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Motherhood, Deconstruction, and a Crumbling Cosmos

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Oral Presentation O1.3

MOTHERHOOD, DECONSTRUCTION, AND A CRUMBLING COSMOS

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In Robert H. Abzug's book *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, he argues that early American reformers, driven by their strong evangelical beliefs, were trying to create God's kingdom of heaven on earth and rebuild their shattered cosmos by reforming nearly every aspect of American society. According to Abzug, their actions and sense of reality were part of a larger cosmic meta-history indeed to bring the coming millennium. While Abzug's work focuses on the major reformers and reform movements, it overlooks and dismisses other worldviews that influenced these reformers. Specifically, he focuses on the radical women reformers and dismisses the mainstream, and as a result has an incomplete theory that does accurately account for the nuance of position and belief within early first-wave feminism. His lack of understanding is especially evident in his analysis of Catherine Beecher. Beecher, along with others, worked within this framework to advocate for a powerful, but separate, sphere of influence for women. And the revolutionary aspects of (what is considered by many scholars) a conservative movement become even more apparent by applying Derrida's theories of hierarchical pairs. Abzug's work is incomplete, and I hope to extend it, challenge it, and ultimately improve it through such an analysis of the rhetoric used by and assumptions of reformers such as Catherine Beecher, Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Huntley Sigourney, and Susan Warner.