

example of the "unjust and cruel treatment" of all emigrants by Saints, as some anti-Mormons claim, and being "a bizarre and inexplicable aberration," as most emigrants would have judged it. "Given the prevailing prejudices," Unruh observes, "it is surprising that so much beneficial interaction between Saints and Gentiles did occur." He notes at the chapter's end that "irrational prejudices of the time" prevented Saints and Gentiles from fully appreciating "how much they both were profiting" from the overland stopovers at the Mormon halfway house.

*The Plains Across* has become one of the standard works that must be consulted by anyone who seriously studies the California, Oregon, and Mormon trail experiences; U.S. nineteenth-century migration patterns; and the prairie period of the American West. Its approachable style makes it useful to those who need reference material for family histories.

—William G. Hartley

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*Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations outside the Mainstream*, edited by Catherine Wessinger (University of Illinois Press, 1993)

Catherine Wessinger has collected essays on women's leadership roles (theoretical and actual) in a handful of American groups outside the religious mainstream. The chapters, written by historians, folklorists, and theologians, take a 1980 article by Mary Farrell Bednarowski as their starting point.

Bednarowski had looked at nineteenth-century religious groups for common elements contributing to expanded leadership roles for women. These elements, she found, included (1) the denial of an exclusively male anthropomorphic deity; (2) a reinterpretation or denial of the Fall; (3) the lack of a traditional, ordained clergy; and (4) a reexamination of marriage and motherhood as the only proper and fulfilling spheres for women.

For the most part, the essays in Wessinger's collection revolve around religious groups meeting Bednarowski's four criteria. The groups include Shakerism, Theosophy, African-American Spiritualism, Christian Science, New Thought, and feminist spirituality. The collection also offers some analysis of three groups that do not otherwise fit Bednarowski's model: Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and Mormonism. Seventh-Day Adventists are excluded even though their prophetess, Ellen G. White, is mentioned twice in passing.

The six-page discussion of Mormonism confines itself to some women's current attempts to reconcile gender roles and theology from within the Church. Unfortunately, no historical overview of women's roles in Mormonism is given, as is often provided in the essays examining other groups.

All essays accept insiders' theological explanations without question. No attempts are made to discredit any group's religious claims. Generally, the authors believe that marginal religious groups are more supportive of the idea of

female leadership than are the mainstream traditions. This characterization holds true even for many of the groups where leadership, in actual practice, changed from reliance on a few charismatic founding mothers into a male hierarchy.

—Julie Hartley-Moore

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*Sisters at the Well: Women and the Life and Teachings of Jesus*, by Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993)

*Sisters at the Well* tells the story of each woman in the four Gospels who came to Christ's well. Through these stories, the book allows us to see how Christ regarded women then and now.

With no claim to offer the "definitive or final word" (3), the Holzapfels offer lay readers a fresh perspective on what it meant to be a female and, especially, a disciple at the time of Christ. They make a welcome contribution to a general reader's insight. For example, the story of the woman with an issue of blood who is healed by Christ (Mark 5:25-34) is enhanced by the authors' explanation of the strictures regarding ritual impurity, the probable economic impoverishment of the chronically ill, the garments Jesus might have been wearing, the social code regarding male/female touching or speaking in public, and a linguistic analysis of the Hebrew word *shalom* (100-103). Multiply this incident by the many miracles, encounters, and teachings involving or directed at women in the Gospels, and

you have an idea of what the Holzapfels offer in this volume.

An interesting chapter discusses Jesus' "atypical" female progenitors. Other chapters consider women in the parables; women Jesus met "along the way"; and women in their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. Three chapters feature women as disciples and allow us to see the Lord's equal acceptance of women and men in this regard. The chapter on women as witnesses of the Passion is revealing and insightful. Initial chapters attempt to place the women of Palestine in the context of the Greco-Roman-Judaic world of their time.

Interested readers will appreciate the bibliography of sources which lists ancient and modern editions of the Bible and other texts, standard reference works, recent feminist volumes, periodicals, and many LDS contributions. The extensive footnoting, however, is sometimes distracting and not always useful. Photos of ancient artifacts add credibility, but the line drawings are less helpful.

Because of Jesus' teachings and example, the Saints of the early days learned that a woman was "not less because she was female and not meritorious only if she was married and biologically capable of bearing children" (153). The Holzapfels have no axe to grind and incite no gender-based animosity. They conclude that men and women must be one in Christ, but they insist on our recognition that women were demonstrably among the first and most faithful disciples to drink from the well of living water.

—Sydney S. Reynolds