



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title**      Review of *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women*, edited by Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook.

**Author**     Beverly Wilson Palmer

**Reference**   *Mormon Studies Review* 5 (2018): 132–136.

**ISSN**        2156-8022 (print), 2156-8030 (online)  
<https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0118>

---

Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds. *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourse by Latter-day Saint Women*. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017.

*Reviewed by Beverly Wilson Palmer*

*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 5, 2018, pp. 132–37

© 2018 Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0118> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/mimsr.21568030>

IN *At the Pulpit*—AN ANNOTATED COLLECTION of fifty-four discourses given by Mormon women between 1831 and 2016—editors Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook clearly achieve their stated goal of “representing the varied ways that Mormon women have addressed public audiences” (p. xxvii). The earliest speeches included in this book were delivered in the American Midwest until the mid-1840s; after 1852 these addresses were almost entirely given in Utah (exceptions being Liverpool, England, in 1861; Chicago in 1893; Washington, DC, in 1895; and Mexico City in 1972). The fact that speakers came from places like New Zealand and South Africa, for example, reflects the geographic expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Indeed, in 1996 Chieko N. Ozaki stated that more Mormons lived abroad than in the United States (p. 256).

As noted in the book's prefatory sections, “many types of pulpits exist in the Latter-day Saints culture,” suggesting that Mormon women have always had opportunities, even if limited, to speak in public settings (p. xvii). These “pulpits” range from the meeting sites of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association (later changed to the Young Women's Mutual Improvement Association) to the Relief Society sessions of general conferences, as well as to locations of various organizations connected with Brigham Young University. On one occasion, Sarah M. Kimball's 1895 address to the National Council of Women,

the audience consisted of both Mormons and non-Mormons. Only at Brigham Young University did the audiences appear to consist of both males and females (e.g., see Belle Spafford's address, p. 185).

Many topics covered in the early discourses in this book reflect broad themes and traditional concerns shared by many nineteenth-century religious women: prayer, faith, temperance, education, and charity. Indeed, other women orators who were contemporaries of these Mormon women, like the Quaker Lucretia Mott, spoke on similar subjects. Mott and her LDS contemporaries also addressed issues beyond religion, such as suffrage (p. 80), the conflicting roles of women (pp. 157–58, 185–86, 242), and political activism (p. 128). As the discourses in the book continue into the mid-twentieth century, it becomes clear that Mormon women spoke on events in the US such as World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. After 1950, the speakers' subjects shifted primarily to the practices and beliefs of the Mormon religion.

A theme of special interest to this non-Mormon reviewer is the women's emphasis on the power of the Spirit, or how the voice of God has spoken directly to them—a theme that echoes the experiences of female preachers in the Quaker, Methodist, or Baptist traditions, for example. In their introduction, Reeder and Holbrook write, "Ultimately, Latter-day Saints believe that the Holy Spirit both prompts speakers to address topics of divine importance and confirms to listeners the authority of a speaker who preaches by genuine inspiration" (p. xxiv). A number of powerful examples of this type of inspiration, ranging throughout the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first century, are included throughout the book. In 1852 Phoebe Angell announced that "in the night she received the following receipt [recipe] as though a voice spoke to her" with instructions on treating chills and fever (p. 28). Likewise, Gladys Sitati told her audience that to avoid conflict, they would "humbly go to Heavenly Father. . . . He will send the Holy Ghost to provide a confirming witness and to guide us on actual things to do" (p. 337). Rachel Leatham in 1908 stated, "I know the gospel is true because God has revealed it to unto me" (p. 105). Annie Noble

described how while on her way to a Mormon meeting in Nottingham, England, she could at last declare that “Joseph Smith was a true prophet of the Lord. And in a moment it seemed like a voice said, ‘You can say it now and I said, Yes, I can say it’” (p. 113). Others, like Elaine Cannon, emphasized women’s special gendered role as “a daughter of God” (p. 207). In 2001 Sheri Dew asked the women of the church to “imagine that God, who knows us perfectly, reserved us to come now, when the stakes would be higher and the opposition more intense than ever? . . . Can you imagine that he chose us because he knew we would be fearless in building Zion?” (p. 269).

Several conversion stories in this volume emphasize the impact of such experiences. As a child, Jutta Baum Busche suffered the deprivations of wartime Germany. Shortly following her marriage in 1955, Mormon missionaries arrived at her home in Dortmund. “I was impressed with many things about these young men. . . . There was no façade,” she explained (p. 235). Similarly, Mormon missionaries gave Irina Kratzer, a doctor living in Barnaul, Russia, in 1996, a copy of the Book of Mormon to help improve her English: “The more I read this book, the more I saw the gap between the teachings of Christ and the way I lived” (p. 262). Most vividly, Judy Brummer described the dialogue with her family after being visited by two women missionaries in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1979. From her family she received “an avalanche of anti-Mormon literature,” she stated. “I asked God to please tell me if the Book of Mormon was the word of God, and the Holy Ghost witnessed to me, in my heart, with such power that I could not dismiss it as an emotion” (pp. 315–16). In these descriptions we see the profound influence of the Mormon church’s missionary movement in awakening a religious consciousness.

And yet personal salvation is not the only theme laced throughout Mormon women’s discourses: a variety of topics hint at larger themes that religious women, and women in general, emphasized at various points in time. As early as 1869, Eliza Snow advocated good works, a cause promoted by many other religious leaders, including Lucretia Mott, who, at a Quaker meeting held in the same year, declared, “We

have been taught to manifest our faith by our works, by our fruits, by our everyday life.”<sup>1</sup> Snow told her listeners at a ward Relief Society meeting, “In administering to the poor you have already aided your bishop and lessened his cares, and every labor that comes within the province of woman devolves upon the Female Relief Society” (p. 44). Throughout several discourses, various speakers praise the accomplishments of the Relief Society, a vital outlet for LDS women’s activism. By 1950 Margaret Pickering was alerting her sisters to the “great opportunity” the Relief Society offers: “It does not do much good to talk about such big things as ‘humanity,’ ‘democracy,’ and the ‘brotherhood of man’ unless we can bring them down and apply them to our next-door neighbor” (p. 163). Stressing the women’s accomplishments, Elaine L. Jack asked her audience in 1993, “Can you imagine the good that has been done in over a hundred nations by thousands of Relief Society sisters? Can you imagine the blessings that have come into the lives of these women?” (pp. 248–49).

Editors Reeder and Holbrook have, with only a few minor exceptions, succeeded in the challenging tasks required to produce a comprehensive scholarly edition: searching, selecting, transcribing, annotating, and indexing. In their introduction Reeder and Holbrook provide an impressive narrative of the growing participation of women in the Mormon church’s various agencies. As they write, “The available records powerfully demonstrate that women have contributed to Latter-day Saint devotion through sermons, speeches, prayers, songs, and stories” (p. xv). Moreover, the introductory material clearly describes the procedures they followed for each step of the editing process. They selected “speeches that were well written, that contained theological analysis, and that illustrated women’s faith” (p. xxix). However, in several of the early chapters the texts seem to have been selected not for their rhetorical quality but rather for the purpose of calling attention to the speakers’ lives. For example, the discourse of Phoebe Angell, a single mother who migrated to Utah in 1848, is represented by a single paragraph that

---

1. Christopher Densmore et al., eds., *Lucretia Mott Speaks: The Essential Speeches and Sermons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 182.

is overwhelmed by the chapter's five introductory paragraphs (p. 28). Similarly brief is the discourse on faith by Mary Isabella Horne, another migrant to Utah with a fascinating life outlined in three long paragraphs (p. 38). One is left to question if these choices truly meet the standard set out by the editors.

The thorough verification of the transcriptions (each discourse was read aloud to another editor three times) is commendable. Annotation understandably consumes most of any editor's time, and Reeder and Holbrook provide expert scholarly apparatus. Helpful to any reader are the notes explaining the history and terminology of the Mormon religion such as "schools of the prophets" (p. 390n23) and "noble birth-right" (p. 429n35). In fact, a list of terms (familiar to Mormons of course but not to outside readers) like *sealed* and *stake patriarch* would have been a useful addition, similar to the glossary of Quaker terms like *disownment* or *minute* that was included in *The Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*.

The editors carefully document the texts with speaker interviews when available, as well as with references to recent Mormon scholarship, for example, *Daughters in My Kingdom: The History and Work of the Relief Society* (2012). They also cite other highly regarded authorities outside the Mormon religion, such as Lori Ginzburg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence* for women's participation in reform movements (p. 356n21) and Thomas Borstelmann's *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (p. 415n20) for events in that decade. I do question, however, some of the excessive notes, which can at times distract from the addresses. Reeder and Holbrook could have omitted all references to biblical quotations, a decision made by the editors of Lucretia Mott's speeches and sermons. Almost any reader in the twenty-first century can easily locate these sources if needed. And do we need an extensive note on the various publications of an Isaac Watts hymn (p. 389n16), especially when Watts isn't included in the index? Or a description of the capitol grounds in Salt Lake (p. 419n29)? That said, the thorough index is very helpful. Frequently occurring subjects

like “Relief Society” are usefully broken down into the subtopics “early membership” and “purpose of.”

This moderately priced collection, while primarily aimed at a Mormon audience, offers non-Mormons valuable insights into a woman’s role in the Mormon religion, a role that, until this volume, has received scant attention. In so doing, *At the Pulpit* contributes significantly to understanding and interpreting women’s experiences in American religious history and US history overall.

**Beverly Wilson Palmer**, research associate in the History Department at Pomona College, has edited documentary editions of nineteenth-century reformers, including *The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner* (1990) and *Lucretia Mott Speaks: The Essential Speeches and Sermons* (2017).

---

Adam J. Powell. *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015.

*Reviewed by Stephen C. Taysom*

*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 5, 2018, pp. 137–42

© 2018 Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/msr.2018.0119> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/mimsr.21568030>

ADAM J. POWELL’S *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy* is not a book for the faint of heart or those allergic to theoretical musings. In just over two hundred pages, Powell manages to produce not only a fascinating comparison between Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century Mormonism and the religious thought of second-century church father Irenaeus, but also introduces an innovative application of the work of Max Weber and Hans Mol to the question of religious conflict management. This is a book about the dynamic nature of religion—how it makes and remakes itself while colliding with ever-present cultural forces.