

— Scott A. Faulring Byers, Box 93, folders 1-3
(Accn 2316), ML)

RLA NOTES FOR FAULRING REVIEW OF:

**Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (1997)
[Prepared the latter part of the week of May 22, 1998 and the week following.]**

I. CHECKLIST OF GENERAL ISSUES

1. POSITIVES

a. High level of research, generally good judgment in use of materials, a new and virtually comprehensive collection of data pertaining to JS and introduction of plural marriage. Regularly includes the spiritual experiences of JS wives in their conversions to the principle. Length and quality of research is impressive--all serious students of JS indebted for this massive collection that took serious effort over years to assemble. Imp. to realize the limitations of such a collection--C has done what possible to reconstruct lives, but even then it is mainly outward events, with regular observations that little is known of private lives and inner feelings. For most women, the pattern of biography moves through a family conversion to Mormonism, gathering to Nauvoo, some type of conversion to plural marriage, and the sacrifices of the exodus and pioneer life in Utah. The author stresses tragedy and sorrow, but the overall reality is the remarkable power of faith of most of the wives that are profiled. C has recovered the history of a group of impressive women who gave all for establishing a latter-day dispensation and expanding family kingdoms of the hereafter.

Important to know viewpoint of author, and he gives it specifically: **I recommend quoting his own self-definition in full, p. 629, 2d par. from bottom, found under his heading, "The Supernatural."** C generally states the viewpoint of the parties involved, but his interpretations of the massive materials have high and low points.

2. NEGATIVES

a. Marred by bias against plural marriage, with major editorializing on subject throughout.

Ex.: xiii to xv explains the title (*Sac. Lone.*) is chosen because his "central thesis" is that Mormon polyg. "was a social system that simply did not work in nineteenth century America," since the "practical result, for the woman, was solitude." Something is wrong here. The preface argues this point with a few non-JS examples. Is author claiming the book proves this--or he wrote the book because he has this premise? This emotional component crops up in occasional statements that read more like propaganda than history. Agnes did not return to Utah after Pickett deserted here, the author implies, because "polygamy was almost an institutionalized form of marital neglect" (170). Orson Whitney followed his grandfather and father "in accepting the onerous burden of polygamy" (531). (Actually, Orson married his second wife with the consent of the first, living in the normative dual wife pattern in Utah.) However, on many occasions C shows more objectivity when he reports why polygamy was practiced--**here I recommend an example, quoting part or all of the 2d full para. on p. 312:** "Accepting polygamy was a matter of integrity for both Latter-day Saint men and women, given

... their acceptance of Smith as a direct conduit of revelation.”

Comment: the result is that chapter titles and interpretation foster the “victimized woman” approach. Joseph Smith’s murder brought about adjustments that were not the fault of the system. P. 432 is soapbox oratory, not fair history, as C explains how Emily Partridge suffered. He allowed Emma to force the Partridges out, but it was easy for him because he had some 30 other wives to turn to--but that faults JS when C says he had no choice in the Partridge matter. C says JS “allowed the marriages [of the Partridges] to lapse.” That misses the point that he never said the eternal sealings were invalid. C is anxious to prove that in polygamy, “when practised on a day-to-day basis, the plural wife is not given financial or emotional support.” One of his examples is Emily in the snow with her baby in the Iowa exodus. C essentially faults the system when the exile of a people was superimposed upon it. Perhaps Brigham was later penurious with Emily--I haven’t checked it out--but he did give her a home outright in Salt Lake City (418). Joseph took no responsibility for support (455)? He tried to have a number of women live in the Mansion House, and C acknowledges in the Dulcena (he spells Delcena) Johnson Sherman and Louisa Beaman chapters that JS was contributing to their support. However, generalizing from the large families misses Ivin’s statistics on the average Utah polygamous household: 66% had 2 wives, and 21% had three wives. (Stanley S. Ivins, “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 [Summer 1956]: 299-39.) It is also unfair to imply that polygamy failed because of special tensions that arose in Nauvoo at the time Joseph Smith was required to establish the system in controlled secrecy. A major flaw in the book is studying the JS wives competently, but then using that atypical example to generalize on the system of polygamy. During and at the end of the Presendia chapter, he uses her as some kind of illustration of normative plural marriage: “So her life exemplifies the tragic ambiguity of Mormon polygamy” (144).

b. The author occasionally expresses extreme (and irrelevant) Mormon feminist positions. E.g., p. 706 comments that “the church has become increasingly less tolerant of women’s independent voices,” adding that the unofficial periodicals and organizations are “generally viewed with suspicion, if not hostility by members of the exclusively male Mormon hierarchy.” I fail to see the place of these opinions in a study of Joseph Smith. If we want to debate that issue, the Church is cautious about any alternative voices, not simply female alternative voices. The Mormon women’s movement in the nineteenth century was doctrinally in harmony with church leaders, which is not the trend of some sectors of it today. C also stresses the sacrifices of the Nauvoo wives by downgrading Joseph Smith, which is unnecessary--it seems inaccurate to call him “a nearly infallible figure” ranking higher than Old Testament prophets (455). This is less history than private agenda to use that not so subtle sarcasm, though he quickly explains he is speaking from “our late-twentieth century monogamous and feminist perspectives” (45-56). The rest of this page says essentially that it is too bad later church presidents were too loyal to Joseph Smith to see how polygamy failed and caused grief. If that is the measure of truth, we can also eliminate tithing, fasting, and even getting up early to attend church meetings.