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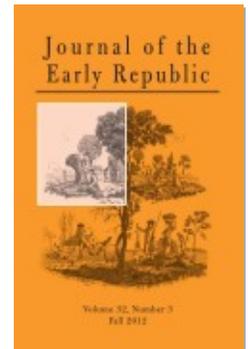
Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism (review)

Jonathan B. Crider

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inclined to back off from criticism of Smith. Nonetheless, these attractive volumes represent a tremendous scholarly resource presented effectively and comprehensively.

RUTH ALDEN DOAN is professor of history at Hollins University. She studies religion in the United States, and has written on Millerites and Adventists, Methodists, and southern evangelicalism.

Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism. By Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 592. Cloth, \$34.95.)

Reviewed by Jonathan B Crider

Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow argue that the life and writings of Parley Parker Pratt are significant to the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and to American religious philosophy. Pratt served as one of the founding members of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, continuing from 1835 until his brutal murder in 1857 at the age of 50, leaving behind multiple wives and thirty children. Besides his progeny, Pratt provided the early Church with an impressive quantity of newspaper articles, poems, pamphlets, and books, in which he defended the Church and established a written theology that greatly influenced Mormon ideology and doctrine.

Joseph Smith established the Church of Christ during the tumultuous 1830s in western New York with only six founding members (in 1838 church officials changed the name to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). By 1900, Church membership grew to over a quarter million, and by the early twenty-first century membership was 14 million worldwide, with just over 6 million in the United States. Pratt helped establish the Church not only within the United States but also throughout the world, creating the foundation that led to the Church's exponential success in the twentieth century. Mormon history exemplifies the religious questioning and excitement that defined the Second Great Awakening and the extreme persecution of those who stood out against accepted societal norms.

Pratt converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints not through the magnetism of its first leader, Joseph Smith, but through

the chance reading of *The Book of Mormon* in 1830. (He met Smith for the first time a month after his baptism.) Pratt read the book and saw within it the answers for many of his questions regarding preparations for the millennium and the return of Jesus Christ, which his experiences as a Baptist and Campbellite failed to provide. Joseph Smith formed early Mormon beliefs through his own limited writings and speeches before his murder in 1844, the most significant being *The Book of Mormon*. Givens and Grow argue that Pratt “did more than any other man to turn Joseph Smith’s prophetic declarations into a fully formed new religious system” (393). Pratt codified and expanded Joseph Smith’s teachings and revelations. Until the early twentieth century, many Mormons considered Pratt’s *Voice of Warning* (1837) standard reading for both members and investigators of the Church. *Voice of Warning* clarified the Church’s stance on millennialism and the meaning of restoration and authority. Pratt’s writings and experiences “illustrated a crucial stage of any religious movement: the creation, explication, and popularization of a theological system” (7).

Once baptized, Pratt committed his talents and life to the building up of the Church throughout the world. Pratt served as a missionary in England, Chile, and the eastern United States. He wrote constantly throughout his life and used his writings to, quoting Pratt, “push the gospel to every people as fast as possible” (301). Pratt helped establish many of the Church’s first newspapers and regularly contributed to non-Mormon and Mormon papers in his proselytizing for the Church. He systematized the doctrine of the Church, which helped missionaries to teach an established theology and doctrine throughout the world.

Pratt also challenged the Church’s critics through print, one of the first Mormons to do so. His *History of the Late Persecution* (1840) made the Mormons’ troubles in Missouri national news and for a brief period gained some sympathy for Mormon tribulations. Pratt believed in the importance of creating a written record of the Church’s history and wrote explicitly for publication, including his personal letters. Givens and Grow describe Pratt as “a self-made individualist, fervent about republican ideals, convinced of America’s providential role in Christian history” (394).

Pratt never apologized for the teachings of his Church; he boldly stated and clarified what he believed to be true, in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. Givens and Grow compare Pratt to early Christianity’s Paul, stating that “both men possessed a deep sense of the divine

importance of their apostolic calling and a bold, blunt, outspoken style that led to frequent controversies” (5). Pratt’s *Key to the Science of Theology* (1855) built upon the teachings of Smith that humans could understand God. Pratt clarified Smith’s teachings on human theosis and his belief that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit were separate entities, rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity. He originally resisted the most famous and controversial of early Mormon beliefs, polygamy, but “once persuaded that the principle was from God, Parley switched from incredulous resistance to anxious haste” (205). Givens and Grow in their cleverly titled chapter, “Parley and Mrs. Pratt(s),” provide an inside glimpse into the inner workings of polygamy and the defenses that both Pratt and his wives used against critics of the practice. The authors argue, “One of the most surprising aspects of Mormon culture was the ease with which early members, most from evangelical backgrounds and reared in strict Methodist and Reformed Baptist traditions, segued into a faith that demolished some of Christendom’s most cherished precepts” (334).

Pratt influenced Mormon print culture, theology, and missionary practices. Givens and Grow successfully move between straight biography and the larger ramifications of Pratt’s actions on Mormon ideology and the public’s perception of the Church. Unfortunately, at times *Parley P. Pratt* comes across as hagiography; the authors appear to struggle between accepting the persona Pratt created through his writings and analyzing his life objectively. Givens and Grow also hint throughout the book on the congruence between religious thought and the rise of democratic and republican ideals but fail to pursue the connection that their evidence appears to indicate.

Pratt has long deserved a book-length treatment of his life, beyond his own autobiography. Richard Bushman’s *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, 2005) and the older, but still widely respected, *Brigham Young: American Moses* by Leonard Arrington (New York, 1985) stand out as exemplars of Mormon biographies. Givens and Grow’s well-written and well-researched work furthers our understanding of the early beginnings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the importance of print culture in forming their religious ideology. *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* further complicates the history of nineteenth-century American religious movements.

JONATHAN B CRIDER is a PhD student at Temple University. His dissertation examines print culture’s role in forming antebellum political party ideology.