

REVIEWS

Loyal Follower, Bold Preacher

Terryl L. Givens, Matthew J. Grow. *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 396 pp. Appendices, Notes, Index. Hardcover: \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-537573-2

Reviewed by John G. Turner

In May 1857, a jilted husband finally found the man who had taken his wife. After tracking him to western Arkansas, he organized a posse to cut off his escape, followed him into a thicket of trees, pulled him from his horse, and stabbed him repeatedly near his heart. Hector McLean left to fetch a gun, returned, and fatally shot Mormon apostle Parley P. Pratt in the neck.

In *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*, Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow tell the dramatic story of Pratt's tumultuous fifty-year life. Since his death, Pratt has remained a beloved martyr to many Latter-day Saints, still admired for his *Autobiography*, his authorship of seven hymns in the current LDS hymnal, and his missionary zeal. While historians continue to debate his death's role in the Utah War and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, he is not well known outside the church, an oversight that *The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* may partly correct.

After years of spiritual seeking and dalliances with Baptists and Campbellites, in 1830 Pratt encountered the *Book of Mormon*, read it, believed, and immediately began preaching Mormonism across the northern United States. For the remainder of his life, Pratt impoverished himself and his family through his relentless commitment to missionary service on behalf of his church. Pratt's forceful defense of his faith—he often skewered his religious antagonists—gained a broad hearing for the fledgling religion and left behind a legacy of rich autobiographical and theological writings.

While Grow and Givens evidence a clear admiration for Pratt and explain his controversial actions sympathetically, they are not blind to his faults and convey the reasons why Pratt engendered opposition and controversy. Through Pratt's missionary travels

and torrent of writings, they also provide an accessible and colorful introduction to the first quarter-century of Mormon history, theology, and missions. Grow and Givens do not hesitate to discuss the uncomfortable episodes in Pratt's life, including his acceptance and practice of polygamy. Overstating the point somewhat, the *Deseret News* went so far as to deem Grow and Givens's biography "not recommended for readers under the age of 18." While hardly as graphic and salacious as that disclaimer would suggest, the authors do not whitewash the early history of plural marriage and Pratt's participation in it.

When Smith gradually revealed the doctrine of celestial marriage to Pratt, the latter still mourned the death of his first wife, Thankful Halsey, and was married to a second wife, Mary Ann Frost. The doctrine of celestial marriage reassured Pratt that both of his marriages would persist for eternity. In early 1843, Pratt returned from nearly three years in England, learned about plural marriage from Joseph Smith, and married Elizabeth Brotherton. He eventually was sealed to nine additional women, and his wives collectively bore him thirty children.

Pratt's practice of polygamy stirred several controversies, within and beyond the church. When he married Belinda Harden in 1844, she was already married to Benjamin Hilton, who was not a member of the church. Pratt also angered both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young by arranging sealings without their respective permission. Moreover, while Mary Ann Frost had accepted plural marriage, she became alienated from Pratt and was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity at the Nauvoo Temple. In that same venue, Parley's own brother Orson Pratt accused him of adultery, a charge later repeated by Brigham Young in relation to unauthorized plural marriages. Increasingly estranged from her husband, Mary Ann eventually divorced Pratt in 1853.

Polygamy also led to Pratt's 1857 death, which sparked a mixture of outrage (mostly in Utah) and approval. In the 1840s, Pratt had warned Mormon missionaries to respect the "harmony of husbands and wives" and had taught that separated spouses could not remarry without a formal divorce. In the case of Eleanor McClain, Pratt disregarded such sensible advice. The apostle felt a strong admiration and affection for Eleanor, whom he termed a "soul . . . worthy to be loved by some good Son of God." Both she

and Pratt saw her baptism into the church, flight from San Francisco, and marriage to Pratt as an escape from an abusive marriage and as the replacement of a meaningless civil contract with an eternal covenant.

It is not surprising, though, that many Americans concluded that Pratt deserved his bloody fate. Mormon apostle George A. Smith had argued that “mountain common law” gave husbands the moral right to kill men who slept with their wives. The Utah territorial legislature codified such justifiable homicides in 1852 when it provided immunity for husbands to kill “in a sudden heat of passion caused by the attempt of any such offender to commit a rape upon his wife, daughter, sister, mother, or other female relation or dependent . . . or when the defilement has actually been committed.” Similarly, in Texas a cuckolded husband could kill his wife’s “ravisher . . . at any time before he has escaped from the presence of his victim.” Neither of those laws suggested that a man could act with McLean’s level of premeditation. Across the country, though, juries in a series of high-profile murder cases in the 1850s and 1860s used an “unwritten law” to extend that privilege to include premeditation.¹ In keeping with such conventions, Americans justified Parley’s murder. While he lay dying, Pratt insisted that he hadn’t stolen another man’s wife. “[T]hey were oppressed,” he said, “and I did for them what I would do for the oppressed anywhere.” McLean defended his actions with pride and enjoyed his moment of fame. “I look upon it as the best act of my life,” he stated. Neither Hector McLean nor Parley Pratt regretted his actions.

Grow and Givens also detail Pratt’s occasional clashes with Brigham Young, which for the most part took place during the several years following Joseph Smith’s death. In addition to the dispute over unauthorized marriages, Young lambasted Pratt for his (and John Taylor’s) failure to adhere to his directives during their 1847 journey to the Salt Lake Valley. Although Pratt came to accept Young’s preeminent position among the apostles after 1847 and repeatedly displayed his loyalty to the church and its new president, Pratt’s actions in the mid-1840s gnawed at Young. Upon learning of Pratt’s murder, Young placed the slain apostle among Joseph and Hyrum Smith in the growing ranks of Mormon martyrs. As Givens and Grow note, though, in 1865 Young

observed that Pratt's "blood was spilt' as punishment for his earlier disputed plural marriages." The authors might have included a fuller version of Young's sharp comment: "Bro. Parley's blood was spilt, I was glad of it for it paid the debt he owed, for he whored."² Young might forgive the perceived transgressions of his subordinates, but he never forgot them, and he did not mince words.

Pratt also had an occasionally strained relationship with Joseph Smith. Grow and Givens take pains to emphasize that neither Pratt's conversion nor his continued faith in Mormonism rested on his personal connection to its prophet. In particular, Pratt bitterly accused Smith of betrayal during the painful collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society. For the most part, however, he was a loyal follower, and Pratt embraced and boldly preached the innovative theological doctrines Smith gradually revealed. Although they suggest that most distinctly Mormon theological and philosophical beliefs originated with Joseph Smith, Givens and Grow leave open the extent to which Pratt may have influenced the trajectory of the prophet's thinking. At the very least, Pratt "organized, elaborated, and defended them in a manner that gave them the enduring life and complexion they have in the church to this day." In particular, the authors admire Pratt for his forthright promulgation of doctrines such as the eternity of matter, the materiality of the soul, the corporeality of God, and the goal of theosis. Pratt did not shy away from theological battle, nor did he seek to make Mormonism more acceptable to its Protestant opponents by downplaying what Pratt saw as its most fundamental teachings. Rather, Pratt's own exhilaration over visions of heavenly glory and godliness infused his writing with vigor, excitement, and rhetorical flourishes. After Smith's death, Pratt—along with several other figures, including William W. Phelps, Orson Pratt, and Brigham Young—played pivotal roles in expanding upon and contending for Smith's theological vision, if all with their own distinct emphases.

At times, Pratt revealed more than Joseph Smith would have wished. At an April 28, 1842 meeting of the Nauvoo Relief Society, Smith complained about "great big Elders" who "had caused him much trouble, whom he had taught in private counsel; and they would go forth into the world and proclaim the things he had

taught them; as their own revelations.”³ Pratt was among several of the apostles identified as in need of a dose of humility. Smith did not want other men to take credit for his teachings, which he, moreover, was not yet ready to preach as forthrightly as Pratt had been doing.

There was a decided virtue in Pratt’s bold proclamation of Mormon doctrine. Had they read Parley Pratt’s tracts or listened to his sermons, mid-nineteenth-century outsiders to Mormonism (as well as church members) would not have endured any confusion about Latter-day Saint beliefs. Today, though, other Americans often have a great deal of difficulty figuring out what exactly it is Mormons believe about God, humankind, and salvation, despite the overviews of the “plan of salvation” available in church publications or from missionaries. Do Mormons believe in such things as human deification or God’s own human existence? Church leaders have affirmed such standard Mormon doctrines in recent years, but they do not preach them with the same sort of robustness as did Parley Pratt (or, to take a more recent example, Bruce McConkie). The distance between God and gods-to-be, narrowed considerably by Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Parley Pratt, seems much wider today. It is understandable why more recent Mormon leaders have taken a different tack, but Grow and Givens make it possible for Mormons and non-Mormons alike to miss the presence of a leader like Parley Parker Pratt.

The Apostle Paul of Mormonism will endure as a significant work that brings to life a pivotal figure in early Mormon history, a writer and missionary who bridges the Joseph Smith and Brigham Young eras of the church. Terryl Givens already has a reputation within the church as a beloved and forthright expositor of his faith’s doctrines—one wonders if he detected something of a kindred spirit in the early Mormon apostle. Matthew Grow, who published an award-winning biography of Thomas Kane several years ago, recently joined the Church History Department as its Director of Publications. If he brings the same attention to detail and open discussion of controversial issues to his new post, all students of Mormon history will benefit. Since both Givens and Grow share Pratt’s prolific ability to write and publish, we can anticipate much more from them in the near future.

Notes

1. Hendrik Hartog, "Lawyering, Husbands' Rights, and 'the Unwritten Law' in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 67–96.

2. May 1, 1865 minutes, Box 3, Folder 44, General Church Minutes, CR 100 318, Church History Library, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

3. April 28, 1842 minutes, Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Church History Library, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book> (accessed December 8, 2011).

Proofed, Typeset, and Bound for Glory: The Material History of the Book of Mormon

Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter. *How We Got the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2011. 154pp. Hardback: \$34.99. ISBN-13: 978-1-60908-062-4

Reviewed by Karen D. Austin

The appearance of Richard Turley and William Slaughter's *How We Got the Book of Mormon* suggested that the volume's intended audience might be investigators, new members and teens seeking to know more about the material history of this modern scripture. I opened the book with a bit of a knowing smirk, expecting that as a lifelong member of the Church and an avid reader, I would not find much new information. However, as I read the book cover to cover and dug through their footnotes, I learned many new things about the translation and printing process of the Book of Mormon. Turley and Slaughter present this information in a way that balances a compelling narrative with instructive images and persuasive archival detail.

Their book contains ten chapters, beginning with Mormon's compilation process, then describing the translation process performed by Joseph Smith and his scribes, and concluding with the publication history of the following editions: the first edition, 1830; the second edition, 1837; the third edition, 1840; the first European edition, 1841; the 1920 edition; and the 1981 edition.