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**Abstract** Review of *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise* (2007), by B. Carmon Hardy.

# PLURAL MARRIAGE AND THE HALF-EMPTY-GLASS SCHOOL OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Allen L. Wyatt

Review of B. Carmon Hardy. *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise*. Norman, OK: Clark, 2007. 446 pp., with illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$39.95.

*Doing the Works of Abraham* is the latest publication on the subject of plural marriage by Carmon Hardy.<sup>1</sup> Hardy is emeritus professor of history at California State University, Fullerton, best known in Latter-day Saint circles for his previous treatment of post-Manifesto polygamy in *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, *Doing the Works of Abraham* can be seen as a follow-up to *Solemn Covenant*, but it should also be viewed as an expansion of that earlier book. Whereas *Solemn Covenant* focused primarily on the post-Manifesto period of polygamy (1890 to 1904), *Doing the Works of Abraham* is much more ambitious, covering the entire expanse of polygamy among Latter-day Saints and schismatic groups (1830s through the early 1900s).<sup>3</sup>

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1. This is another in the *Kingdom in the West* series, published by the Arthur H. Clark Company.

2. B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

3. It includes some cursory information—less than ten pages—on polygamy as practiced by Mormon schismatic groups since the practice of plural marriage ceased in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Consistent with the subtitle, *Doing the Works of Abraham* contains a wealth of information on the “origin, practice, and demise” of plural marriage. The impressive forty-two-page bibliography indicates that Hardy has pulled information from a wide range of primary and secondary sources.<sup>4</sup>

### Neutrality and Polygamy

Polygamy is a difficult issue for individuals who have spent their lives in a modern monogamous society. For such individuals, examining nineteenth-century polygamy is doubly difficult. The larger societal context of Victorian America is foreign to the permissiveness of our day, and Latter-day Saint polygamy is often viewed as morally aberrant. Working through such sociological and moral differences presents a challenge that makes it difficult for a historian to establish the emotional distance necessary to examine the topic.

In addition, decisions must be made by historians about how they will approach a topic. Some of those decisions involve how original sources will be used—what will be included, how they will be presented, and what weight they will be given. Because a historian’s work is inherently distillatory, it is impossible for such work to be neutral because of the very decisions that are at the heart of the historian’s work.<sup>5</sup>

The impossibility of historical neutrality is, however, not recognized by all, and at times historians are themselves blind to the subjective nature of the works they produce. The series editor, Will Bagley, claims in his foreword that Hardy approaches the topic “with a refreshing honesty, letting the people and facts speak for themselves” (p. 16). Bagley seems unaware that texts do not speak for themselves. There is always an act of judging and selecting. People cannot be heard in Hardy’s pages without his choosing to give them

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4. The bibliography alone is an important contribution to anyone interested in studying the history of plural marriage as practiced by Mormons in the nineteenth century.

5. For an excellent discussion of the impossibility of historical neutrality, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

voice, and the texts consulted cannot speak without being selectively presented in a context of his own making.

Fortunately, Hardy doesn't share Bagley's apparent naïveté. The author-editor states very plainly that he is "keenly aware that other historians would have selected different themes and documents" and that they "would sometimes have given different emphases" (p. 19). His goal in writing *Doing the Works of Abraham* was "to present as full and balanced a portrait of nineteenth-century polygamous Mormonism as possible." But he also grants that "the reader will encounter frequent passages of exploration and suggestion" of his own (p. 19).

It is in these choices that Hardy made—that is, what is presented, what is explored, and what is suggested—that the underlying bias can be discerned, *contra* Bagley. To what conclusions does the author-editor lead the reader, and along which path is the reader led to those conclusions?

### Half-Empty Glasses

To date, most treatises on the topic of polygamy tend toward the polemic, some more than others. Most of those who engage the subject—especially when it comes to polygamy as once practiced by Latter-day Saints—invariably become polemical either for or against the subject. For instance, Bagley, in his foreword, slides into a comfortable polemical mode. He asserts that nineteenth-century polygamy "hangs around the neck of the modern LDS church like the ancient mariner's albatross" and implies that polygamy is still alive and well since the church "still quietly seals devout widowers to additional wives" (p. 14).<sup>6</sup>

Knowing Bagley's disdain for anything remotely positive associated with Mormon polygamy, I did not count it as a harbinger of Hardy's endeavors. In his foreword, Bagley closes with appeals to the "human anguish behind so much" of polygamy's history. Bagley calls

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6. Perhaps Bagley's zeal can be understood since he freely admits his bias regarding Mormon polygamy. Quoting Robert N. Baskin, an anti-Mormon, Bagley agrees with what he calls "hardboiled realism"—"that if Joseph Smith had been a eunuch he would never have received the revelation on polygamy" (p. 16).

attention to those who “forfeited so much for” the Principle and suggests how “compassionate reader[s] will acquire a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices the devout made to practice their religion” (p. 17). Once one moves beyond the foreword, though, the negative harbinger struck by its author did not translate into reality. For the most part, Hardy did a fine job of pulling together disparate sources into an interesting mix. The majority of the book consists of long excerpts from historical documents, presenting what Hardy views as the voices for and against plural marriage. Hardy gives greater emphasis to negative voices, both from practitioners of the Principle and those seeking its demise. Numerous examples could be cited, but I will just mention a few to illustrate the point.

When Hardy discusses the effect that the official announcement and open practice of polygamy had on the church and missionary efforts in Great Britain, starting in August 1852, he begins by quoting the words of T. B. H. Stenhouse that the announcement “fell like a thunderbolt . . . and fearfully shattered the mission” (p. 80). No mention is made that Stenhouse penned these words two decades after the fact, at a time when he had already left the church.<sup>7</sup> The quotation is from *Rocky Mountain Saints*, which was written by Stenhouse to reflect the Godbeite position regarding leadership of the church. Portrayals of Joseph Smith were sympathetic, but portrayals of Brigham Young (and anything with which Brigham was involved) were not flattering. Young is generally portrayed as “defiled by his ‘frenzied lust of power’ and his love of wealth” and “corrupted by his faith.”<sup>8</sup>

In the footnote for the Stenhouse quotation, Hardy also cites a book by Craig Foster about the same time period (p. 80 n. 15). However, Foster had a different take on the effects of the announce-

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7. Interestingly, Stenhouse’s break with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was precipitated, at least in part, by the decision of Zina Priscinda Young, daughter of Brigham and Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young, to marry one of her father’s office clerks (Thomas Williams) instead of Stenhouse. He took this refusal of Young to become his third wife as a slap in the face by her father and, thereafter, found himself more and more at odds with him.

8. Ronald W. Walker, “The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 68.

ment than Stenhouse. While acknowledging some defections, Foster stated that “while there were a number of apostasies in consequence of the announcement, most of the members remained in the Church.”<sup>9</sup> These divergent views may be a classic example of considering a glass half empty or half full; Stenhouse recounts a shattering of the mission, while Foster reports that most stayed true to the church. The point is, however, that Hardy takes the “half-empty” approach, indicating in the main body of the text that the picture within Great Britain was bleak and that “hundreds left the church” because of the announcement (p. 80). Having taken this approach, he chose to subtly reference the “half-full” analysis in a footnote.

Another example of seeing the negative instead of the positive is found in Hardy’s accounts of the difficulties faced by first wives during the “rapid increase of plural marriages after [Joseph Smith’s] death and the move west” (p. 162). Hardy cites, as examples, statements by Mary Haskin Parker Richards and Helen Mar Whitney. While these two accounts are accurate, they represent a conscious choice to again reference a half-empty glass. Other accounts from the same period provide a different picture of polygamy during the migration. For example, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young stated the following about the early days of the exodus:

Arrived at Sugar Creek, we there first saw who were the brave, the good, the self-sacrificing. Here we had now openly the first examples of noble-minded, virtuous women, bravely commencing to live in the newly-revealed order of celestial marriage.

“Women; this is my husband’s wife!”

Here, at length, we could give this introduction, without fear of reproach, or violation of man-made laws, seeing we were bound for the refuge of the Rocky Mountains, where no Gentile society existed, to ask of Israel, “What doest thou?”<sup>10</sup>

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9. Craig L. Foster, *Penny Tracts and Polemics: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Mormon Pamphleteering in Great Britain, 1837–1860* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2002), 153.

10. Zina D. Young, in Edward W. Tullidge, *The Women of Mormondom* (New York: Tullidge & Crandall, 1877), 327.

While such later reflection could be easily dismissed by those predisposed to do so, the view represents the other side of the same coin on which Hardy seems to focus. As non-Mormon commentator William Chandless stated in 1857, the “wretchedness of wives in Utah has been greatly exaggerated” (p. 190). Hardy has exaggerated that focus as well, with his choice of negative sources and their emphasis in preference to positive sources.

### **Pulling Probability out of Impossibility**

Hardy insists that any effort “to fully understand historical events must give respectful attention to the claims of actors involved” (p. 32), yet he seems unable to give a full measure of that respectful attention when it comes to firsthand accounts that attribute joy and happiness to some polygamous marriages. Instead, he cavalierly dismisses such accounts: “Mormon awareness that their marriage doctrine was an object of interest to outsiders undoubtedly accounted for attestations by both male and female Saints that their homes were happier than those found in monogamy” (p. 145).

With the firsthand accounts summarily dismissed, Hardy sees only scenarios of bitterness and unhappiness in polygamous marriages. He views such reports as more exemplary of the rule of the day. He prefaces several largely negative accountings (pp. 146–60) with the introductory remark that despite “all that was done to brightly clothe the Principle, records exist that are filled with honest descriptions of polygamous practice” (p. 146). It is disappointing that Hardy could find no positive accounts that he could judge as “honest descriptions” of polygamous marriages. Hardy praises the “inadvertent . . . candor” of a negative comment (p. 163). It seems odd that he couldn’t locate any positive statements that reflect “candor,” inadvertent or not. In still another place, he makes “allowance” for the “excessively positive attitudes” expressed by children of polygamous families (p. 172). Why? Perhaps because such attitudes, in Hardy’s view, cannot possibly be true, and therefore must be discounted.

One wonders if some future historian, called upon to examine monogamous marriages of the early twenty-first century, could pen



condemnation of the entire marriage system. It should be easy—just find reports of unhappy marriages, broken homes, and public condemnation. Any positive reports could be summarily dismissed since they would be “undoubtedly” due to outside interest and could be “excessively positive.”

Hardy states that “it is impossible to judge whether most men and women were ‘happy’ in polygamy” (p. 184 n. 92), yet his selection of sources and presentation of stories seems to indicate that he tries to pull probability out of impossibility. In his words, “the emotional burdens of those living the Principle, especially women, seem undeniably wounding” (p. 184). Such a conclusion, coupled with his wholesale discounting or dismissal of positive firsthand accounts, makes it hard to escape the conclusion that Hardy has judged it impossible that the majority were happy.

### **Eugenic Plans and Wormwood**

In some instances Hardy takes liberties with some of his sources. For instance, in a section entitled “‘Take unto You Wives of the Lamanites and Nephites’: An Early Revelation on Polygamy?” (pp. 34–37), he explores whether Joseph Smith authored a revelation “condoning plural relationships” through intermarriage with Native American women (p. 35). The very title of the section, ending as it does with a question mark, is consistent with Hardy’s warnings throughout the section that “one must view the document cautiously” (p. 35).

Yet, just a few pages later, Hardy throws caution to the wind and unequivocally proclaims that “as noted, [Joseph Smith’s] mind encompassed eugenic plans to make American Indians ‘white and delightful,’ as well as Romantic visions of the hereafter” (p. 40). How one moves from caution to certainty is unclear.

Another example of Hardy taking liberties with sources occurs in the following passage:

Despite Young’s contention that intermarriage alone could transform the native race, Mormon Elders were loath to answer the call. Some who did soon soured on the enterprise,

one saying of the Shoshones at Fort Supply that he “wouldn’t give his horse to save all the d—d Indians from hell.” (p. 140)

The problem with the quoted statement is that it had nothing to do with intermarrying with the Native Americans. Indeed, a full examination of the source Hardy provides bears this out. It is from a journal of John Pulsipher, recounting some of his experiences on a mission to the Shoshone Indians, at Fort Supply, Wyoming territory. Here is the full quotation:

As this company of missionary boys were camped one night on Green River, while talking of the best plan of keeping the horses from being stolen by the Indians—one of the boys, who owned a fine horse, said he wouldn’t give his horse to save all the d—d Indians from hell. That seemed a hard saying if it was in fun. It was said by a Missionary that was sent to teach the poor Ignorant Indians the way of salvation & we believe the Lord will not hold him guiltless that will indulge in such sayings. Before leaving that camp the said favorite horse got tangled in his rope & *died*. We thot this a warning to us that we should not place our affection on any Earthly thing—or let it hinder us from our duty to the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

The full story thus has nothing to do with intermarriage or souring on intermarriage. In fact, the entire article from which this quotation is pulled (some twenty-eight pages) never refers to marrying Native Americans.

Still another example regarding Hardy’s selection of sources is his decision to include “the legend of Chris L. Christensen,” as recounted by Juanita Brooks. This story is judged worthy of inclusion despite the fact that it amounts “perhaps to no more than third-or-fourth-hand hearsay” (p. 154) and is not supported by Christensen’s diary (p. 155 n. 13). Why include such a story? Hardy uses the story to illustrate the “openness with which Mormon males could advertise themselves in the hunt

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11. Juanita Brooks, “From the Journal of John Pulsipher,” *Utah Humanities Review* 2/4 (1948): 359.

for [plural] wives” (p. 154). It would seem that Hardy should be able to provide a better illustration of a point he is trying to make. Indeed, one wonders if the point can stand at all on such a tenuous foundation.

In some cases Hardy is guilty of misrepresentation of sources. One example occurs when he introduces a discussion about the difficulty that men experienced in living the Principle: “Women were not alone in finding polygamy difficult. Brigham Young’s statement that he often heard stories of such bitterness about the practice that it was like ‘drinking a cup of wormwood’ probably referred to male as well as female complaints” (p. 174). One is left with the impression that people were complaining to Young about the necessity of living in polygamous unions (“he often heard stories . . . about the practice”). Yet, that is not what Young is referring to, as can be seen from the full quotation:

If the Elders of Israel, who enjoy this privilege [of plurality], understood it as it is in the bosom of eternity, they would not trifle with and abuse it, and treat the blessings of the Lord lightly, as is too often the case. How often am I called upon to hear tales of sorrow which are like bitterness to my soul—like drinking a cup of wormwood. I hate this. God hates it. He does not hate to have us multiply, increase, and replenish the earth; but he hates for us to live in sin and wickedness, after all the privileges bestowed upon us,—to live in the neglect of the great duties which devolve upon us, notwithstanding the state of weakness and darkness in which the human family lives. Burst that vail of darkness from your eyes, that you may see things as they are.<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to Hardy’s assertion, the complaints and their bitterness weren’t *about* the practice. Instead, the bitterness was experienced by Young because of the sin and wickedness he saw as the root of the sorrow in the tales he heard. Yet, that is not how Hardy characterized Young’s words.

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12. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:63. This and other historical quotations herein appear with original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

## Men, Women, and Marital Relations

Hardy also explores the purported relationship between men and women in polygamous unions. His exploration is unfortunately one-sided, almost to the point of caricature. For instance, Hardy discusses how polygamy provides a framework for “patriarchal dominion” (pp. 122–25), the subjugation of women as inherently inferior (pp. 125–29), and sex within marriage solely for procreative purposes (pp. 130–40). Since such views of women and the marital relationship were common in Victorian society at large, it is odd that Hardy included such explorations in his book.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, throughout the entire nineteenth century, the whole legal system was designed to recognize the rights of the husband at the expense of the rights of the wife. It was almost universally held that when a man and woman were married, her very being was subsumed within his and “covered” by his legal standing. These laws, collectively referred to as *coverture*, provided a framework that most today would view as repressive.

Certainly, patriarchy and misogyny were present in the legal culture as well as in the words and worlds of judges. A nineteenth-century judge could always find reasons, if wanted, why the wife before him in court was not recognizable as a separate person from her husband, why her identity had been “covered over” by his. And many judges, like many other men, believed, passionately and adamantly, in a hierarchical, patriarchal order that they identified with the law of marriage and with *coverture*.<sup>14</sup>

The common view of nineteenth-century Christians of any sect was to relegate sexual relations within marriage solely to an act of procreation and to consider the woman’s sexual needs and desires to

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13. Hardy, in an offhand manner, states that the “Saints were thoroughly Victorian in outlook” (p. 145) but fails to connect those Victorian outlooks with their approaches to marriages of any type, be they monogamous or polygamous.

14. Hendrik Hartog, *Man and Wife in America: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 4.

be inferior to the man's.<sup>15</sup> It wasn't until well into the last half of the twentieth century that American society finally accepted that a married woman controlled her own body sexually, even within marriage.<sup>16</sup> Common nineteenth-century societal beliefs about women can even be found in some of the non-Latter-day-Saint quotations provided by Hardy elsewhere in *Doing the Works of Abraham*. For example, James Bodell commented on the necessity of keeping "women under subjection" and how hard that must be in polygamy (p. 209).

Since concepts of patriarchy, female inferiority, and the role of sex weren't uniquely Mormon or inherent to polygamy, how does their inclusion in *Doing the Works of Abraham* shed light on Mormon polygamy? Does their inclusion instead illuminate Hardy's views of polygamy? It would seem so, as he blatantly mischaracterizes the "gender configuration" of polygamous families as "a single male figure at the center of his kingdom with wives and children radiating from him in worshipful dependence" (p. 125). Historical accounts that would counter such a view are either ignored or buried in footnotes.<sup>17</sup>

Further, when commenting on the irony of women actually being ardent supporters of the Principle, Hardy notes his feeling that the reasons were "societal reinforcement, hierarchical household life, and religious teaching" (p. 310 n. 15). Why he fails to accept the women's statements at face value—as a bona fide and acceptable statement of

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15. A fascinating examination of marriage in various religious traditions can be found in John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

16. Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 211–12.

17. For example, the nonuniversality of any patriarchal view of the inferiority of women is never addressed, except inadvertently in a footnote. Hardy recounts a comment by Lucinda Lee Dalton in which she "bemoaned" feelings of superiority by some men (p. 165), but then tells in a footnote how she was able to marry a man who didn't hold those feelings (p. 165 n. 48). The mere fact that such a man could be found should provide evidence that attitudes of male superiority, while they may have been the Victorian norm, were not universal. A footnote on the same page (p. 165 n. 51) comments on the "irony" that women in polygamous marriages "often enjoyed greater independence from their husband's control than in monogamy." The irony would seem to be that Hardy doesn't view such information, which is contradictory to his caricature of polygamous relationships, as worthy of exploring in the main body of the text.

their personal beliefs—is unclear. Is it possible for a woman to have a belief without it being the result of external forces? In Hardy’s view of history, apparently not.

Concerning marital relations, I found the inclusion of the following statement by Hardy to be odd: “The importance of offspring was stressed constantly [by LDS leaders], and women who had large families, whether monogamous or polygamous, were singled out for recognition” (p. 120). Hardy states that such spotlighting wasn’t unique to polygamous families but also applied to monogamous marriages. Was this statement included merely because recognition to large families was provided? I wouldn’t think such recognition would even raise an eyebrow since even today large families—particularly those with triplets, quadruplets, sextuplets, or some other number of multiple births—draw recognition in both television and print. The reality that large or uniquely composed families have always been recognized by society leads one to wonder why Hardy would consider such a statement to be worthy of inclusion in *Doing the Works of Abraham* unless it was to somehow suggest that LDS leaders, besides promoting a change in the nature of marriage, were somehow promoting sexual productivity among the Saints. Even if this is so (and Hardy never explicitly claims that), how would such an expectation be any different than the command given by God to Adam and Eve to “multiply and replenish the earth”—a command recognized and accepted by Christians and Jews the world over?

When one compares the relationship between a man and one of his polygamous wives, can Hardy point to any differences in the relationships of monogamous marriages? It would seem not, as he provides no information, examples, or stories to illustrate such differences. Indeed, the information he does provide is applicable to monogamous marriages in Victorian America, just as much as it is to polygamous marriages. So why did he include a discussion of marital relations, if those relations in polygamous households didn’t differ materially from relations in monogamous households of the day? Hardy points out that practitioners of Mormon polygamy often spoke about it “in ways contemporary Mormons would hesitate to own” (p. 109), so per-

haps the argument can be made that Hardy's decision to include the information was a way for him to accentuate the "foreignness" of plural marriage for his readers. Yet, such an artificial accentuation is a disservice since it provides no context by which the reader can really judge—it would seem that contemporary Mormons would "hesitate to own" most nineteenth-century concepts about marital relations, polygamous or not.

### Trading in Husbands: Divorce in Mormondom

Of particular interest to me was Hardy's reference to Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young and how she was an example of leaving her husband "for men of higher priesthood" (p. 182 n. 87). Hardy is not the first to make such a suggestion, but, upon full examination, such a position cannot be reasonably maintained. Hardy makes the suggestion in reference to a statement by Brigham Young: "If a woman can find a man holding the keys of the priesthood with higher power and authority than her husband, and he is disposed to take her, he can do so, otherwise she has got to remain where she is."<sup>18</sup> Young, within a few sentences, clarifies his statement in a recapitulation, where he says the following: "If a woman claims protection at the hands of a man possessing more power in the priesthood and higher keys, if he is disposed to rescue her and has obtained the consent of her husband to make her his wife, he can do so without a bill of divorcement."<sup>19</sup>

So it would seem that this method of gaining a divorce (finding one with keys of a higher priesthood power) was only to be used if the woman "claims protection." Exactly what this means is not known, as this concept has not been cited in any other extant source. It is important to note, however, that the burden for pursuing a divorce in this manner rested squarely on the woman; it was she who had to find

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18. *Brigham Young Addresses, 1860–1864: A Chronological Compilation of Known Addresses of the Prophet Brigham Young*, vol. 4, comp. Elden J. Watson, March 1980, p. 2 (Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University). Watson references this particular sermon as "HDC, ms d 1234, Box 49 fd 8 SLC Tabernacle, October 8th, 1861, a.m."

19. *Brigham Young Addresses, 1860–1864*, 3.

the willing man with keys to a higher priesthood, and she had to get permission from her present husband for the divorce and subsequent remarriage.

Even though Hardy holds that Zina's case is an example of this type of divorce, such a scenario does not fit with what is known of her life. Young's 1861 requirements for such a divorce and remarriage include finding a willing priesthood holder with "higher keys" in the priesthood. Brigham may have had the highest keys at the time of his marriage to Zina, but it was generally understood that Joseph Smith—the person to whom Zina was sealed prior to her sealing to Young—held "more power in the priesthood and higher keys" than did Young. Thus, Zina's agreement to be married to Brigham does not seem to fit the requirements of this type of divorce.

It should also be noted that the concept of trading in one husband for another, with the purpose of securing some semblance of salvation or exaltation, was also condemned by church leaders in Zina's day. President Jedediah M. Grant stated the condemnation very clearly, fully five years before Young's 1861 statement:

I would be far from taking a woman that would leave a good man. A woman that wants to climb up to Jesus Christ, and pass by the authorities between her and him, is a stink in my nostrils. . . . there is a low, stinking pride in a woman, that wants to leave a good husband to go to another. What does it matter where you are, if you do your duty? Being in one man's family or the other man's family is not going to save you, but doing your duty before your God is what will save you.

. . . Shall a man be saved because of some particular Quorum to which he belongs, or a woman be saved because she is in some particular family? No, that is foolery. Men and women are saved because they do right. It is nonsense for a woman to suppose, that because she is sealed to some particular man she will be saved.<sup>20</sup>

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20. Jedediah M. Grant, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:128.



Hardy's suggestion that Zina was an example of somehow "trading up" in her marriages just doesn't make sense. A better fit is that Zina's marriage to Young was an example of a modern application of levirate marriage.<sup>21</sup>

### Hostility among Cattle Watchers

Hardy describes how the non-Mormon public felt that polygamy must change or cease: "There were others, however, observers neither hostile toward nor persuaded by the Saints, who disapproved of Mormon polygamy and warned that they must change if they wished to remain in the republic" (p. 210). It is unclear how Hardy fails to see "hostility" in the words of Samuel Bowles, one of his two non-Mormon commentators. Indeed, Bowles seems quite hostile toward Mormons. For example, Bowles comments on how "the greatness of a true Mormon is measured . . . by the number of wives he can keep in . . . obedient subjugation" (p. 210). Not content to leave such non-hostility ambiguous, he comments that "handsome women and girls, in fact, are scarce among the Mormons of Salt Lake" (p. 211). Pity.

Perhaps the most acerbic commentator given voice by Hardy, however, is Mary Katherine Keemle Field. Hardy reprints nearly three pages of her ruminations about Mormons. Among her comments is this priceless gem:

Looking down on that congregation [in the Tabernacle], I understood why the church held its sway. There were thousands of human beings, ranging from infancy to extreme old age; there were bodies and no brains. All were clothed with bad taste, when there was an attempt at more than decent covering; all looked foreign, and not one pleasing face could I discern, apart from a few of the young Saints born in Zion. The

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21. For more information on the marriages of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young, see Allen L. Wyatt, "Zina and Her Men: An Examination of the Changing Marital State of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young," at [www.fairlds.org/FAIR\\_Conferences/2006\\_Zina\\_and\\_Her\\_Men.html](http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2006_Zina_and_Her_Men.html) (accessed 11 October 2007).

vast majority were cattle on two legs—obedient, subservient cattle, not to be blamed for being themselves. (p. 217)

While such bigotry might find acceptance as part of a mission statement for several modern-day anti-Mormon ministries, one must wonder how such sentiments help anyone better understand the “origin, practice, and demise” of Mormon polygamy.

### Confusing Obedience and Polygamy

Hardy, like others who examine Mormon polygamy, focuses on how people were coerced to practice the Principle. Indeed, he affirms that “claims that polygamy was . . . not essential for the highest reward in heaven, ignore a large body of teachings to the contrary” (pp. 111–12). What such assertions fail to recognize is that it was not polygamy that was required for the “highest reward” but obedience to God’s command. Polygamy isn’t the issue; obedience is. Polygamy was simply the command, and it has always been true among those professing to follow God that when they are satisfied that he has commanded, it is incumbent upon them to obey.

This principle of obedience is not unique to Mormonism; it is found in many religious traditions. If one chooses not to obey God’s command—even when those commands are inconvenient or unpopular—then one does so at the peril of one’s salvation. The words of Elder Joseph F. Smith are to the point in this matter: “I understand the law of celestial marriage to mean that every man in this church, who has the ability to obey and practice it in righteousness and will not, shall [be] damned, I say I understand it to mean this and nothing less, and I testify in the name of Jesus that it does mean that.”<sup>22</sup>

Even though Hardy includes this as part of a larger discourse by Joseph F. Smith (pp. 113–14), he does so in a section of his book entitled “‘No Exaltation without It’: Importance of the Doctrine.” In doing so, he fails to recognize the true issue at point and promulgates

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22. “Discourse Delivered by Elder Jos. F. Smith, in the Tabernacle, Sunday morning, July 7, 1878,” reported by Geo. F. Gibbs, *Deseret News [Weekly]* 27/32 (11 September 1878), 499.

an improper view of the issue: that it was somehow polygamy that ensured salvation, rather than obedience that is salvific. This concept is also echoed in more detail by George Q. Cannon:

No woman can enter into the celestial kingdom any more than a man whose will is in opposition to the will of God. When God speaks all must submit to it. It may not be pleasant to us; it may come in conflict with our traditions; it may not be that which will suit us if we had the choosing. There are a great many things which would not suit us if we had the choosing, according to our natural feelings, for these are often far from correct. But whatever feelings we may have which may be the result of tradition and false education, we must get rid of and be willing to do that which God requires at our hands. And it is the experience of the women of this Church who have done that—I speak now of plural marriage, for that is one of the most trying things—those who have submitted to this order, have reached a point where they enjoy true happiness, because in sacrificing their own will they have the consciousness of knowing that they have done the will of God; and in their supplications to Him they can ask Him in confidence for such blessings as they stand in need of. Where is the man or the woman who has been diligent in observing the requirements of God, who has failed upon any point upon which he has sought earnestly to God? If there are any, there must be something lacking, they have not that claim upon God which they would have if they had submitted perfectly to the requirements made of them.<sup>23</sup>

Quotations throughout *Doing the Works of Abraham* provide evidence that it is obedience that is being preached, yet Hardy never draws the distinction for the reader. The logical reality of such a distinction is evidenced by the fact that those who perished as faithful Saints prior to the institution of plural marriage were assured of their eternal reward

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23. George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 22:126–27. Thanks to Greg Smith for bringing this quotation to my attention.

the same as those who later practiced the Principle and remained faithful. In addition, those who have left this life since the discontinuance of polygamy likewise have the assurance that their salvation is assured, provided they were obedient to God's commands during their lifetime. The idea that God can change his commands from time to time is also not unique to Mormonism. Numerous religious traditions adhere to various tenets based on whether they believe that God commanded something or rescinded some ancient command.<sup>24</sup>

Obedience to God's command, with a willing heart, has always been treated as a requisite virtue for salvation. It shows a regrettable lack of understanding that Hardy uses historical sources to almost cast plural marriage as a "saving ordinance," when it never was any such thing. Stating that "without plural marriage" one cannot attain salvation (p. 112 n. 2) is different from pointing out that for those living at the time, it may rather have been that obedience to God's command of plural marriage was required for exaltation.

## Conclusion

Critics of the Latter-day Saints have found much to condemn in plural marriage. They may find within Hardy's latest offering additional ammunition for their broadsides.<sup>25</sup> Hardy fails to come to grips with why Joseph Smith would institute a marital system that was diametrically opposed to and essentially abhorred by the Victorian establishment of the day.

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24. For example, there are many instances in the Bible where God gives "everlasting commands" that have yet to be rescinded (e.g., Genesis 17:9–14; Exodus 12:14, 24–27; Leviticus 16:34). I know of few Christian religious traditions whose adherents lose sleep over not following such divine edicts. Either the Bible was in error in recording them as everlasting commands, or God has changed his mind and no longer requires compliance with such commands. Is one to believe that God cannot similarly change his will relative to how marriages should occur?

25. For instance, series editor Will Bagley comments on how Hardy's work speaks to "the joys and evils of polygamy" (p. 17), seemingly oblivious to the fact that both could be just as easily found in an examination of any marital system.

Most, of course, assume it was for sexual gratification and power.<sup>26</sup> However, the argument can easily be made that Joseph already had power and that changing marital systems was destructive to that power and eventually led to the forfeiture of his life. Religious leaders throughout history have had no problem commanding and receiving sex without overhauling the basic familial relationships of their societies. Kathleen Flake likewise sees the critics' assessment of Joseph's motivations as too facile:

Do I think Smith's revelations on polygamy can be reduced to his sex drive? No, I don't. . . . It's too simplistic; we all know this. There are so many easier ways to satisfy our sex drive than to have many marriages—at least at one time. Now, maybe serially, but having many marriages at one time seems, to me, to be the least rational way to satisfy one's sex drive.<sup>27</sup>

It would have been so much easier for Joseph and other early Latter-day Saint leaders to exercise their libidos through the socially acceptable means of the day, without the need to resort to a wholesale change of everything society *did* accept. Joseph and thousands of others would never have pursued such a course without a genuine belief that obedience to the Principle was divinely instituted and mandated—unless, of course, one dismisses the ability of Providence to require such behavior. It seems unfortunate that Hardy chooses, in his words, to present, explore, and suggest (p. 19) information valuable to critics without presenting, exploring, or suggesting why those critics' most long-held condemnations don't seem reasonable when compared to the actual record.

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26. It was, for example Fawn Brodie's contention that "there was too much of the Puritan in [Joseph], and he could not rest until he had redefined the nature of sin and erected a stupendous theological edifice to support his new theories on marriage." Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1986), 297.

27. "The Origins of Polygamy—1843," chap. 10 in *The Mormons*. Originally aired on PBS as part of *American Experience*, 30 April 2007, and also viewed on [www.pbs.org/mormons/view/](http://www.pbs.org/mormons/view/) on 15 October 2007.

This review should not be taken as a wholesale rejection of *Doing the Works of Abraham*. Hardy's efforts should not be minimized; there is much that is excellent in his book. Unfortunately, some elements will be used by the polemical naysayers to misstate the historical record and to continue to cast Mormon polygamy in the worst light possible. For this reason I do not suggest this book as an introductory primer to polygamy. I am not sure that such a book has been written, but I have great hopes that it will be in the future.<sup>28</sup> I agree wholeheartedly with this statement in Hardy's afterword: "For those who study it, however, Mormonism's brave adventure with plural marriage, including its modern reversal and flight from the practice, is an instructive subject. As with all historical inquiry, revisiting the topic enlarges humane sensibility and tolerance" (p. 392).

It is my hope that when scholars examine plural marriage in the future, they will create works that don't accentuate the negative at the expense of the faith exemplified by those who practiced the Principle.

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28. Perhaps the book that comes closest to being a good introductory primer on the topic is Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001). Her approach, tone, and tenor have a more balanced feel than what Hardy has achieved in *Doing the Works of Abraham*.