

Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow. *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 512 pp. Notes, index, maps, photographs, illustrations, appendices. Cloth: \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-19537-573-2.

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Parley Pratt has always held a special place for the followers of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Pratt was baptized in 1830 only months after the organization in Manchester, New York, which made him one of the earliest followers of this new religious movement (33).<sup>1</sup> Pratt was also one of the four missionaries called to serve in the first Lamanite mission, the mission that changed the course of Mormonism by moving the headquarters from New York to Ohio and bringing in one of its most important converts, Sidney Rigdon (38–42). This new biography details all these exciting events and plenty more.

Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow are both well-known authors to the members of the John Whitmer Historical Association.<sup>2</sup> They have decided to tackle the “Archer of Paradise” and write this engaging and well-documented biography. Grow is a descendent of Pratt and his father is president of the Jared Pratt Family Association.<sup>3</sup>

The authors begin the book by discussing Pratt’s ancestors and then move into Parley’s early childhood and life experiences prior to his conversion to Mormonism. After this first chapter, the authors move into the main theme of the book, which is Pratt’s life as a member of

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the organization of the church at Manchester, see H. Michael Marquardt, “An Appraisal Of Manchester As Location For The Organization Of The Church,” *Sunstone* 87, no. 2 (February 1992): 49–57; accessed January 26, 2012, <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/087-49-57.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Terryl Givens is well known for his apologetic work on the Book of Mormon with his book *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Matthew Grow is the author of the award winning book *“Liberty to the Downtrodden”: Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Jared Pratt was Parley’s father. Jared Pratt Family Association, accessed, January 26, 2012, <http://jared.pratt-family.org>.

Joseph Smith's new religious movement and his calling as one of the original apostles of the Latter Day movement. Even though the book is arranged chronological, the authors do an excellent job of bringing out certain themes that followed Pratt through his life. These include his belief in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and the idea it was an actual history of the American Indians both in North and South America (36).

Another theme that flows through the book is that of polygamy and Pratt's family dynamics, how those played a major role in Pratt's life. An entire chapter is dedicated to the subject titled appropriately enough, "Parley and Mrs. Pratt(s)." Pratt was married to twelve women during his short life; ten of these were polygamous marriages (321). From these marriages Pratt "fathered thirty children, twenty-three of whom lived to adulthood" (326). In May 1854 Heber C. Kimball prophesied to Pratt that his "posterity would be 'as numerous as the stars of heaven.'" From his twenty-three children, Pratt would have 266 grandchildren with an estimated thirty to fifty thousand descendents today (342). In comparison, Pratt's contemporaries, Joseph and Emma Smith have approximately eleven hundred living descendents.<sup>4</sup>

One family dynamic about which I appreciated learning (though I wish there was even more to learn) related to Parley Pratt's rocky relationship with his younger brother Orson. Most of their difficulties seem to have centered around their monogamous wives Sarah Bates (Orson's wife) and Mary Ann Frost (Parley's wife). Joseph Smith was at the center of this conflict because of his teachings to Parley about polygamous marriage, and because he desired to marry Sarah as one of his own polygamous wives in 1841 (201). Interestingly, the authors add that there was a very real possibility that Smith also wanted to have Mary Ann as his wife. They quote Brigham Young telling Parley and Mary Ann Pratt that "If Joseph [Smith] had lived he would have had Mary Ann sealed to him" (209, 245-46).

Pratt not only had major conflicts with his family, but with nearly everyone with whom he came in contact with. As the authors point out, "Pratt seemed incurably conflict prone" (272). Pratt seems to have had many conflicts with members of the new religious movement. For example Pratt had a major conflict with Joseph Smith over the Kirtland Safety Society. As the

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<sup>4</sup> The number for the descendants of Emma and Joseph Smith is from The Joseph Smith Jr. and Emma Hale Smith Historical Society, courtesy of Michael Kennedy.

authors point out, “By early 1837, some leaders, including Pratt, expressed concern about the rising speculation and worldliness among the Saints” (97). This concern expressed by Pratt developed into a full-blown conflict with Smith by May of that year. Pratt had bought property from Smith on credit for \$2,000, which Smith had earlier bought for “less than \$100” because “Smith had given him ‘the most sacred promise’ that he would ‘not Be ingured’ by the real estate transactions and that ‘it was the will of God that Lands Should Bear such a price.’” The authors write that “Pratt felt betrayed by both Rigdon and Smith,” with Pratt responding to this betrayal with an accusatory letter to Smith and Pratt denouncing Smith in an address in the Kirtland Temple (97–101). With Brigham Young, Pratt clashed over the move from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City (248–49), then once again in the Great Basin with the SLC high council over civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction (272–74). While on his English mission Pratt had angry words with Orson Hyde, his fellow apostle, over teaching polygamy, with Hyde writing: “The Spirit whispereth me that you are preaching things in Manchester which you ought not” (258–59).

Pratt also had his share of conflicts with the civil authorities and non-Mormon religious leaders. The first arrest the authors discuss is the famous story of Pratt being chased by an officer and his dog, with the officer yelling at his dog: “stu-boy, stu-boy—take him—watch—lay hold of him, I say—down with him.” Pratt wrote in his autobiography that he then yelling at the dog the same instructions with the dog running “past me with redoubled speed towards the forest; being urged by the officer and myself, and both of us running in the same direction. Gaining the forest, I soon lost sight of the officer and dog, and have not seen them since.” In Pratt’s account, he claimed that he was arrested on “a frivolous charge,” and that “the real motives for his arrest as a mix of religious hatred and greed.” But as the author’s point out, Pratt was most likely arrested for running “away from a constable, and numerous creditors” (42–44).

Many themes flowed through Pratt’s life, and this biography covers these with informative details. Pratt’s life was one of constant poverty, which is an important theme also found in the biography. As the author’s point out, Pratt’s family went without housing and food while Pratt was away on missions, advocating Smith’s new religious movement; “his devotion to Mormonism required a kingdom-or-nothing-attitude that led to frequent absences even with family members ill, with babies about to be born, or with his family in deep poverty. Everything had to be subordinated to the needs of the kingdom and the oncoming millennial timetable” (9).

Pratt's solution to his dilemma of poverty was to ask for support from members of the new church (344), to publish his polemical writings, or publish Smith's Book of Mormon (173). While Pratt was on his mission to Chile his wives were left with a partially built house. After he learned that his wives were unable to secure money to finish the house he advised them, "Be of good cheer, I have suffered poverty much longer than any of you. Nor do I expect to find the end of Poverty and want this side of the grave. If the Lord gives us something to eat we will not much covet Buildings nor furniture nor fine close [clothes]. for we are strangers and pilgrims" (306).

Givens and Grow have given readers an interesting and well-documented biography of Pratt. Pratt lived a life full of excitement and adventure, one which the authors capture well. One concern that I have is that some sources the authors cite are not generally available to scholars and historians. Examples include the George Q. Cannon Journals (449n26) and Minutes of Special Conference, San Francisco Branch (472n173). One hopes that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Library in Salt Lake City will make these sources available to all historians, not to just a select few. But for now, the reader will have to turn to this fine biography to learn about the contents of these records.