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Author(s): David J. Whittaker

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*The Bone in the Throat:
Orson Pratt and the Public
Announcement of Plural Marriage*

DAVID J. WHITTAKER

Plural marriage, or polygamy, has often been at the center of Mormon history. From very early times the public heard reports of its practice by Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and some of his followers. Although charges of polygamy were among the explosive factors leading to Smith's assassination in 1844, he never acknowledged it publically during his lifetime to either Mormons or to the general public. Scholarship over the last half century, however, has traced the development of the practice by Smith and his closest associates from 1831 to the time of his death.¹ Perhaps because of the negative impact polygamy reports had on Mormon proselyting, as well as the strain the reports placed upon relations with the larger population, the legacy of secrecy continued after Brigham Young became the Mormon leader until 1852, when polygamy was publically announced in Utah. In the decades that followed, polygamy was openly practiced and defended in Mormon teaching as a superior way of life. It was also a major factor in the long "Mormon conflict," which ended only in the decade and a half after the so-called "Manifesto" was announced by President Wilford Woodruff in 1890. Since that time, official Mormon policy has renounced polygamy's practice. Nevertheless, it has not been easy to abandon some of the doctrinal underpinnings developed during the period

David J. Whittaker is curator, Archives of the Mormon Experience, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

Note: Because of current archival policy which has closed access to manuscripts in the Brigham Young Collection in the LDS Church Archives, I have not been able to recheck footnote citations to documents I cite from the Brigham Young Papers.

¹ See Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (master's thesis, Purdue University, 1975). Other important references and guides to the literature include, Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah: 1540-1887* (San Francisco, 1890), 370-96; Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, 2d ed. (Cincinnati, 1914); Richard D. Poll, "The Twin Relic: A Study of Mormon Polygamy and the Campaign by the Government of the United States for its Abolition, 1852-1890" (master's thesis, Texas Christian University, 1939); Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York, 1954); and Davis Bitton, "Mormon Polygamy: A Review Article," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977), 101-18.

of advocacy, and a reticence to consider polygamy historically has sometimes been apparent.

Looked at in the broad context of history, the decades in which polygamy was openly defended represent the high tide of Mormon nonconformity. The doctrinal nature of that defense was laid out in incipient form when polygamy was publically announced in 1852 at a missionary conference in Salt Lake City by Apostle Orson Pratt. Self-taught and sometimes viewed as eccentric by non-Mormons, Orson Pratt had already joined his brother Parley P., also an apostle, in the most significant efforts to carry Mormon ideas beyond Latter-day Saint congregations and beyond the street meetings of Mormon proselyting to a more disciplined and learned debate. Orson Pratt, who survived his brother by several decades, was sometimes an irritant to Brigham Young but contributed significantly to Mormon thinking and was revered by rank and file Utah Mormons as their foremost thinker.

This article examines the background of the 1852 announcement of polygamy by Orson Pratt and discusses his defense of the doctrine and practice in the years that followed. As suggested by the early policy of secrecy and the recent reticence to discuss polygamy, Mormons were sensitive to the isolation plural marriage placed them in even during the era of open acknowledgement. The frontier boldness of Brigham Young, and others close to him in Utah, made public announcement possible.² But Pratt's

² Charges that the Mormons were teaching and/or practicing plural marriage can be traced to as early as 1831. See Bachman, "Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 61. It is clear that no attempt was made to teach the doctrine beyond a small circle of friends during the 1830s. There is some evidence that Joseph Smith intended to announce the doctrine to the public in 1841, but changed his mind. See Helen Mar Whitney, *Plural Marriage, As Taught by the Prophet Joseph*. . . . (Salt Lake City, 1882), 11-12. See also Bachman, "Study of Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 203. What is clear from the public record is that Mormons consistently denied that they were practicing plural marriage until 1852. These denials can be found in many sources, including the following, Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Latter-day Saints*. . . . (Kirtland, OH, 1835), Section 101, 251-52; *Kirtland LDS Messenger and Advocate*, May 1837, 511; *Kirtland Elder's Journal*, July 1838, 43; *Liverpool LDS Millennial Star*, 1 August 1842, 74; 15 January 1850, 29-30, 1 July 1845, 22-3; *Nauvoo Times and Seasons*, 1 September 1842, 909, 1 October 1842, 939-40, 15 March 1843, 143, 1 February 1844, 423, 15 March 1844, 474, 15 November 1844, 715, 1 May 1845, 888, 893-94; B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1954), 5:72, 6:46. In his 4 February 1851 address to the Utah Territorial Legislature, Brigham Young began to change the tone and direction of the early denials. See Elden J. Watson, comp., *Brigham Young Addresses, 1850-54*, 6 vols. (By the Compiler, July 1979), vol. 2. See Journal of Wilford Woodruff under same date, Historical Department of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Hereafter cited as HDC.) To this dimension was added the argument of George A. Smith in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1854-1886), 2:216-17 (speech of 18 March 1855), in which he reasoned that it was the inability of the Saints to accept new doctrines that forced Joseph Smith to keep these things to himself. Hereafter cited as JD with appropriate volume, pages, and date following. It

defense not only became an important element in nineteenth-century Mormon thinking, but contributed to the place the Latter-day Saint experience occupies in western American history .

A number of factors influenced the Mormon decision to publically acknowledge polygamy in 1852. These included (1) the charges of "runaway" federal appointees in 1851, (2) the approaching end to Mormon isolation, and (3) Mormon millennialism. Controversy began in the autumn of 1851, and by late winter had reached a national audience. There is little doubt that Federal Judge Perry E. Brocchus, in a Salt Lake City speech of 8 September 1851, referred to polygamy when he called upon Mormon women to become "virtuous." Brigham Young's angered response, and the hostilities that followed, resulted in the territory's first set of "runaway" officials. Brocchus, Chief Justice Lemuel H. Brandebury, and Territorial Secretary Broughton D. Harris, along with a sub-Indian agent, took their leave of Utah Territory on 28 September. Once they had returned to the east coast they filed reports with the president. They further used the press to argue their claims that their lives were in jeopardy in Utah.³ Their consequent report, which showed up in the *New York Herald*, charged, among other things, that Mormons were "openly sanctioning and defending the practice of polygamy or plurality of wives."⁴

John H. Bernhisel, Utah's delegate to Congress, examined the report and found it to be "a tissue of gross exaggerations and misrepresentations." Far removed from Utah's frontier isolation and keenly sensitive to public opinion at the nation's capital, Bernhisel wrote Mormon Apostle Willard Richards, in December 1851, that Washington was in a state of great excitement, and he feared that Young would be removed as territorial governor.

was not until late 1846, when the exiled Illinois Saints were encamped at Winter Quarters, that knowledge of polygamy became more general among the rank and file membership. The larger story is told in Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981), 181-225; and in Richard E. Bennett, "Mormons at the Missouri: A History of the Latter-day Saints at Winter Quarters and at Kanesville, 1846-52—A Study in American Overland Trail Migration" (doctoral dissertation., Wayne State University, 1984), 388-415.

³ A lengthy discussion of the "runaway" officials episode is in Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church. . . Century I*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1930), 3:520-44; shorter presentations are in Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York, 1985), 227-30; and Norman F. Furniss, *The Mormon Conflict, 1850-1859* (New Haven, 1960), 21-32.

⁴ See *U. S. House Executive Document*, 32nd Congress, 1st Sess., No. 25 (1852), esp. 8-9. See also *Congressional Globe*, 32nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1851-1852, pt. 1, 24 (Number 14, 1852), 211; pt. 1, 24 (Number 15, 1852), 240; pt. 2, 24 (Number 89, 1852); *New York Herald*, 10 January 1852. See also, *Letter of Judge [Perry E.] Brocchus . . . upon the difficulties in the Territory of Utah* (Washington, D.C., 1852), copy in the Library of Congress; and Lemuel G. Brandebury, *Polygamy Revived in the West . . .* (Liverpool, 1852), only known copy in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Useful overviews are provided in Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, 1971), 1-10; and in Richard D. Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics, 1850-1856," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 25 (April 1957), 117-31.

Proceeding cautiously, Bernhisel filed a letter of protest with President Millard Fillmore a few days later and, in a January address to the House of Representatives, demanded a congressional investigation. Bernhisel convinced Fillmore that most of the charges were without substance, but the "runaway" officials continued to lobby to get back-pay and to justify their hasty departure. All this kept polygamy in the congressional and public eye throughout 1852.⁵

Newspapers, especially, kept the issue alive. For example, James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* editorialized in the spring that "the Brocchus affair had been inevitable because polygamy monopolized all the women, making it very inconvenient for the Federal officers residing in Utah Territory." In June, the *Herald* called Bernhisel "old polygamy," a thrust that Bernhisel was sure came from one of the "runaway" officials.⁶

In this climate of acrimony, Bernhisel learned, during the summer of 1852, that plans to announce polygamy publicly were afoot in Utah. Keenly aware of the problems open admission would produce in the national capital, Bernhisel wrote Brigham Young that he feared he would have to fight "the battles" raised by the initial "runaway reports" all "over again."⁷

But his lament apparently fell on deaf ears, as Mormon leaders had begun to move toward acknowledging polygamy in 1851. Indeed, immediately on the departure of Brocchus and his colleagues, Young had reassigned Jedediah M. Grant, the able and bombastic first mayor of Salt Lake City, from another mission and sent him to Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. There, he was instructed to assist in the church's defense against the charges that were sure to be forthcoming.⁸

Grant soon found it expedient to admit to Thomas L. Kane, a Pennsylvanian who had been defending the Mormons in public and in print for five years, that the charges of polygamy were true. Grant explained the dilemma in a letter to Young on 30 December 1851, reporting that when his discussion with Kane turned to the charge "relating to our domestic relations he past it by saying it was false. I found myself therefore under

⁵ Gwynn Barrett, "John M. Bernhisel: Mormon Elder in Congress" (doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1968), 91-115. The growing public awareness of Mormon polygamy probably triggered the first Strangite defense of polygamy: see *Beaver Island, Lake Michigan Northern Islander*, 4 March 1852, 2-3. See also David Rich Lewis, "'For Life, the Resurrection and Life Everlasting': James J. Strang and Strangite Mormon Polygamy, 1849-1856," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 66 (Summer 1983), 274-91.

⁶ Bernhisel's own attitudes regarding polygamy are detailed in Barrett, "John M. Bernhisel," 59-60, 105-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸ See B. H. Roberts, ed., *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 3:520-44; see also Gene A. Sessions, *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant* (Urbana, 1982). Hereafter cited as Sessions.

the disagreeable necessity of *volunteering* to tell him how far it was false and how far it was true."⁹

Grant went on to relate that he had explained to Kane that plural marriage was necessary because females outnumbered males three to two, and this ratio was forcing many women to marry outside the church. Grant explained that Joseph Smith had sought the counsel of God and been given instructions to practice the marriage system of Abraham. He also assured Kane that the rights of women were held very sacredly, and that this was so even among the larger polygamous families of church leaders. As the capstone of his argument, Grant pointed out that the Mormon marriage system was nothing more than "the faith of the ancients reduced to practice." Concluding his letter Grant wrote:

I will not undertake to tell you in this communication how the Col. [Kane] seemed to feel after my announcement of the whole matter. Let it suffice for me to say here that I am satisfied he will not fail to do all in his power to help us in the present crisis of affairs. Indeed, he declares that he will never leave us when we are in trouble. . . .¹⁰

Grant's meeting with Kane seems to be the first admission of polygamy to a public figure by a Mormon. His comments also contained a number of arguments that foreshadowed later Mormon defenses.¹¹

As the polygamy scandal received more and more attention in the press, Grant grew impatient with Bernhisel, who did not wish to issue a public reply to the "runaway" officials. Grant thus found himself increasingly

⁹ J. M. Grant to Brigham Young, 30 December 1851, Brigham Young Collection, HDC. Unless otherwise noted all correspondence cited hereafter is in the Brigham Young Collection, HDC. See also Grant to "Family," 11 December 1851, in Sessions, 90-91.

¹⁰ Kane became acquainted with the Mormons in 1846 and remained their friend throughout his life. A brief sketch is provided in Leonard J. Arrington, "'In Honorable Remembrance': Thomas L. Kane's Services to the Mormons," *Brigham Young University Studies*, 21 (Fall 1981), 389-402. Grant's discussion with Kane was surely Kane's first knowledge of polygamy among the Mormons. Later, T. B. H. Stenhouse incorrectly suggested that the Mormons "designedly kept him in ignorance, and deceived him," *Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York, 1873), 275. Kane did not immediately write Brigham Young regarding this matter (Kane's brother was dying), but when he did he thanked Young for letting his friend Grant convey the information. Kane also frankly told Young his feelings about the practice, including his disapproval of it. See Thomas L. Kane to Brigham Young, 17 October 1852.

¹¹ Of course many of the inner circle of Church leaders knew of the content of the 12 July 1843 revelation on "celestial marriage" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 132). See Bachman, "Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 59, 144; and Bachman, "New Light on an Old Hypothesis: The Ohio Origins of the Revelation on Eternal Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History*, 5 (1978), 19-32. See also the arguments that William W. Phelps used in his attempts to prevent a plural wife from divorcing him in his letter to Brigham Young, 18 March 1849. Also see the comments of Brigham Young on polygamy to his family and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, 16 February 1847 as recorded in Wilford Woodruff's Journal, HDC.

drawing away from Bernhisel and closer to Kane.¹² This association led to a series of coauthored *Letters*, the first of which appeared in the *New York Herald*, 9 March 1852.¹³ While the *Herald* published only the one letter, public interest was so obvious that two additional letters were produced and, along with the first, were issued by Grant and Kane in May 1852 as a sixty-four page pamphlet.¹⁴ In the second letter they promised to deal with the polygamy charges, and in the third one they did so in a way that made no admissions, but did foreshadow an argument that later became an important part of the Mormon defense. "But as to the charge of Polygamy, again: Suppose I should admit it, Whose business is it? Does the Constitution forbid it? . . ."¹⁵

Grant reported his work with Kane to Brigham Young in a letter of 15 April 1852, a month before the pamphlet was published.¹⁶ Earlier, while preparing the pamphlet, Grant, with a bravado that hinted at the coming reversal of the secrecy policy, had written the church president that "[P]olygamy is the bone in the throat. But I shall give it to them as I would feed a hemlock tree to a jackass. It causes a great deal of coughing and sneezing, wind, etc."¹⁷

Grant's bold stand in the pamphlet, and his success in securing Kane's support, apparently sustained Brigham Young in a growing conviction that his own office would have to respond publicly to the controversy. Moving in this direction, he had a ninety page document prepared bearing the title "Beating Against the Air," which responded to the charges of the "runaway" officials. Addressed to President Fillmore, this document may never have reached the president, though Bernhisel probably received a copy. After repeating the charges of the "runaway" officials, Young seemed to make no denial of polygamy when he wrote,

Surely those who believe the testimony of the Reporters, in this section, will not need any further proof; for the words of the Section are established by the mouths of three professional witnesses, and that is all law or gospel requires; and to those who do not believe what these witnesses have stated, I need say nothing; for if their sayings and testimony are rejected, there is nothing before me to reply.¹⁸

Another evidence of developing openness may be seen in the reports of non-Mormon visitors to Salt Lake City. For example, Corps of

¹² See Grant to his wife, Susan, 7 March 1852, in Sessions, 96-98.

¹³ The best discussion of the authorship of the Grant-Kane *Letters* is Sessions, 264-95.

¹⁴ See Grant to his wife, Susan, 15 April 1852, in Sessions, 104-5.

¹⁵ *Three Letters to the New York Herald, from J. M. Grant of Utah* (New York, 1852), 22, 44, 45.

¹⁶ Grant to Brigham Young, 15 April 1852.

¹⁷ Grant to Brigham Young, 20 March 1852.

¹⁸ This document, dated 11 June 1852, exists in two manuscript copies in the Brigham Young Collection HDC. See also Brigham Young to Millard Fillmore, 29 September 1851.

Topographical Engineers' surveyors Howard Stansbury and John Gunnison were both aware that polygamy was being practiced in Salt Lake Valley during their visit just before the public announcement. Their widely read accounts offered some of the earliest non-Mormon glimpses into Mormon community life. Gunnison's comments reflected the reality of the situation:

That many have a large number of wives in Deseret, is perfectly manifest to any one residing long among them, and, indeed, the subject begins to be more openly discussed than formerly, and it is announced that a treatise is in preparation, to prove by the scriptures the right of plurality by all Christians if not to declare their own practice of the same.¹⁹

The growing public awareness of the charges of the "runaway" officials also aroused an interesting response by Mormon Apostle Parley P. Pratt in San Francisco in July 1852. He defended Brigham Young's morality and the doctrine of polygamy without actually admitting to its practice. His argument also foreshadowed later Mormon defenses in its appeal to history, the Bible, and the Constitution.²⁰

Thus, the wide public interest in the charges of the "runaway" officials, the shattering of Mormon isolation by the California gold rush, reports of government surveyors like Stansbury and Gunnison, and the growing willingness of Mormons to admit and defend polygamy all provided a background to the public announcement in August 1852.

These elements were all given focus by the interrelationship between matrimony and millennial expectations among the Latter-day Saints. Again, John Gunnison described the situation accurately when he noted that they taught,

. . . that the use and foundation of matrimony is to raise up a peculiar, holy people for the Kingdom of God the Son, that at the Millennium they may be resurrected

¹⁹ J. W. Gunnison, *The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints*. . . (Philadelphia, 1852), 67, 120. See also Howard Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake*. . . (Philadelphia, 1852), 136. Consider also the openness of the pioneer celebration "Toast" offered on 24 July 1852: "Number 8. 'Mormonism' and Marriage: More good, and more favour; for Solomon says, 'Who finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favour of the Lord;' " wherefore, as he had many, *the more good*; and the more good, the more favours of the Lord. That's Scripture." "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," HDC, 24 July 1852. This toast was printed in both the *Salt Lake City Deseret News* and the *Millennial Star*. Gold seekers who passed through the Mormon capital also wrote to friends and families of Mormon polygamy. See the material in Brigham D. Madsen, *Gold Rush Sojourners in Great Lake City, 1849 and 1850* (Salt Lake City, 1983), 103-6.

²⁰ "Mormonism!" "Plurality of Wives!" *An especial Chapter, for the Especial Edification of Certain Inquisitive New Editors, Etc.* A Broadside dated San Francisco, 13 July 1852. Photocopy in the Harold B. Lee Library, Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. A copy of the broadside was published in the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 14 (March 1935), 58.

to reign with him, and the glory of the man will be in proportion to the size of his household of children, wives and servants. . . .²¹

Gunnison obviously recognized both the centrality of millennial expectation among the Mormons and polygamy's connection to it. In stressing their responsibility to establish the earthly Kingdom of God, Mormons had been out of step, from the first, with the pluralism of Jacksonian America. Unable to pursue this in the East and Midwest, they had progressively moved to the frontier where they could put their vision of the kingdom into effect. Political steps in this direction are apparent in the provisional State of Deseret of 1849 and in continuing efforts during the 1850s to build a millennial kingdom. That the frontier's lack of social restraint may have encouraged a modification of marital practices also seems likely. That such was indeed the case was suggested by Oliver Olney's report that Mormons had contemplated a western exodus as early as 1842, to escape social restraint against their new marriage practices.²²

Students of LDS history have shown the pervasiveness of millennialism in early Mormon thought.²³ Although Mormon political history has been the focus of much recent scholarship, social history has been increasingly included.²⁴ Particularly useful is Lawrence Foster's recent study of

²¹ Gunnison, *The Mormons*, 68-69. Historian Klaus J. Hansen has suggested polygamy was an important part of the social order of the early Mormon political kingdom. See *Quest for Empire, The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, 1967), 53-55, 170-72, 178-79, 186-87.

²² The best study is a pamphlet by Peter Crawley, *The Constitution of the State of Deseret*, Friends of the Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library, *Newsletter*, 19 (1982), 27 pp. Crawley dismisses political millennialism as a basis for this document, but stresses the need early Mormons felt for self government, which was the prerequisite for the social and economic millennial emphasis that is clearly present in early Mormon thought. Crawley's interpretation is more in line with Marvin S. Hill's, "Quest for Refuge: An Hypothesis as to the Social Origins and Nature of the Mormon Political Kingdom," *Journal of Mormon History*, 2 (1975), 3-20. Oliver Olney recorded 20 July 1842 that the Mormons were planning to immigrate West so that they could, in polygamy, raise up "a righteous branch" of Israel. See the material in Lawrence Foster, "Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Oneida Community Complex Marriage and Mormon Polygamy" (doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976), 331, note 1.

²³ A useful review essay is Grant Underwood, "Early Mormon Millenarianism: Another Look," *Church History*, 54 (June 1985), 215-29.

²⁴ These studies have focused on the role of the Council of Fifty in early Mormon history. The early studies saw an aggressive political unit bent on empire building: James R. Clark, "The Kingdom of God, The Council of Fifty and the State of Deseret," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 26 (April 1958), 131-48; Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City, 1958); and most fully in Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire*. More recently, Mormon scholars have stressed the conservative nature of this council, seeing it more as an extension of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who directed its activities for establishing a refuge rather than an empire: Marvin S. Hill, "Quest for Refuge," D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945," *Brigham Young University Studies*, 20 (Winter 1980), 163-97; Andrew F. Ehat, "'It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth': Joseph

the marriage patterns of several religious groups in nineteenth-century America.²⁵ Applying the model of Victor Turner, Foster points out how Mormon polygamy was a central practice in their attempt to create a new society. He argues that the establishment of extended patriarchal families created both loyal communities and provided practical evidence of personal commitment to the God of Israel. Thus, polygamy helped to create a new social order—a basis, literally, for the Kingdom of God.²⁶

In addition to its connection with marital practices, millennial expectation had an important bearing on Mormon missionary work. To take the gospel message to the world was to assist in gathering the righteous to an earthly Zion in preparation for the Savior's second coming, which Mormons believed was imminent. Thus, there was consistency in the public proclaiming of plural marriage at a conference from which the largest missionary thrust in Mormon history was launched. This also puts the Mormons' stress on the role of polygamy as a basis for reordering society along righteous principles into a millennial focus.²⁷

It was in this context, then, that Brigham Young called for a special conference which was to meet 28-29 August 1852. It was in this setting that that veteran defender of Mormonism, Apostle Orson Pratt, publically announced polygamy on 29 August 1852. When he began his address he told an audience of about 3,000 that his assignment was a surprise both as to timing and topic.²⁸ Polygamy, however, was not a new doctrine to Pratt. In 1842 he had returned to Nauvoo from a mission to the British Isles to be greeted by the charges and countercharges that were emerging in a conflict between Joseph Smith and his counselor, John C. Bennett. Pratt's excommunication in August of that year, over polygamy, was rarely discussed by him in later years, but by the time he was readmitted

Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *Brigham Young University Studies*, 20 (Spring 1980), 253-79. Regardless of approach, it is clear that Mormon millennial thought impacted in the political arena; this is made clear in their Nauvoo experience in Robert B. Flanders, "The Kingdom of God in Illinois: Politics in Utopia," *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 5 (Spring 1970), 26-36.

²⁵ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*.

²⁶ Victor Turner's work is *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969). Foster, "Religion and Sexuality," 9, 19, 166-69. See also I. C. Jarvie, *The Revolution in Anthropology* (New York, 1964), 44-73, 116; and Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York, 1969), 3-14.

²⁷ At the heart of Mormon millennialism were sacred sealing practices wherein husbands and wives were "sealed" to each other for all time and eternity as well as to key priesthood leaders, thus creating an extended bound community. A useful overview of these practices in the nineteenth-century is Gordon Irving's "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830-1900," *Brigham Young University Studies*, 14 (Spring 1974), 291-314.

²⁸ See *Deseret News*, Extra, 14 September 1852; *LDS Millennial Star*, Supplement, (1853), 18-23; *JD* 1:53-66, and the *St. Louis Luminary*, 17 & 24 February 1855, 49; 53.

to membership in January 1843 he must have spent hours considering the practice.²⁹ The ten years between his excommunication and his public announcement of polygamy provided additional time for reflection and adjustment.

Pratt also had special occasion to contemplate the matter during the weeks prior to the 29 August meeting, when church leaders submitted Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation on "celestial marriage"—which dealt in part with polygamy—to intensive discussion. On Sunday, 8 August, for example, thirteen of them had listened as secretary Thomas Bullock had read the revelation (later known as Doctrine and Covenants, Section 132) and then had discussed it minutely. Earlier the same day, Brigham Young had told a congregation about the importance of growing by degrees, admonishing them not to reject truth because of their traditions, and cited lengthy quotes from Doctrine and Covenants, Section 76, a text that Pratt would refer to in his 29 August address. On 15 August, church leaders, Pratt among them, again met to discuss the principle of "plurality."³⁰

The special conference session on Sunday morning (the 29th) was taken up by Pratt's address. Brigham Young began the afternoon session by defending Joseph Smith. He gave a brief history of the revelation on celestial marriage, and concluded that no man could be exalted in heaven without the application of the principles involved. After his address, Bullock read the revelation to the congregation.³¹

Both Pratt and Young told listeners that the doctrine was not new to the Latter-day Saints. Both men spent time explaining the theological foundation upon which the doctrine was built. Pratt's address was the more detailed, and even a cursory examination suggests that it was not a spontaneous presentation as he implied at the beginning of his presentation.

Pratt's discourse, which set the tone and direction for the later Mormon pamphlet defenses, may be divided into five sections. He first touched briefly on the Mormon right under the American Constitution to practice a system of marriage that was a part of their religion. He then discussed Mormon views of a premortal existence and specifically dealt with the origin of man's spirit body, which, he argued, was sired by God. He discussed the Father of these spirits, stressing the eternal dimension of His work. Then,

²⁹ Several sources provide good material on this period of Orson Pratt's life: T. Edgar Lyon, "Orson Pratt, Early Mormon Leader" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1932); Elden Jay Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City, 1975), 177-93, 490-93; Bachman, "Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 233-38. Pratt did state in 1878 that he had been deceived by Bennett: see *LDS Millennial Star*, 40 (12 September 1878), 788.

³⁰ See "Journal History," 8 August and 15 August 1852. Brigham Young's 15 August address can be found in *JD* 6:283-98.

³¹ The entire conference minutes were published in the *Deseret News*, Extra, 14 September 1852, 48 pp.; and as a supplement to the *LDS Millennial Star*, 1853, 64.

he led his audience to a consideration of how all the spirit children of God received their earthly tabernacles. Marriage, eternal in duration, was the divinely appointed channel through which bodies were to come.

It was while discussing the nature of marriage that Pratt gave the specific reasons for plural marriage. Briefly stated these were: (1) fulfill the commandment given to Adam and Eve—"to multiply and replenish the earth"; (2) take part in the promises made to Abraham and his family; (3) the earth's population must believe in polygamy, realizing monogamy was the exception historically, not the rule; (4) accept that the practice of polygamy would reform the world morally and socially and monogamy was unnatural and invited immorality, and (5) realize that spirit children of God waited in a preexistent state for a "noble parentage" on earth who would train them properly to help usher in the Kingdom of God.

Finally, Pratt insisted that only one man held the keys, or priesthood authority, to perform celestial marriages and that a great responsibility rested upon those to whom the doctrine was preached. Throughout the address he stressed the moral implications of the doctrine and the moral responsibility of those who wished to enter into its practice, reminding his audience that the system was divinely inspired.

Pratt obviously had more to say—three times in the discourse he apologized for not elaborating on various points either because he lacked time or because topics spread forth "like the branches of a thrifty tree." That he had more to say on the topic was also apparent during the course of the next year, most of which he spent in developing and perfecting his arguments.

The proceedings of the special conference were published two weeks later in a *Deseret News* "Extra," and in other church periodicals in the months following. To publicly announce the doctrine was to invite more criticism, but it also allowed Mormons to publicly discuss and defend polygamy.³² Between the time of its announcement in 1852 and 1884, when the last major defenses appeared, about twenty items were authored by Mormon writers which dealt directly with polygamy.³³ A close examination of them reveals how influential Orson Pratt's ideas and writings were.

³² That the "cat was now out of the bag" for some Mormons is apparent in Hosea Stout's journal entry for 29 August 1852:

In the afternoon the Revelation on that subject [polygamy or plurality of wives] given to Joseph on the 12th of July 1843 was publicly read for the first time to the great joy of the Saints who have looked forward so long and so anxiously for the time to come when we could publicly declare the true and greatest principles of our holy religion and the great things which God has for his people to do in this dispensation.

See Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1964), 2: 449-50. Brigham Young referred to the announcement as a cat let out of the bag in JD 1:188 (discourse of 19 June 1853). Compare the comments of Thomas Caffell in *LDS Millennial Star*, 16 (5 August 1854), 482.

³³ For the sake of space, no attempt is made here to deal with the voluminous pulpit literature, a consideration of which would require a separate essay.

Clearly, the publication of the proceedings of the August conference was a key factor in shaping the early defenses of polygamy. The celestial marriage revelation itself and Orson Pratt's discourse gave the missionaries guidelines and a specific document to use and discuss. But Brigham Young sensed that this material would not be enough, and in the months following he called key church leaders to go to strategic locations throughout the United States to establish new publications which could, among other things, defend the doctrine of plural marriage. Hence, Erastus Snow and Orson Spencer's *St. Louis Luminary*; George Q. Cannon's *Western Standard* (San Francisco); John Taylor's *The Mormon* (New York City); and Pratt's *The Seer* (Washington, D.C.) all contained defenses of polygamy.³⁴ Pratt's writings, however, were the most lengthy and detailed, and his series on "Celestial Marriage" provided grist for the Mormon defense mill throughout the nineteenth century.

While these publishers were among the handful of early Mormons specifically called on missions to defend plural marriage, Orson Pratt was the only one who systematically approached his assignment and the only one who interpreted his call as being totally devoted to this topic. He recognized that this mission was special. As he told Salt Lake City listeners in 1854, his manner of preaching was usually practical, stressing the basic doctrines, "except on my last mission" when "I was sent to preach the doctrine of plurality of wives."³⁵

Pratt published twenty issues of *The Seer*, each having sixteen pages, making a combined work of 320 pages. In a "Prospectus" dated 21 December 1852, he described his plans to publish his paper monthly and promised that it would contain "original matter, illucidating the doctrines of the Church... as revealed in both ancient and modern revelations." He specifically promised that "the doctrine of *Celestial Marriage, or Marriage for all Eternity*" and "the views of the Saints in regard to the *Ancient Patriarchal Order of Matrimony, or Plurality of Wives*, as developed in a revelation, given through JOSEPH the Seer, will be fully published."³⁶

³⁴ See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, 4:55-68. The references to plural marriage in these publications are too numerous to treat fully here. The *St. Louis Luminary* was published weekly from 22 November 1854 to 15 December 1855. It regularly defended the church and included in its pages defenses of plural marriage. The *Western Standard*, published weekly from 23 February 1856 to 6 November 1857, also responded regularly to attacks on the Mormon's marriage practices. Seldom did the *Western Standard* present new arguments, although an article entitled "The Improvement of Our Species," suggested that polygamy would perfect the species, presumably through superior breeding (7 August 1857). Perhaps because of its location in New York City, *The Mormon* devoted more of its pages to defending plural marriage than those in St. Louis or San Francisco. Published weekly from 17 February 1855 to 19 September 1857, it published almost one article per issue on plural marriage.

³⁵ JD 2:58-59 (7 October 1854).

³⁶ *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 1.

The Seer occupied a unique place in Mormon publishing.³⁷ It was a subscription pamphlet series containing almost no other material except that authored by Pratt, and it had none of the advertising or ordinary editorial matters that cluttered other early Mormon periodicals.

The first issue, dated January 1853, was actually in circulation about 23 December 1852. By 31 December, Pratt had sent copies to the major eastern newspapers, placed copies in the major bookstores and periodical depots in the Washington, D.C. area, and boasted a subscription list of about 200 people east of the Rocky Mountains.³⁸ Actual preparation of copy began in November, when Pratt wrote Young about a manuscript he had been writing on "The Peopling of Worlds."³⁹

Pursuing a heavy writing obligation, Pratt spent the first two months of 1853 shut up in a small room composing material for *The Seer*. By March, the first six numbers had been published, and the seventh was in proof-sheet.⁴⁰ Pratt was anxious to publish more as quickly as possible for he wrote to Brigham Young:

My object has been to hurry out the whole twelve Nos. of the *Seer* as soon as possible in order that the evidences and arguments in relation to Plurality may be set before the minds of the people before their works shall appear in opposition, and also that they may be led to investigate while the subject is fresh before their minds.

The number of subscriptions had grown to about 500 by March, although the public sales were and remained almost nil. Pratt estimated that his costs in publishing *The Seer* for one year would amount to about \$1,000.⁴¹

Pratt spent about three and a half months of 1853 in England, leaving in May and returning near the first of September. Before his departure he issued two more numbers of *The Seer* (August and September) and estimated that subscriptions had reached 700, the highest number ever attained.⁴² From Liverpool, he wrote to Brigham Young asking if he should

³⁷ Pratt's letter of appointment from Brigham Young was published in *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 2. In his 31 October 1852 letter to Orson Pratt, Brigham Young specifically referred to Pratt's mission as "forcibly illustrating, elucidating" to the children of men the principles and truths which have been hid from the world.

³⁸ Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 31 December 1852. This letter also contains information on the activities of John Bernhisel and his concerns about Orson Pratt's publication dealing with polygamy.

³⁹ Pratt to Brigham Young, 20 November 1852.

⁴⁰ Pratt to Brigham Young, 4 March 1853. This means that the first 112 pages were in print by March 1853 even though they were dated through July.

⁴¹ This figure included living expenses.

⁴² Pratt to Young, 30 May 1853. He estimated the public sales to be about forty cents per month; they sold for ten cents each or \$1.00 per year by subscription.

continue the publication for another year. Young responded that he approved, if Pratt wanted to do so.⁴³

When Orson returned to Washington he had several letters from Young waiting for him. One of these dispatches voiced disapproval of Pratt's publication of the details of the plural marriage ceremony, mainly because of the ceremony's sacred nature. Pratt responded on 10 September. In addition to telling Young that he planned to end the series on celestial marriage with the twelfth number, he defended his actions by reminding his leader that mistakes were due to the difficulties of writing on such a novel subject.⁴⁴ Although Young advised Pratt to deal more with the fundamental teachings of the church he was generally pleased with Pratt's effort.⁴⁵

By 1 November, the last three numbers of the first volume (October to December) were in print.⁴⁶ By then Pratt was taking stock of the impact of his publication and assessing its prospects for the future. Only twenty of the old subscribers had responded to his plea for renewal, a fact that greatly disturbed him.⁴⁷ In addition, he was growing increasingly pessimistic about the prospects of a sympathetic hearing from the general public. He wrote of his concerns to Brigham Young:

The excitement on the introduction of celestial marriage has mostly subsided, and sunk down into a bitter, cold, deadly, silent hatred, looking upon the Saints as the most degraded, contemptible, beastly creatures that, in their estimation, disgrace the earth. Their minds are made up upon popular rumor and newspaper slander, for our works they do not read.⁴⁸

⁴³ Brigham Young to Orson Pratt, 29 July, 30 November, and 31 December 1853. In his 30 May 1853 letter, Pratt had requested permission to take another plural wife as a "practical demonstration of the doctrine of Celestial Marriage." He married his seventh wife, Sarah Louise Lewis in Birmingham, England, 21 June 1853.

⁴⁴ Pratt to Young, 10 September 1853. See also Pratt to Young, 14 February 1854.

⁴⁵ Orson wrote, "The first volume of *The Seer* has been mostly occupied in defending the Plurality and Unity of God, and the Plurality of Wives. I have closed these subjects and will endeavor to comply with your suggestions in my future numbers to publish and reason upon other subjects more easily comprehended and not quite so much opposed to the prejudice of the people." Pratt to Young, 4 November 1853. See also Young to Pratt, 1 June 1853, in which he noted, "The news of your safe arrival at Washington, and of your proceedings there, was highly gratifying, evincing energy, zeal, observance, and direction of the spirit of the Lord, though I must confess I was somewhat surprised to see the sealing ordinances in print at all, and especially in the prints of the Gentiles, however, it may be all right." In Brigham Young Letterbooks, HDC.

⁴⁶ Orson Pratt to Parley P. Pratt, 2 November 1853, Pratt Family Collection, HDC; and Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 4 November 1853.

⁴⁷ Notice of his intention to publish a second volume appeared in *The Seer*, 1 (October 1853), 160.

⁴⁸ Pratt to Young, 4 November 1853. Cf. the material in Orson's letter of 14 February 1854, "I have done the best with that I could. I am happy to say that no Gentile has as yet, to my knowledge, been able to bring one argument against it. . . ." See also JD 2:347 (18 February 1855).

He was a bit more optimistic a month later when he reported about 300 subscribers for the second volume. In December, Pratt moved his operation to Baltimore, where he found publishing costs less, even though "all my correspondence is at Washington, and *The Seer* goes out as if published in Washington."⁴⁹ He rejoiced that the sales of other Mormon publications were picking up.⁵⁰ To meet this interest he printed, in November, about 1,500 circulars containing catalogues of Mormon publications for sale from his book agency. Again happy in his mission, he told Young that "the Press is a powerful engine, and I want to keep my pen busy for the benefit of this nation and others who wish to inform themselves of the doctrines of the saints."⁵¹

In February 1854, subscribers reached 400, but the financial drain was bringing increased stress to Pratt. This stress, coupled with permission from Young to end his mission and return home, forced Pratt to face the question of ending his publication.⁵² But, feeling a commitment to his subscribers, he continued to publish *The Seer* for another six numbers (January to June 1854) in the United States, and another two numbers (July and August) which were published in Liverpool, England. In response to Young's counsel he devoted space in the second volume to "faith, repentance, and other items of a more simple nature," but somewhat lamely pointed out that he had intended all along to do so after "having placed those other principles prominently before the public."⁵³

Pratt was back in Salt Lake Valley by September 1854 where he reported his experience with *The Seer*.⁵⁴

In considering the series on plural marriage, Pratt lamented to Young that it was not as systematic as he would have preferred. In addition to the general problems of breaking "new ground," he reminded his leader of "the difficulties which attend the presentation, for the first time, of so delicate a subject." On the whole, Pratt was pleased with the material and asked that any errors, lack of wisdom, and "other imperfections . . . be overlooked and generously pardoned."⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 13 December 1853.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 13 December 1853. He warned the Saints that they "frequently transgress through ignorance; and this ignorance arises from a neglect to procure and read the Church publications; such ignorance is inexcusable; and such transgressions will, if not repented of, be punished." *The Seer*, 1 (November 1853), 168. The larger story is told in David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering" (doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1982), esp. Chp. 2. See also Orson's comments on writing and publishing in his letter to his brother Parley, 2 November 1853, Pratt Family Collections, HDC.

⁵² See Orson Pratt to Parley Pratt, 12 February 1854, Parley P. Pratt Collection, HDC.

⁵³ Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 14 February 1854.

⁵⁴ JD 2:96-104 (10 September 1854). JD 2:58-59 (7 October 1854).

⁵⁵ Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 10 September 1853.

In spite of an occasional wandering from his main theme, Pratt had approached his subject rather systematically. He devoted eight pages of *The Seer*, for twelve issues, to "Celestial Marriage." A close examination of the combined ninety-six pages reveals the following outline of his main arguments.

In the first number (January 1853) he published the celestial marriage revelation to Joseph Smith, to which he added five pages of material, much of which summarized his 29 August 1852 address. The second installment (February 1853) argued that polygamy was the key to fulfilling the great commandment to "multiply and replenish" the earth. In a discussion of the mechanics of courtship for polygamy, Pratt made it clear that authority from God was absolutely essential to the polygamous union. It was in this context that he reviewed the actual plural marriage ceremony.

In the third and fourth issues (March and April 1853), he discussed, at length, the nature of eternal marriage, argued that polygamy protected women, and began a long analysis of the Biblical evidence for plural marriage that continued through the sixth installment (June 1853). In the next two issues (July and August 1853) Orson presented his constitutional arguments and reasoned that there was no evidence polygamy was injurious to a society.

The last four installments (September to December 1853) centered on his discussions of patriarchal order. He detailed the Mormon conception of eternal family relationships and included practical rules for achieving peace, love, and union in these extended families. The December 1853 issue also devoted a separate essay to "Christian Polygamy in the Sixteenth Century."⁵⁶

Taken as a whole, this series constituted the most extensive defense of plural marriage to appear in early Mormon literature. Although Pratt later returned to discuss polygamy in several discourses, he did not add any new arguments to *The Seer* series, nor did other Mormon authors in the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Early Mormon use of non-Mormon sources to buttress their defenses of plural marriage are treated in David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses," *Journal of Mormon History*, 11 (1984), 43-63.

⁵⁷ There are five discourses by Orson Pratt in the *Journal of Discourses* which were entirely devoted to polygamy or celestial marriage. In addition to the public announcement, JD 1:53-66 (29 August 1852), they are JD 6:349-64 (24 July 1859); JD 13:183-96 (7 October 1869); JD 16:171-85 (31 August 1873); and JD 17:214-29 (7 October 1874). The 1869 address was published, with two other addresses given at the same October conference by other Mormon leaders, as a pamphlet: Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, and George Q. Cannon, *Discourses on Celestial Marriage*. . . . (Salt Lake City, 1869). There is some evidence these talks originated from a special assignment from Brigham Young. See the short summary of the main arguments for plural marriage in Lyon, "Orson Pratt," 119-24; the larger analysis in Davis Bitton, "Polygamy Defended: A Study of 19th Century Polemic," this essay is included in a collection of Professor Bitton's essays forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press; and Poll, "The Twin Relic," 3-59.

Pratt's defense of polygamy combined scriptural, historical/social, and constitutional arguments. All of these arguments rested on the fundamental Mormon premise that God had commanded and authorized plural marriage in a revelation to his latter-day prophet, Joseph Smith. Pratt began his series with the 1843 revelation, and continued to return to it as the basis for the series.⁵⁸ From it flowed his other arguments.

In his scriptural exegesis, Pratt combed the Old Testament and the New Testament.⁵⁹ He especially liked to interpret Genesis 1:28 ("multiply and replenish") as a commandment that required the practice of polygamy.⁶⁰ The story of Adam and Eve was consistently invoked to teach the concept of eternal union. That Abraham was polygamous was used as the model for the faithful.⁶¹ Pratt employed all the major Bible citations in his defense and also gave thoughtful consideration to the more problematical passages.⁶² He even made an argument for polygamy in explaining the large numbers for the population of Israel, as reported in the Book of Numbers.⁶³ Perhaps he went the furthest as an exegete when he argued for plural wives for Jesus, but his Mormon colleagues tended to agree, and the notion regularly appeared thereafter in Mormon sermons.⁶⁴

Many of Pratt's arguments were historical/social in their thrust. He consistently maintained that polygamy was both a check and a prevention against adultery, and argued emphatically at one point that plurality of wives would reduce prostitution by 90 percent in a few years.⁶⁵ Of course there were other factors, too. Polygamy would protect women and their

⁵⁸ *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 13-14; 1 (February 1853), 29-30, etc.

⁵⁹ *The Seer*, 1 (April 1853), 62; 1 (July 1853), 105-9; and JD 6:349-54. A useful overview of polygamy in ancient Israel is in Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York, 1965), 1:24-25. See also *The Seer*, 1 (April 1853), 62-64; 1 (May 1853), 73-80; 1 (June 1853), 89-96, 1 (September 1853), 135; 1 (November 1853) 169-73.

⁶⁰ *The Seer*, 1 (February 1853), 25.

⁶¹ *The Seer*, 1 (March 1853), 44-45; 1 (June 1853), 89. See also JD 16:251-52 (24 July 1859); 18:47-51 (11 July 1875); 21:289-96 (18 July 1880). *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 13; 1 (July 1853), 105.

⁶² Examples include I Timothy 2:3, 12 and Titus 1:6-7 in *The Seer*, 1 (May 1853), 75; and Matthew 19:14, 6 in *The Seer*, 1 (June 1853), 90. It should be noted that several early Mormon writers qualified their arguments by suggesting that while the number of men and women in ancient and modern times was fifty-fifty, there were more *righteous* women than men. See *LDS Millennial Star*, 18 September 1869, 611; and, 7 June 1870, 358; Parley P. Pratt, *The Key to the Science of Theology* (Liverpool, 1855), 166. Orson Pratt also suggested that while the birth rates were fifty-fifty, by the time females reached marriageable age they greatly outnumbered the males, thus making polygamy necessary if many women were to have the opportunity to marry. See JD 13:195-96 (7 October 1869).

⁶³ *The Seer*, 1 (July 1853), 108-9.

⁶⁴ *The Seer*, 1 (May 1853), 80; 1 (September 1853), 137; 1 (October 1853), 159-60; 1 (November 1853), 169-72. Other, early LDS references are given in Whittaker, "Early Mormon Pamphleteering," 378-79.

⁶⁵ *The Seer*, 1 (August 1853), 125. Additional material presenting this social argument is on 1 (January 1853), 12; 1 (March 1853), 43; 1 (August 1853), 124, 236.

rights; it would care for unmarried women; it would help to create more positive family relationships; and, at the same time, establish a righteous patriarchal government, the only government of the eternities.⁶⁶ Pratt had argued in his 29 August 1852 address that four-fifths of the nations of the world permit or practice plural marriage, and he continued to argue this in *The Seer*.⁶⁷ Historically, polygamy did not corrupt a society; in fact, he declared, it was the wicked who rejected this marriage system authorized by God himself.⁶⁸ It was in his attempts to help create this righteous order that Pratt occasionally offered practical counsel and gave “rules” for those who would enter into plurality.⁶⁹ Here the mechanics of Mormon millennialism were

⁶⁶ *The Seer*, 1 (March 1853), 41-2; 1 (August 1853), 122-3; 1 (September 1853), 140; 1 (April 1853), 58-60; 1 (September 1853), 143-4; 1 (October 1853), 155; 1 (July 1853), 105; 1 (September 1853), 141; 1 (October 1853), 154; 1 (September 1853), 135, 138, 140.

⁶⁷ *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 12, 14; 1 (August 1853), 124.

⁶⁸ *The Seer*, 1 (April 1853), 61; 1 (August 1853), 123.

⁶⁹ *The Seer*, 1 (July 1853), 105-6, 111. The twenty-seven rules for establishing “peace, love and union,” in polygamous households include the following: (1) Let the man who seeks to become a husband, seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and learn to govern himself, according to the laws of God; (2) “Let him next seek for wisdom to direct him in the choice of his wives. . .;” (3) When he has obtained his wives, let him not suppose that they are perfect in all things—they are weaker vessels—study their dispositions that he may know how to instruct them; (4) “Betray not the confidence of your wives. . .;” (5) “Speak not of the faults of your wives to others. . .;” (6) “Avoid anger and a fretful peevish disposition in your family. . .;” (7) “Use impartiality in your family. . .;” (8) “Suffer not your judgement to be biased against any one of your wives, by the accusations of the others. . .;” (9) “Call your wives and children together frequently and instruct them in their duties toward God, towards yourself, and towards one another. . .;” (10) Husbands must have the Holy Ghost to teach and lead in righteousness; (11) “Let no woman unite herself in marriage with any man, unless she has fully resolved to submit herself wholly to his counsel, and to let him govern as the head. . .;” (12) “Never seek to prejudice the mind of your husband against any of his other wives. . .;” (13) “Seek to be a peacemaker in the family with whom you are associated. . .;” (14) “Speak not evil of your husband unto any of the rest of the family. . .;” (15) Administer to the needs of your husband’s other wives when necessary; (16) Let each mother correct her own children in every principle of the gospel; (17) Teach your children the Book of Mormon; (18) “Let each mother commence teaching her children when they are young—the mother is the key to righteous children. . .;” (19) “Do not correct children in anger. . .;” (20) Never deceive your children by threats or promises; (21) “Do not be so stern and rigid in your family government as to render yourself an object of fear and dread. . .;” (22) “Let each mother teach her children to honor and love their father, and to respect his teachings and counsels. . .;” (23) “Suffer not children of different mothers to be haughty and abusive to each other. . .;” (24) “Be industrious in your habits. . .;” (25) Let mothers educate their daughters in all kinds of domestic labor—let fathers educate their sons in whatever branch of business they intend them to follow—all education must be “useful” or it is like “putting costly jewels on swine. . .;” (26) “Use economy and avoid wastefulness. . .;” and (27) “Let husbands, wives, sons and daughters continually realize that their relationships do not end with this short life, but will continue in eternity without end. . .” (*The Seer*, 1 [November 1853], 174-76; and 1 [December 1853], 183-87) Orson recognized that quarrels occurred in plural marriages, but argued that “the system is good.” See speech of 11 August 1867, JD 12:91. Compare the material in Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington, IN, 1986), 77-85, 112-6; and Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 239.

placed on a practical level while, at the same time, basic Victorian morality was reinforced in extended families.

Coupled with his scriptural and historical/social explanations were constitutional arguments which called for protection under the first amendment guarantee of religious freedom. Since plural marriage was directly related to both faith and teaching, its practice should be given the religious protection of the Constitution. This position Pratt presented consistently.⁷⁰ One outgrowth of his constitutional argument was his question about the legal status of the polygamous, non-Mormon immigrant. Would the government protect him? Pratt felt that the government should and could.⁷¹

For Orson Pratt polygamy was a religious order. Commanded by God, it was to be practiced only for righteous motives, and with the approval of the proper priesthood authority. It was modeled, he maintained, after the celestial family pattern and provided a means of joining the divine program begun by God in a preexistent state to the glorious millennial times ahead. For Pratt, the key to the success of this divinely established order was love. "Love," he wrote, "should be the predominant ruling principle in all family governments."⁷² It was a principle, "like knowledge, which can be imparted without diminishing the fountain from which it emanates. Love, in other words, begets love."⁷³ Pratt also linked polygamy to the larger story of man's eternal journey—a journey that he described in detail and published side-by-side with the series on "Celestial Marriage" and under the title "The Pre-Existence of Man."⁷⁴ This cosmological view

⁷⁰ Pratt stressed his constitutional argument in his letter to Young, 31 December 1852. See also JD 1:54 (29 August 1852); *The Seer*, 1 (January 1853), 12; 1 (February 1853), 30; 1 (July 1853), 111; 1 (August 1853), 122, 124-28; 2 (January 1854), 193-97; JD 8:111-3 (4 July 1860); JD 13:184 (7 October 1869); JD 20:326 (6 October 1879). In the same vein was "Polygamy and Utah," *LDS Millennial Star*, 24 February 1855, 113-18; "Plurality of Wives—Its Constitutionality," *LDS Millennial Star*, 9 June 1866, 357-60; and George Q. Cannon, *A Review of the Decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the Case of George Reynolds vs. the United States* (Salt Lake City, 1879).

⁷¹ *The Seer*, 1 (July 1853), 112; 1 (December 1853), 191; JD 7:226 (14 August 1859). Joseph Smith had raised this question about 1842 in Nauvoo when he challenged an audience to ponder the possibility of the conversion of a "Turkish polygamist" who would bring his wives to Zion. See the discussion in Bachman, "Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage," 203-4, where the sources suggest that Joseph Smith was attempting to get his followers prepared for a public announcement of the practice.

⁷² *The Seer*, 1 (October 1853), 152, 1 (September 1853), 138.

⁷³ *The Seer*, 1 (October 1853), 155. Orson clearly drew from the insights of his own brother, Parley, and from Joseph Smith himself. Compare the material in *The Seer* to Parley P. Pratt, "Intelligence and Affection," originally published in 1844, but more conveniently found in Parley Parker Robinson, ed., *Writings of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City, 1952), 48-60. See also Parley's essay, "Celestial Family Organization," *The Prophet*, 1 (1 March 1845), 1.

⁷⁴ This series appeared in *The Seer* from February to September 1853. See also JD 15:241-53 (15 December 1872); JD 19:311-21 (7 October 1867); and Orson Pratt to Brigham Young, 4 March 1853, where both articles are described as being written as part of the same composition effort.

emphasized man's divine connections and his exalted potentials. These were topics to which Pratt regularly returned in discourses throughout his life.⁷⁵ This view also expanded to include the earth itself, allowing Pratt to treat the history of the earth, from its first organization to its final state, as the abode of the faithful.⁷⁶ Here was a basis for a radical reordering of society, a truly millennial undertaking.

Orson Pratt's openness in his discussion of polygamy set the stage for a more open discussion of the topic. He also urged Church members to subscribe to *The Seer*.⁷⁷ Yet, as a mission president, he cautioned his subordinates to avoid the topic.⁷⁸ It was probably this kind of advice, in addition to personal doubts and fears, that prevented most Mormons, missionaries and writers alike, from addressing the question of polygamy. It may, too, help explain why even when they did deal with polygamy, no one added anything substantial to Pratt's arguments.

A brief examination of a few subsequent Mormon defenses of plural marriage shows how central Pratt's arguments became in LDS literature and thought.⁷⁹ Richard Ballantyne, Jesse Haven, and Benjamin F. Johnson were called on foreign missions at the 1852 conference where Pratt announced plural marriage. Ballantyne went to Madras, India, and, while there, issued his *Dialogue Between A and B on Polygamy* in March 1854. The work depended heavily on Pratt's essays in *The Seer*.⁸⁰ The importance of Pratt's ideas in Ballantyne's domestic life was apparent in an 1854 letter to his wife in which he responded to her concerns about polygamy by advising her to subscribe to *The Seer*, recommending "Brother Pratt's works as your constant guide."⁸¹

Jesse Haven, the first president of the South African Mission, issued his *Celestial [sic] Marriage and the Plurality of Wives!* in June 1853. Three of the eight pages of the pamphlet came directly from Pratt's 29 August 1852

⁷⁵See for example, *The Seer*, 1 (March 1853), 33-36; for example, JD 2:235-48 (15 October 1854); JD 3:97-105 (22 October 1854); JD 7:154-57 (12 February 1860); JD 16:353-69 (27 January 1874); JD 21:197-206 (12 November 1879); and JD 21:256-63 (13 June 1880).

⁷⁶*The Seer*, 2 (April 1854), 248-51; JD 1:328-334 (n.d., 1854); JD 14:233-45 (20 August 1871); JD 18:286-97 (12 November 1876); JD 18:314-23 (3 December 1876); JD 19:280-94 (n.d., 1878); JD 21:319-31 (1 August 1880).

⁷⁷ *The Seer*, (1 October 1853), 160.

⁷⁸ *The Seer*, 1 (November 1853), 168. Orson realized that "plurality of wives is something a little different from what our fathers have taught us, and it will take us a little while to learn this ancient scriptural order." JD 12:92 (11 August 1867).

⁷⁹ For an extended analysis of these see Whittaker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses."

⁸⁰ The details are presented in Whittaker, "Richard Ballantyne and the Defense of Mormonism in India in the 1850s," in Donald Q. Cannon and David J. Whittaker, eds., *Supporting Saints: Life Stories of Nineteenth-Century Mormons* (Provo, UT, 1985), 185-88.

⁸¹ Ballantyne to his wife, 2-6 February 1854. HDC.

address, and the remainder echoed his public expressions.⁸² Another tract, *Why the Latter Day Saints Practice a Plurality of Wives!* was composed by Benjamin F. Johnson and published in San Francisco in early summer 1854.⁸³ Orson's published articles on polygamy were specifically recommended in a short note in the pamphlet, and his influence is apparent throughout the work.⁸⁴ Another strong defense of plural marriage, important because it was the only such work written by a Mormon women during Brigham Young's lifetime, also reveals Pratt's influence. Belinda Marden Pratt (a plural wife of Parley) in *Defence of Polygamy, by a Lady of Utah, in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire* depended on *The Seer's* biblical arguments.⁸⁵

Orson Spencer's *Patriarchal Order, or Plurality of Wives!* was published in England early in 1853. Having heard Pratt's August 1852 address, Spencer's pamphlet was an extended analysis of one of Pratt's five main arguments, specifically the sociological argument that polygamy would reform the world both morally and socially.⁸⁶ As with Pratt's discussions, Spencer offered plural marriage as an alternative to family patterns which seemed to be failing.

The basic arguments for plural marriage were so well established directly by Orson Pratt and indirectly through these other pamphlets that no new arguments appeared in LDS literature thereafter. Surely Pratt's influence among his own people was extensive; but he was keenly disappointed at the cold reception by the Eastern establishment of the 1850s.

Pratt and his brother Parley were key figures in presenting Mormonism to more urban and sophisticated audiences, particularly after 1837 when early missionaries increasingly entered into larger cities. Parley, even more than Orson, set the tone and direction for early Mormon pamphleteering.⁸⁷ Orson's heavy dependence on his brother has been established, although his own contributions of extended analysis and popularization can in no wise be dismissed.⁸⁸

Orson Pratt's polygamy defenses, appearing as they did in the nation's capital on the eve of the American Civil War, are important for yet another reason. As historian Davis Bitton has pointed out in an-as-yet

⁸² Haven's journals for this period reveal his regular reading program of Orson Pratt's works. See especially Journal A, HDC.

⁸³ For details see Whittaker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses," 50-53.

⁸⁴ In a letter to Orson Pratt, 18 November 1853, Johnson said he had received the first nine numbers of *The Seer*. See *The Seer*, 2 (April 1854), 247.

⁸⁵ See the extended discussion in Whittaker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses," 53-57.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

⁸⁷ This point is made very clear in Peter Crawley, "Parley P. Pratt, Father of Mormon Pamphleteering," *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 15 (Autumn 1982), 13-26.

⁸⁸ See Whittaker, "Orson Pratt: Prolific Pamphleteer;" and Crawley, "Parley P. Pratt," 27-41.

unpublished essay, Mormon polygamy defenses show important parallels with contemporary defenses of slavery.⁸⁹ Bitton has specifically suggested these similarities: (1) both appealed to the idea of popular sovereignty; (2) both institutions were defended by biblical proof-texts; (3) both institutions recognized and argued for a “natural place” for blacks and women in their respective societies; (4) both argued that practical considerations justified their systems; (5) both Mormons and Southerners eventually took refuge in apocalyptic solutions—Southerners in a civil war and Mormons in the millennial expectations the very practice of polygamy implied in their defenses; (6) for each group, its peculiar institution became a lost cause, either denied or glorified in a later literature of justification; (7) contemporary observers noted that both slavery and polygamy were practiced in isolated regions of the country; and (8) the two institutions posed similar constitutional problems for American lawmakers. Little wonder that both institutions were identified in the nineteenth-century public mind as the “twin relics of barbarism” which the newly formed Republican Party in 1856 committed itself to eradicating. Thus, Orson Pratt’s defenses of plural marriage helped articulate a central dimension of Mormon millennialism, and at the same time, more clearly labeled Mormon thought as increasingly alien to mainstream northern thought.

The Pratts were central to the early Mormon attempt to articulate a theological view that carried the debate out of frontier churches into the large realm of intellectual and cultural discourse. Orson’s extensive traveling and voluminous literary output, plus Parley’s early death, assured him the greater public status. As late as the Reed Smoot hearings in 1904, much of which centered on the continuing practice of plural marriage by Mormons, non-Mormon senators were quizzing Mormon leaders as to the influence of Orson Pratt on polygamy in the Church.⁹⁰ No one surpassed him as a defender of Mormonism’s most controversial practice.

⁸⁹ Davis Bitton, “Polygamy Defended.” It is interesting to note that both Mormons and Southerners came close to denouncing Northern capitalism as the basic cause of each section’s “peculiar institution.”

⁹⁰ See the comments of James E. Talmage in *Proceedings Before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of the Protests Against the Right of Hon. Reed Smoot a Senator from the State of Utah to Hold His Seat*, 4 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1904), 3:25: “Many of Orson Pratt’s works are of great value . . . that is to say they present the views of a man who was a careful student and one whose utterances are worthy of consideration.”