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## *The Essential Parley P. Pratt* by Parley P. Pratt

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PARLEY P. PRATT. *The Essential Parley P. Pratt*. Foreword by Peter Crawley. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990. xxvi; 242 pp. \$17.95.

Reviewed by Robert Steven Pratt, Jared Pratt Family Historian and Director of Resource Management, 26th Area Support Group, Heidelberg, Germany.

Parley Pratt was a pivotal figure in early Mormon history. Much of what is regarded as “Mormon doctrine” was explicated in his many theological works. He has been characterized as an intellectual second only to Joseph Smith in the early Mormon movement and a synthesizer of the semisystematic set of theological arguments within Mormonism.<sup>1</sup> Timothy L. Smith credits Pratt with effectively appealing to biblical authority to establish the credibility of the Book of Mormon and the revelations later published in the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>2</sup>

For Pratt, Mormonism, “instead of being confined to a few dogmas or general truths, opens the flood gates of all truth and knowledge, and teaches mankind to retain all the truth they can already comprehend, and comprehend as much more as they can all the time.”<sup>3</sup> The Restoration itself was, in his view, an outpouring of truth

by new revelation, by the authorities of heaven, by the ministration of angels, by the ordination of Prophets and Apostles, and ministers or Elders, by their testimony and ministry on the earth, by the organization of Saints, by the administration of ordinances, by the operations of the Holy Spirit, [all] for the government of man.<sup>4</sup>

Pratt went to great lengths to expound these teachings through such diverse media as books, pamphlets, tracts, essays, poems, fictional works, hymns, plays, historical works, and editorials. Several hundred works emerged from his pen.

Most students of Mormonism are familiar with *A Voice of Warning*, *Key to Theology*, and *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. Eight hymns written by Parley Pratt are contained in the current LDS hymnal. However, due to the inaccessibility of much of his work, Pratt’s other extensive contributions to early Mormon literature and theology are not widely understood and appreciated. Twentieth-century attempts to make Pratt’s writings available

include Samuel Russell's 1913 publication of *The Millennial Hymns of Parley P. Pratt*, containing fifty selections of Pratt's poetry set to music, and Parker Pratt Robinson's *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt*, published by Deseret Press in 1952.

The most recent effort is *The Essential Parley P. Pratt*, the first book in the new Classics in Mormon Thought Series by Signature Books. This book contains twenty selections from Parley Pratt's writings, a publisher's preface, and a foreword by Peter Crawley, which is a reproduction of Crawley's excellent 1982 Mormon History Association presentation, subsequently published in *Dialogue*.<sup>5</sup> In his study, Crawley places Pratt's writings within the context of the Church's first decade, when little was published "that dealt with any aspect of Mormon theology" (xvi). Pratt's early pamphlets describing basic doctrines were among the first Latter-day Saint theological works. Crawley boldly contends that Pratt was the inventor of Mormon book writing and that many of the Latter-day Saint theological works to follow were patterned after his earlier compositions.

While Pratt was the first to publish certain ideas and concepts unique to Mormonism, Crawley would likely agree that many of the concepts Pratt introduced were not original with him. E. Robert Paul has already observed that Pratt's unique literary talents were used to synthesize the ideas of Joseph Smith and others into a systematic theological system.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Smith himself seemed to suggest this in a speech he gave to the Relief Society on April 28, 1842. He may well have been alluding to Parley Pratt, among others, when he referred to "great Big Elders" who, having received Joseph's teachings in private, would then "go forth into the world and proclaim the things he had taught them; as their own revelations."<sup>7</sup> Pratt's writings had to be revised in some instances because he had published teachings which were either not in harmony with the Prophet's view or had not been cleared with the Prophet before publication.<sup>8</sup>

While Joseph Smith's influence is very evident in Pratt's writings, such nineteenth-century thinkers as Charles Lyell, Thomas Chalmers, Timothy Dwight, Thomas Dicks, and others may also have helped shape his style and thought. Parley's beginnings were

near New Lebanon, New York, a hotbed of various religious and philosophical systems from that of the Shakers to the transcendentalists. Naturally, questions are raised as to how much their ideas influenced him and whether he was attracted only by the primitive gospel movement. In light of these questions, an essay on Parley's major ideas in light of European and American intellectual history would have greatly added to an understanding of the selections the publisher chose.

The publisher's preface is probably the weakest part of the overall work; the factual information is too often inaccurate. For example, the death of Pratt's wife Thankful is placed in Canada while he is serving a mission there (xi). Actually, she died in Kirtland with Pratt present on March 25, 1837, and was then buried in the churchyard near the temple.<sup>9</sup>

The brief dissent of Pratt during the Kirtland period is only partially explained. The preface indicates that Pratt, leading other dissenters, "accused Smith of false prophecy," referring, I assume, to a letter Parley sent to Joseph Smith which was later stolen by Warren Parrish and published in *Zion's Watchman*. "Smith countered by calling a church court to excommunicate the dissenters," the preface continues (xi), with reference to the high council trial fiasco described in *History of the Church*.<sup>10</sup> The reader of *The Essential* would not know this because there are no footnotes. In fact, Pratt wrote two letters to Joseph Smith and gave speeches in the Kirtland Temple stating he was against the Prophet's business dealings.<sup>11</sup> He claimed, however, that the *Zion's Watchman* letter had been altered by Parrish. Pratt felt that although Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon had used poor judgment in the Kirtland Safety Society they were still "men of God."<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after Thankful's death, Pratt married Mary Ann Frost Stearns, a widow, on May 14, 1837, not on May 9, 1838, as indicated by the publisher (xi).<sup>13</sup> Probably the most misleading section of the publisher's preface is the account of Parley's adoption of plural marriage and the divorce of Mary Ann. Explaining the complexities of Pratt's marriages is beyond the scope of either the publisher's preface or this review, but some clarification is required here. Pratt learned about his right to take additional wives in June 1843.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to what is written in *The Essential*, Parley and Mary Ann consulted together on prospective wives, though Mary Ann was initially very much opposed to the doctrine.<sup>15</sup> After consultations with Vilate Kimball, Heber C. Kimball's first wife, Mary Ann gave her consent.<sup>16</sup> Parley and Mary Ann were close during 1843 and 1844, even though three other plural wives joined the family: Elizabeth Brotherton on July 24, 1843, Mary Wood on September 9, 1844, and Hannahette Snively on November 2, 1844.<sup>17</sup> Mary Ann appears to have accepted the other wives and certainly knew about them. The publisher's preface indicates she did not (xi).

However, Mary Ann did not know about the November 20, 1844, sealing of Belinda Mardin Hilton and Parley P. Pratt until August 1845. Rumors of their relationship may well have reached her earlier, probably through Sarah, the outspoken wife of Parley's brother Orson.<sup>18</sup> By the time ordinance work began in the Nauvoo Temple, Mary Ann and Parley were having serious disagreements. She was sealed to Joseph Smith for eternity and to Parley for time on February 6, 1846, but never considered herself a Pratt from that time forward. They were divorced in 1853.<sup>19</sup>

Another inaccuracy in the publisher's preface is the discussion of the writing of Pratt's *Autobiography*. *The Essential* maintains that this important document is the work of Parley Pratt, Jr., John Taylor, and George Cannon (xiii). While the first two edited the work extensively, Cannon served only as a scribe for the nearly three-hundred page manuscript section of the *Autobiography* which precedes the 1851 journal. Pratt's history is a compilation from several sources, but almost 90 percent of it comes from his own earlier writings.<sup>20</sup>

What about the text of *The Essential* itself? Is this a valuable documentary source book? On the whole, it is not. Even though the editors are quite accurate in reproducing Pratt's twenty original printed works, they leave it at that. There are no explanatory footnotes to help the reader decipher names, places, and scriptural passages. Because Pratt used references from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, citing page and line number, the present-day references would have been helpful.

The publisher has not explained or justified selection criteria, and the question naturally arises whether the twenty selections really represent the “essential” Parley P. Pratt. Pratt wrote many theological and literary works, publishing some in books and tracts and others in newspapers and periodicals. The emphasis of this work is mainly his already more accessible published pamphlets and tracts. The editors include only one example of Pratt’s poetry, which in reality made up a large part of his writings. A complete bibliography of all Pratt’s works and a brief discussion preceding each selection and explaining its particular significance would have added greatly to this work.

In some instances, a work selected for *The Essential* has appeared in several editions, but the editors have reproduced only the original edition, which in many cases was later modified. Documentary editors must weigh several factors in deciding to use a particular edition of an author’s work, suggests Mary-Jo Kline’s *Guide to Documentary Editing*. One might choose the edition that reflects the author’s most fully expressed intentions, the edition that is the most historically significant, or the edition deemed to be the most literary.<sup>21</sup> This decision presupposes a very thorough knowledge of the various documents and the author, none of which is evident here.

There can be good reasons for choosing the original edition, but footnotes showing corrections from subsequent editions or references to original manuscripts would be helpful and maybe even necessary. For example, *The Essential* includes an 1853 sermon entitled “Spiritual Communication” (172–83), which was published in *Journal of Discourses* (1:6–15). The Parley P. Pratt Papers at Brigham Young University Special Collections contain part of the manuscript of the speech as recorded by stenographer George D. Watt. Watt told Pratt he wanted the speech in the hands of the “compositor early on Monday Morning” and to “please use dispatch, and oblige your Bro in the bonds of peace.” Pratt apparently “corrected” the Watt version, for there are several differences between the manuscript speech and the printed version. A short example at the very end of the speech is instructive. The manuscript reads, “I have received the Holy Anointing, and I cannot rest; there I have told it now. You see when I get to talking I never know when to stop, but I will give (wa)y for I want to hear from my Bre &c May

God Bless you all Amen.” The printed version reads, “I have received the holy anointing, and I can never rest till the last enemy is conquered, death destroyed, and truth reigns triumphant. May God bless you all. Amen.” Even though it would have taken additional work on the part of the editor to refer to this and other similar changes from the manuscript, the effort could certainly have helped the reader see how Pratt’s ideas went from a transcript of the spoken word to the printed page.

A careful comparison of various editions can help the reader understand the development of the author’s thought and literary abilities over time. This is crucial in the case of Pratt’s writings because he wrote while Mormon theology was developing rapidly. *The Essential’s* chapter entitled “Kingdom of God” is taken from the original 1837 edition of *Voice of Warning* which, though significant, was modified in later editions. The 1847 edition in particular not only changed some of the wording of the original version, but actually reduced the length of the book itself.<sup>22</sup>

Pratt’s writings were modified both by himself and by subsequent nineteenth- and twentieth-century Mormon theologians. For example, the *Key to Theology* was extensively revised by Charles W. Penrose to make Pratt’s work concur with the prevailing doctrine at the time, especially with reference to the Holy Ghost and plural marriage. Since the original edition’s chapters were included in *The Essential*, the changes made by Penrose might have been included in the footnotes so the reader could trace the development of several Mormon doctrines from the nineteenth century into the twentieth.<sup>23</sup>

It is always exciting to read the writings of Parley P. Pratt, one of the paramount intellectual thinkers of early Mormonism. *The Essential* is important in that it brings us a bit closer to the man, his writings, and the milieu of early Mormonism. Unfortunately, the book is flawed and deficient. The definitive documentary source book on Parley P. Pratt remains to be compiled.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. Robert Paul, "Early Mormon Intellectuals: Parley P. and Orson Pratt, a Response," *Dialogue* 15 (Autumn 1982): 42-48; Paul M. Edwards, "The Secular Smiths," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977): 3-17; Erich Robert Paul, *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); and Larry C. Porter and Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Doctrine and the Temple in Nauvoo," *BYU Studies* 32 (Winter and Spring 1992): 41-56.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy L. Smith, "The Book of Mormon in a Biblical Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 3-21 (see especially 18-20).

<sup>3</sup> Parley P. Pratt, "Mormonism," July 10, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: R. James, 1985), 1:307.

<sup>4</sup> Pratt, "Mormonism," 308.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Crawley, "Parley P. Pratt: Father of Mormon Pamphleteering," *Dialogue* 15 (Autumn 1982): 13-26.

<sup>6</sup> Paul, "Early Mormon Intellectuals," 42-48; and E. Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Plurality of Worlds Idea," *Dialogue* 19 (Summer 1986): 12-36.

<sup>7</sup> Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, April 28, 1842, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives); Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1980), 114-19 (see especially 116); Wilford Woodruff, Journal, end of 1842, Wilford Woodruff Papers, LDS Church Archives; and Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journals*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), 2:199.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Smith Journal, September 1, 1839, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives; Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 2:330; Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1970), 4:7 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*); and Parley P. Pratt, Jr., ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 290.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt, *Autobiography*, 140-43; *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (May 1836): 380-81; Parley P. Pratt to John Taylor, November 27, 1836, John Taylor Papers, LDS Church Archives; *Messenger and Advocate* 3 (April 1837): 496; Woodruff, Journal, May 26, 1837; and Joseph Fielding Journal, Joseph Fielding Papers, 8-10, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Parley P. Pratt to Joseph Smith, May 23, 1837, *Zion's Watchman*, March 28, 1838; Richard Livesey, *An Exposure of Mormonism: A Statement of Facts Relating to the Self-Styled "Latter Day Saints"* (Manchester, England: N.p., 1840), 8-9; Joseph Fielding, Journal, August 3, 1838, Joseph Fielding Papers, LDS Church Archives; and *History of the Church* 2:484-86.

<sup>11</sup> Orson Pratt and Lyman Johnson to Newel K. Whitney, May 29, 1837, Newel K. Whitney Papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Mary Fielding to Mercy Fielding, June 15, 1837, Mary Fielding Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives; Mary Fielding to Mercy Fielding, July 5, 1837, Mary Fielding Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives; and Mary Russell to Isaac Russell, July 17, 1837, Isaac Russell Papers, LDS Church Archives.



<sup>12</sup>Parley P. Pratt, "To the Public," *Elders' Journal*, ed. Joseph Smith (August 1838): 50-51; and Parley P. Pratt, *A Reply to Mr. Thomas Taylor's "Complete Failure," &c., and Mr. Richard Livesey's "Mormonism Exposed"* (Manchester, England: W. R. Thomas, 1840), 1-12.

<sup>13</sup>*Messenger and Advocate* 3 (May 1837): 512; and Parley P. Pratt, "Family Record of Parley Parker Pratt," Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives. The latter record is a handwritten record kept by Parley of all his family vital statistics, marriages, and blessings.

<sup>14</sup>Pratt probably did not learn about plural marriage in 1839 as suggested in *The Essential*, though he was concerned about the relationship he and his first wife Thankful would have in the hereafter and learned from Joseph that she would be his for "time and all eternity." Pratt, *Autobiography*, 259-60.

<sup>15</sup>Reva Stanley, *The Archer of Paradise* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1937), 162-65; and Mary Ann Pratt Smith Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavits, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>16</sup>Vilate Kimball to Heber C. Kimball, June 29, 1843, Heber C. Kimball Papers, LDS Church Archives; see also Stanley B. Kimball, "Heber C. Kimball and Family, The Nauvoo Years," *BYU Studies* 15 (Summer 1975): 462-63.

<sup>17</sup>Pratt, "Family Record"; Parley P. Pratt to Hannahette Snively Pratt, June 5, 1845, Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives; and Parley P. Pratt to Mary Ann Pratt, December 18, 1844, Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>18</sup>Pratt, "Family Record." Belinda indicates that Brigham Young and Erastus Snow were the only witnesses of the sealing at Snow's house, probably kept secret because she may not yet have been legally divorced from her first husband Benjamin Abbott Hilton. Belinda Marden Pratt, "Autobiographical Sketch," February 17, 1884, 1-7; Belinda Marden Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives.

Belinda lived with Parley during part of his mission to the Eastern States, precipitating rumors which provoked some of the Saints in that mission to join the Strang and Rigdon movements. Philadelphia Branch Minutes, 1843-45, October 6-November 4, 1844, RLDS Archives; John Hardy, *History of the Trials of Elder John Hardy* (N.p., [1845]); and Robert Steven Pratt, "History of Eastern States, 1842-1845," paper presented at the Mormon History Association, 1983, in author's possession; N. B. Helverson to Sidney Rigdon, July 9, 1845, *Messenger and Advocate* 1:268-70; Benjamin Winchester to Ebenezer Robinson, July 9, 1845, *Messenger and Advocate* 1:272; Parley P. Pratt, "Beware of Imposition," *The Prophet* (March 29, 1845): 2; and Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, January 12, 1846, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>19</sup>Nauvoo Temple Sealings, February 6, 1846, LDS Church Archives; and Divorce Certificate, March 5, 1853, Mary Ann Pratt Smith from Parley Parker Pratt, Brigham Young Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>20</sup>Robert Steven Pratt, "The *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt: A Study of Sources*," unpublished, in author's possession; George Q. Cannon, Journal, September 7-September 23, 1854, LDS Church Archives; Isaiah Coombs, Journal, October 11, 1856, Isaiah Coombs Papers, LDS Church Archives; and Parley P. Pratt to Family, January 3, 1857, Parley P. Pratt Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>21</sup>Mary-Jo Kline, *A Guide to Documentary Editing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 87-88.

<sup>22</sup> Compare “Kingdom of God” in *The Essential* (1-14) with *A Voice of Warning* as published in New York in 1837 and then with the editions published in Manchester, 1841; New York, 1842; Nauvoo, 1844; Edinburgh, 1847; and Liverpool, 1852 and 1854.

One further correction: *The Essential* quotes from “The Fountain of Knowledge,” “Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body,” and “Intelligence and Affection” from a pamphlet published in 1844, not 1840 (97-130). See Parley P. Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York: Letter to Queen Victoria, (Reprinted from the Tenth European Edition,) The Fountain of Knowledge; Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo, Ill.: John Taylor [1844], rpt. n.p.: David C. Martin, n.d.).

<sup>23</sup> *The Essential* quotes “Keys of the Mysteries of the Godhead,” 184-92; “Origin of the Universe,” 193-99; and “Destiny of the Universe,” 200-205, from *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool, 1855), 26-62. Charles D. Penrose made many changes. Compare Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool, 1855), 38-41, 66, 94-95, 98-99, 159-73, with Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 45-48, 72, 97-98, 100-102, 160-70. For a discussion of changes in doctrine, see Thomas G. Alexander, “The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology,” *Sunstone* 5 (July-August 1980): 24-33.