

Mormonism's First Theologian

The Essential Parley P. Pratt, foreword by Peter L. Crawley (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), xxvi, 242 pp., index, \$17.95.

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AT LEAST ONE Latter-day Saint in the early days of the Church truly understood what it means to have the heavens open and God speak after centuries of silence. Parley Parker Pratt, one of Mormonism's original Twelve Apostles, ordained at age twenty-seven by Joseph Smith himself, knew in his soul that revealed truth—final, full, and absolute—could never compromise or co-exist with human dogmas or systems. It would prevail over them and within the lifetime of the believer sweep to universal dominion. Anything less would deny its superiority.

"I will state as a prophecy, that there will not be an unbelieving Gentile upon this continent 50 years hence," Parley wrote in 1838, "and if they are not greatly scourged, and in a great measure overthrown, within five or ten years from this date, then the Book of Mormon will have proved itself false" (p. 24). Driven by this belief, the largely self-educated New Yorker became the young faith's first theologian and most ardent propagandist.

While Pratt's writings may strike some today as overly aggressive, they accurately reflect the militancy and zeal of a nineteenth-century millennial movement charged with establishing the kingdom of God on earth as a condition of Christ's return. Poor timing could be one reason Parley is best known today as a missionary or composer of hymns, while his younger brother, Orson, also an apostle, gets the credit for being an intellectual.

Now this new collection of Parley's most significant works, *The Essential Parley P. Pratt*, published by Signature Books under the direction of Peter L. Crawley

of Brigham Young University, restores Pratt to his rightful place in Mormon annals. It is highly appropriate that Pratt was chosen to be first in a new "Classics in Mormon Thought Series" that will include the writings and sermons of such notables as Brigham Young, John Taylor, Joseph Smith, Wilford Woodruff, B. H. Roberts, John Widtsoe, James Talmage, and others.

Presented in this handsome volume are the original texts of twenty of the apostle's most important writings, including "The Kingdom of God" from Mormonism's most successful missionary piece, *A Voice of Warning*, published in twenty-four English editions before 1900, and "Keys of the Mysteries of the Godhead" from *Key to the Science of Theology*, his most comprehensive work. Well worth the investment by itself is the foreword by Crawley, an authority on early Mormon publications, who evaluates Pratt's contribution to the theology of the Church and influence on other Mormon authors.

A gifted writer, Pratt was also a born publicist and anything but shy. He once informed the Queen of England that her government was just one of the toes of the great image, spoken of by Daniel, that would be smashed by the "stone cut out of the mountain without hands" (p. 88), referring to the Mormon kingdom. He then printed his letter in pamphlet form for widest distribution.

Pratt's case for the gospel "as Restored in this Age" was closely reasoned, internally sound, and founded squarely on the Bible, which he knew almost by heart. In defending Joseph Smith, he was emotional and convincing. And on offense, his preferred stance, the Archer of Paradise, as he was named by W. W. Phelps, shot real arrows from his bow. In a piece entitled "Zion's Watchman Unmasked, and Its Editor, Mr. L. R. Sunderland, Exposed; Truth Vindicated; The Devil Mad, and Priestcraft in Danger!" Pratt flatly told a Methodist critic that his church was "a