laundry, the nursing, come home from the factory, the cafe."

The satellite-broadcast speech immediately prompted widespread discussion throughout the Church, especially in the intermountain area where members who missed the fireside could watch or listen to recordings friends made from the local broadcast on BYU's radio and television stations.

The Church received numerous

telephone calls about the speech and along Utah's Wasatch Front some mothers quit their jobs, prompting exaggerated rumors about large numbers of working mothers quitting work at the Church Office Building.

The following Sunday's church services became forums for discussion in Relief Society and priesthood meetings, and many monthly testimony meetings witnessed comments on the talk. At one stake conference, the stake president mentioned the prophet's points; then, with an ambiguous smile, he counseled his members to "adjust them into our lives until we feel comfortable with them."

Other members also emphasized the role of personal revelation or viewed the prophet's comments as a goal. "He's talking about what would be a wonderful ideal, but it's an ideal few people are able to realize," said Mary Stovall, director of the Womens Research Center at BYU. "What his talk hopefully will do is help people re-evaluate the situation. Are they giving enough time to their family?"

People who wanted to know what the fuss was about found little cause for controversy in the *Church News* account of Benson's talk, which left out the debated quotes and emphasized that his counsel applied to both parents, not just mothers.

"It is going to be an extremely wrenching experience for Mormon families to implement that teaching in their lives," said Carlfred Broderick, director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Center at the University of Southern California. Broderick, who was quoted in an Associated Press news story, added

"It's easier to deal with guilt than to do without the income."

However, others welcomed the president's address. "A firm statement was needed to get the people's attention," said Bryce Christensen, editor of *Family Newsletter*. "If he had used too many qualifiers and concessions to the spirit of the times, his message would have been dismissed. Instead of looking for a million excuses to evade what the prophet is saying, LDS intellectuals ought to be looking for ways to deal with the unprecedented economic and cultural pressures causing women to enter the work force."

A 1981 Church-sponsored study indicates that 40 percent of all LDS women work and an additional 6 percent are looking for work. Of mothers with school-age children, 57 percent work either full- or part-time.

Not surprisingly, some of the most intense discussions took place at Brigham Young University, where childbearing-age women pursue career-oriented studies. Some counselors in the Office of Student Life told the flood of women students who asked whether the Church wanted them to leave the university that they should seek personal revelation to guide them in applying the prophet's instructions.

The debate was particularly intense in the BYU law school, where women students are obviously preparing for a vocation and not just obtaining emergency backup skills. Moreover, the men are often supported by working wives, who may have consciously delayed having children until after graduation. Before the intense feelings subsided and regular study habits resumed, an open meeting of professors and students was held to discuss how to put the prophet's counsel in the context of all other Church teachings and expectations.

"This kind of experience illustrates the value of having a law school at BYU," said Law School Dean Bruce Hafen. "Here the professors share their commitment to the church and explain how they

try to apply its counsel." Hafen said that the Church's goal is to "solidify the family;" he feels his students understand the Church's concerns and work not to neglect their children.

Although many people felt that President Benson had simply reiterated the Church's long-standing position that, ideally, women who are raising children should remain in the home, the ensuing heated discussion was markedly different from the apparent equanimity with which members had received President Kimball's similar statements on the issue.

The divisive feelings aroused by the talk were amply evident at the BYU Women's Conference, held March 12-13 and attended by 5,000 LDS women from around the United States.

Probably aware of the distance between President Benson's comments and the "Diversity in Works, Unity in Faith" conference theme, BYU President Jeffrey R. Holland attempted to bridge the gap in his welcoming comments. He affirmed that BYU was a "place for and a symbol of growth and development and learning, including and especially for women." Using a U.S. Constitution bicentennial theme he described the extension of rights to all and said there is still important work to do, in a tone that implied he was referring to the rights of women.

Holland reminded the audience of President Benson's commitment to defending constitutional principles and then said, "Recently he has also counseled us to protect the freedoms—and futures—of our children."

Holland then discussed the problems confronting children and adults today as they exercise their freedom of choice and quoted President Benson's 1965 General Conference counsel on the use of personal revelation in decision making: "Usually the Lord gives us the overall objectives to be accomplished and some guidelines to follow, but he expects us to work out most of the details and methods ourselves. The methods and pro-

cedures are usually developed through study and prayer and by living so that we can obtain and follow the promptings of the Spirit. . . those spiritually alert look at the objectives, check the guidelines laid down by the Lord and his prophets, and then prayerfully act—without having to be commanded ‘in all things.’”

The two-day conference featured a wide variety of topics, including a panel on “Accepting Diversity, Achieving Unity” panel included some wives of General Authorities. Other sessions focussed on financial management, marital relations, Christian living, human sexuality, and parenting.

BYU Organizational Behavior Associate Professor Kate Kirkham discussed the value of non-contentious disagreement and differences in the Church, and stressed the need to have discernment in understanding others.

Ida Smith, founding director of BYU’s Women’s Research Institute, vigorously exhorted women to be active in the world, saying “The boundaries of the home must exceed the boundaries of the house. . . . perhaps in trying to

maintain homes as a haven from the bad of the world, sometimes we exclude instead of include. The best home brings the world to people. . . home is any place you extend yourself and make connections.”

The panel discussion on “The Price of Excellence,” which included mothers who are pursuing academic and cultural interests, was the most confrontational session. The discussion elicited angry comments from the audience, including accusations that the panelists were not following the prophet’s counsel to stay home.

The majority of women attending seemed to enjoy the conference; yet, despite of the intended celebration of diversity while building a united faith, long-time attendees say this was the most divisive women’s conference ever held. Many women attending were critical of the preponderance of career women with degrees who were held up as role models, and occasionally questioned their faith. President Benson’s talk was often used not just to guide one’s own life but also to judge other’s.

Some women leaders have expressed concern that the discord

among women at the conference is an intimation of a serious schism forming among LDS women and they are saddened at the polarization in a society where charity and sisterhood are stated ideals.

Since President Benson’s address is now being distributed in pamphlet form, it will continue to be discussed throughout the Church.

Some insightful comments on the issues concerning the role of women and how to constructively approach them were given in Pat Holland’s Women’s Conference keynote address where she shared her own spiritual struggles with conflicting priorities can help make the dialogue more constructive. “I am very appreciative of the added awareness that the women’s movement has given to a gospel principle we have had since Mother Eve and before—that of free agency, the right to choose,” she stated.

“But one of the most unfortunate side effects we have faced in this matter of agency is, because of the increasing diversity of life styles for women today, we seem even more uncertain and less secure with each other. We are getting not closer, but further away from that sense of

community and sisterhood that has sustained and given us unique strength for generations. There seems to be an increase in our competitiveness and a decrease in our generosity with one another.

“We simply cannot call ourselves Christian and continue to judge one another—or ourselves—so harshly. No Mason jar of bing cherries is worth a confrontation that robs us of our compassion and sisterhood.

“Obviously the Lord has created us with different personalities, as well as differing degrees of energy, interest, health, talent, and opportunity. So long as we are committed to righteousness and living a life of faithful devotion, we should celebrate these divine differences, knowing they are a gift from God. We must not feel so frightened; we must not be so threatened and insecure; we must not need to find exact replicas of ourselves in order to feel validated as a woman of worth. There are many things over which we can be divided, but *one* thing is needful for our unity—the empathy and compassion of the living Son of God.”

## A NEW WITNESS FOR GOD

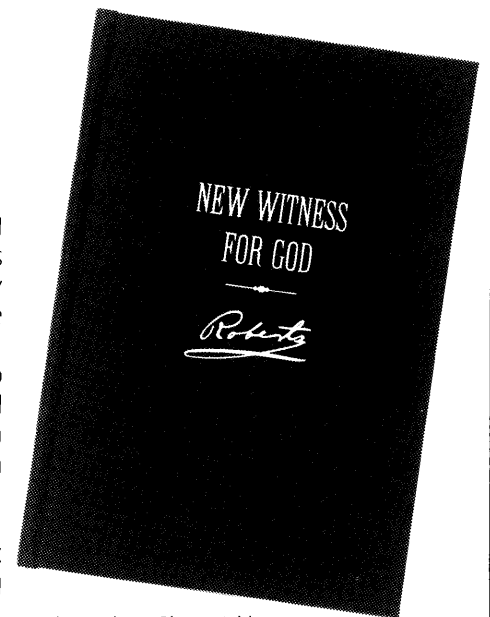
By

B.H. ROBERTS

This is the Editorial Series that Elder Roberts wrote in 1888 for the *Millennial Star* while he was its assistant editor. It was re-printed in the *Contributor* as soon as the *Star* arrived in Utah, along with a few changes that were made by the editor, Junius F. Wells, and/or by President Woodruff, who was also the YMMIA superintendent.

This is an excellent overview of what President Roberts later developed into the three-volume set. He says, in his biographical notes, that “there was laid during that two years missionary experiences in editorial work, the foundation of the three-volumed *New Witnesses for God*, much of the matter of which appeared in the *Star* editorials.” (p. 161)

112 pages. This compilation uses the same format as the three-volume set. Just \$9.95 at most LDS bookstores. Or contact Lynn Pulsipher, P.O. Box 1607, Provo, Utah 84603-1607 for copies or more information. Shipping costs will be additional. Please specify First Class or Fourth Class Book Rate.



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# MORMON CANON DISCUSSED AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

In an effort to help establish a "permanent forum in which the many scholars who have more than a historical perspective on the study of religions can specifically address questions relating to Mormonism," several Brigham Young University professors participated in a consultation session at the most recent annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, which was held in conjunction with the Society for Biblical Literature on 22-25 November in Atlanta, Georgia.

The session, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon' and the Study of 'Other' Religious Traditions," was anchored by a W. D. Davies article "Reflections on the Mormon Canon." Davies, who is the George Washington Ivey Professor of Advanced Studies and Research in Christian Origins at Duke University, discussed the way Mormons wrestle with their canonized sacred texts, and their view of revelation. "Progressive and continuous revelation is certainly an attractive notion," he concluded, "but equally certainly it is not without the grave danger of so altering or enlarging upon the original revelation as to distort, annul, and even falsify it." Davies' paper is included in his recent book, *Christians Among Jews and Gentiles*, by Fortress Press.

Building upon and responding to Davies' paper, John W. Welch, BYU professor of law, and David J. Whittaker, BYU archivist, presented the paper "Mormonism's Open Canon: Historical Perspectives on its Religious Limits and Potentials." Using Davies' analysis, they discussed how "open" the Mormon canon is and explored the historical, theological and institutional reasons why "the open canon of Mormon Christianity has not

become a Pandora's box."

They emphasized four points which check the belief of an open canon: 1. The LDS refusal to adopt a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy has permitted textual corrections and emendations of existing scriptures; 2. The belief that Joseph Smith gave the core Standard Works to the Church has kept other LDS non-canonical writings peripheral and secondary; 3. The institutional practices of common consent, unanimity of the Quorum of the Twelve, the unique role of the Church president as the Lord's spokesman, and the effect of precedent and scripture have provided norms that keep the canon from being widely open; and, 4. the belief that oral messages when moved upon by the Holy Ghost are also "scripture" with a complementing burden on the hearer to also have the Spirit creates a dynamic balance and lessens the need for all scripture to be written as canon.

M. Gerald Bradford's paper, "Approaches to the Study of 'Other' Religions: Thomas F. O'Dea and the Mormons," presented previously unknown notes of a 1958 address in which the author of *The Mormons* summarized parts of his groundbreaking sociological study of Mormonism and discussed issues of methodology in approaching the study of a religion. Some points included: the insider/outsider perspectives; the importance of treating it as a religion instead of some other category; seeing the religion as a whole, with no one dominant theme; setting Mormonism in its own time and place; avoiding overly strong comparisons with other religions which can give a distorted view; and keeping an open mind. "Before there was a broad understanding of what reli-

gious studies is, O'Dea was doing it," concluded Bradford, who is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Other participants included Kent P. Jackson, BYU associate professor of ancient scripture, who gave a response to Davies' paper, and Truman G. Madsen, who spoke on "Approaches to the Study of 'Other' Religions," based on his experience holding BYU's Richard L. Evans Chair for Christian Understanding and organizer of several BYU Religious Studies Center symposiums.

Because of the success of the session, the consultation status was renewed for another year. Gordon Thomasson, the session's chair and organizer, is organizing the session for the 1987 annual meeting on "Mormonism, Biblical, Common, and Constitutional Law and the State." Although previous AAR meetings, have had papers and sessions devoted to Mormonism, the obtaining of consultation status, which requires annual renewal, is a major step towards having a permanent session on Mormonism at each conference.

## LDS BLACKS HOLD FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE

"Love One Another" was both the impromptu opening song and the outcome at the first LDS Black History Cultural Conference. Blacks from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Oakland, California, gathered in Salt Lake City on February 21-22 to create a support community and to discuss the place of blacks in Mormon history and contemporary LDS culture.

The conference was sponsored by *Ebony Rose*, a two-year old Salt Lake-based magazine/newsletter edited by Marva Collins and intended to link black Mormons throughout the world in a supporting network. Most of those who attended had joined the LDS church since President Kimball received his 1978 revelation that allowed blacks to be ordained to the priesthood.

At several of the Saturday workshops conference attendees discussed Church history and grappled with the past and present struggles of being a black Mormon.

Mary L. Bankhead, a gracious 85 year old woman from the Salt Lake Valley, related her family's experiences in the Church. Her grandfather, Green Flake, a slave, was the first black to enter the Salt Lake

Valley, driving Brigham Young's carriage. Mrs. Bankhead said that many of his descendants remained active in the Church but that the men had more troubles than the women. However, she said she had always felt a part of the Church and even served as the Relief Society president in Union Fork, Utah.

Jerry Carter, the creator of a local Utah PBS television documentary on Utah's Black History, told how Utah paralleled the segregationist attitudes and practices of the greater American society, including requiring separate restaurants and hotels for blacks. "The Lord called on me to make this documentary," said Carter, who is not LDS. Provided he gets the funding, he plans to produce a documentary on blacks in the Church to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the priesthood revelation.

Carter's comments saddened his audience who were disappointed to learn that the Utah saints did not rise above the discriminatory practices of the nation. However, when Chester Hawkins, a black historian at BYU, shared statements on blacks from early Church leaders many in the audience became visibly disturbed.

Stating that the history of Mormon blacks "needs to be told," Hawkins described how Joseph Smith's views on slavery and abolition fluctuated over time but that, although they were not unequivocal, they were progressive for his day. Among other early Mormon statements, he quoted Brigham Young's assertion that the "negro is damned."

Hawkins, who is editing a forthcoming comprehensive collection of Mormon statements on blacks, then outlined the lives of several prominent black Mormons, including: Green Flake; Elijah Abel, a black in Nauvoo who was given the priesthood and went through the temple; Jane Manning Jones, a black woman adopted into Joseph Smith's family; Samuel Chambers, a slave who was illegally baptized and moved to Utah after the Emancipation Proclamation; and Walker Lewis, a "forgotten black man" who also held the priesthood.

For most at the conference, this information was new. They challenged his more disturbing sources, and, when satisfied with their accuracy, engaged in an obviously painful discussion on the fallibility of Church leaders, while still affirming their belief in the Church. Most said they didn't believe the denial of the priesthood to blacks to have ever been a true doctrine and the change in policy only awaited a prophet to petition the Lord.

On Sunday the conference met with Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. Elder Kikuchi said he thought there was a need for gatherings like this and also for the

*Ebony Rose* magazine and regional ethnic support groups. He was not, however, in favor of so-called "specialty wards" for ethnic groups, except perhaps where there is a language problem.

He used his own family's move from Japan to Utah as an illustration. "Since I'm going to live in the United States, I want my children to learn English," he said. Although invited to attend the Japanese ward in Salt Lake City, his family goes to their local residential ward; however, they do attend cultural and social functions with the Japanese saints.

Elder Kikuchi then encouraged the blacks not to feel left out because of their experiences as a minority but to work for and look to the day when "there will be one to two million black Saints and one or two black General Authorities." After sharing some personal experiences he counseled them that the answer is love and then sang a cappella "As I Have Loved You." Those attending the conference felt that it was a good beginning to building a supportive black community in the Church.

The 1988 annual conference will be held during the first week in February in Washington, D.C., and will be hosted by the Washington Genesis Group, which is sponsored by the Church's Washington Area Public Communications Council. At present there are two other regional LDS black groups, a Genesis group in Oakland, California, and a Unison Group in Atlanta, Georgia. The original Genesis group in Salt Lake City recently disbanded.

## PERSONAL ESSAY EXPLORED AT AML CONFERENCE

Stating that in his personal essays he felt the need to "push vulnerability to the brink and yet retain the literary aspect," Eugene England, author of the collection of essays, *Dialogues With Myself*, addressed the topic of "Literature and Personal Experience" at the opening session of the recent Association of Mormon Letters meeting.

In contrast, BYU English Professor Edward Geary expressed the need for distance in his essays; a distance of time, since present experience so often "seems of no significance." He read an excerpt from a semi-autobiographical work dealing with a boy's teenage experience in a small Utah town.

Session commentator Levi Peterson described England's essays as a "philosophical, theological discourse," while Geary's were more like the "restructuring of fiction in a carefully wrought essay." He then led the audience in an open discussion of the freedom afforded by the personal essay for philosophical impulses and speculation.

The annual conference, held on 24 January 1987 at the University of Utah LDS Institute, expanded the usual format of a presentation of papers by including generous time for discussion and audience participation.

The late morning session, "Literature and Scripture," explored the various approaches to reading the Bible as literature. Steven Sondrup, a founder of AML, opened the session by stating that the very term "scripture and literature" is problematic: The reader should keep in mind the scriptures as scripture, yet see within it the differing generic conventions. He gave the example of the book of Isaiah which contains narrative and poetic genres as well as oral formulaic patterns.

Steven Walker's less formal approach looked at the Bible as a narrative of human experience and

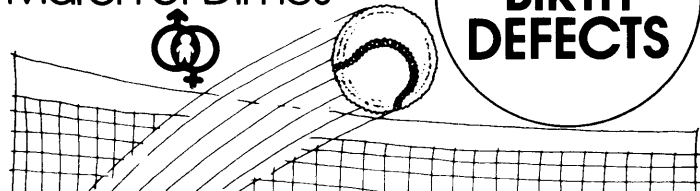
warned against reading it with cultural expectations. However, moderator John Tanner noted, that in bringing one's own generic expectations to the Bible, the reader receives a generic interpretation and gave as example the interpretation of Hosea in the Gospel of Matthew.

An interesting discussion ensued with members of the audience presenting their own approaches to the Bible, ranging from interpreting the Bible as a dynamic text to seeing it as an invitation to moral interpretation, to viewing it as the word of men responding to the divine, or reading it as theology, an aesthetic experience, or as a catalyst to experiencing the Holy Ghost. Levi Peterson suggested reading the Bible not as scripture, but rather as the story of human nature, of people responding to people.

The afternoon session presented an even less formal approach to Mormon literature with an Editors' Roundtable consisting of representatives from the various publishers of Mormon literature. Linda Newell represented both *Dialogue* and the University of Utah Press; Daniel Rector, Signature Books (on the behalf of Lavina Fielding Anderson) and SUNSTONE; Cory Maxwell, Bookcraft; and Jack Lyon, Deseret Book. The panel gave accounts of what type of literature they published, how they solicited their manuscripts, the audience they hoped to reach, and what plans their companies had for future publications.

The attention was focused on Deseret Book and Bookcraft with concerns about the lack of quality fiction produced by these major publishers. Jack Lyon replied, "we can't publish what we don't receive," although he said that Levi Peterson's book, *The Backslider* probably would not have been accepted by Deseret Book. Never-

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theless, he stated that of late Deseret Book has published more quality fiction dealing with controversial matters and "sensitive themes well handled."

Linda Newell, new Mormon Studies editor at the University of Utah Press, said the press is committed to publishing four books a year with the first book (a survey by Jessie Embry on the children of polygamists) soon to be released.

The late afternoon session, "Emerging Voices," included poetry and short story readings by Patty Gunter, Lance Larsen, Pauline Mortensen, and Zina Peterson.

The 1980 awards for outstanding Mormon literature were given out at the luncheon: children's literature, to author Steve

Wunderlie and illustrator Brent Watts for *Marty's World* (Bookcraft); personal and family history book, Myrtle McDonald for *No Regrets* (privately published); personal and family history essay, Paul M. Edwards for "When Will the Little Woman Come Out of the House?" (*John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*); short story, Michael Fillerup for "Hozohoogoo Nanina Doo" (*Dialogue*); poetry, Dennis Marden Clark for "Sunwatch" (*Literature and Belief*); personal essay, Susan Taber for "In Jeopardy Every Hour" (*Dialogue*); religious literature, Dennis Rasmussen for *The Lord's Question* (The Keter Foundation); and novel, Levi Peterson for *The Backslider* (Signature Books).

## SUNSPOTS

In an effort to reverse declining morality and Church activity at Brigham Young University, each spring students who want to come back the next fall must now turn in a BYU bishop-signed Continuing Ecclesiastical Endorsement form. Because of the late notice school administrators had of the new Board of Trustees policy, they simply revised the form students and bishops sign as part of the university's admissions application. Many students must not have read the Honor Code since they applied, for when the form was released there was a lot of grumbling about the code's language ("I will live and continue to live" . . .) and about the requirement to write a short essay explaining the code. The release statement requiring students' signatures caused the most dissent: "I agree that the university may obtain confidential recommendations from Church leaders or clergy. I hereby waive any right I may have under university policies or federal or state law to examine confidential recommendations received by the university." Many law students turned in unsigned forms, or modified the statement before signing. Some

student ward bishops treated the forms with a casualness that almost defeated the form's intent. One bishop announced that anyone wanting a signed form could pick one up from his counselor after sacrament meeting. School administrators feel frustrated that their efforts to provide a timely form prior to semester end was not appreciated, but they promise a new form next year.



For those who watch the Tabernacle podium with the same diligence as those who watch the Kremlin reviewing stands, there were two changes of note at the April General Conference. First a new row of General Authority red chairs was added, replacing three rows of hardwood benches, to provide seating for eight new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy and the presidencies of the women's organizations. Second, the pulpit was air conditioned to combat the heat from the television lights.

## OXYMORMONS

