

In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith. By Todd Compton. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997. xvi + 788 pp. \$39.95 cloth.

The Latter-day Saints placed the beginnings of plural marriage in the days of Abraham in the Old Testament. As Martin Luther recognized, it was an acceptable practice before God at that time and presumably could be practiced later as well. With the LDS belief in the restoration of all things, including all ordinances, practices, and doctrines of previous dispensations, polygamy became a principle to practice with a religious motivation. The year 1831 is the commonly agreed-upon beginning of Smith's teaching the doctrine of plural marriage. The written revelation was recorded in mid-1843. A similar revelation is contained in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 132.

Estimates of the number of Joseph Smith's wives have varied from twenty-seven (A. Jensen) to eighty-four (S. Ivins), with the majority being in the forties (Brody and Quinn), while Foster and Hardy avoid even an estimate of the number. Compton has decided on thirty-three, feeling that affidavits, reliable testimony, or records of various kinds give us the names of the ones he tentatively proposes as Joseph's plural wives. He gives the biographies of each in far more detail than has been done before. Another eight are listed as inconclusive and not accorded detailed life histories. Some may feel that the number should be lower, as the evidence is examined and found somewhat dubious.

A very helpful chart (4-8) lists each woman according to the chronological date of the marriage. From Fanny Alger in 1833 to Fanny Young in November 1843, Compton gives an account of their other husbands and their marital status prior to their marriage to Smith, and the age of each woman (ranging from 14 to 56) when married to Smith. It becomes clear that polygamy is the correct term and not polygyny, because polyandry was common. Fifty-five percent (18) were single when sealed to Joseph Smith though most later married again "for time only" to others. Thirty-three percent (11) remained with their husbands and thus were in a polyandrous relationship, though perhaps only in a spiritual and not a physical one. Three of these were married to non-Latter-day Saints. The wives' ages break down as follows: 33 percent were 14-20 years old; 27 percent were 21-30; 24 percent were 31-40; 6 percent were 41-50; and 9 percent were 51-60.

Compton's central thesis is that Mormon polygamy was "characterized by a tragic ambiguity" (xiii). A spiritual dimension was added to the lives and marriages of the individuals, but the practical side was diminished due to expanded commitments. An example is the amount of marital relations between Joseph and his wives. There is testimony of three of the women that such occurred with them but with the rest silence rules and only rumor portrays the relationships. The real motivation seemed to have been to gain an eternal mate in the heavenly life to come. When this was the only motive there was little stress or conflict. When more was expected by either party trouble ensued. After Joseph died many of his widows were married for time only to Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, or some other person—sometimes a non-Mormon. The same consideration was altered as financial support and marital relations were usually expected with this time-only marriage.

An interesting account is of Lucinda Pendleton Morgan, widow of the anti-Masonic martyr William Morgan. Lucinda married Smith ca. 1838 at age 37 while married to an active Latter-day Saint, George Washington Harris (43-54). This was considered a sealing for an eternal marriage and not a threat

to the civil marriage to Harris. In fact, he evidently approved or at least did not cause trouble.

The first specifically dated sealing was to Louisa Beaman on 5 April 1841. She was not married to anyone else during Joseph Smith's lifetime and seemed to be supported by him. She was a friendly confidant of his other plural wives (55-70). Later married to Brigham Young, she bore him five children, all of whom died in childhood.

Another famous wife was Agnes Coolbrith, who was married to Joseph's brother Don Carlos when she was 27 and he 19, in 1834. Upon the death of Don Carlos, Agnes was married for time to Joseph in an Old Testament-sanctioned Levirate marriage intended for men to marry their brothers' widows. When Don Carlos died in 1841 he left three children, one of whom, Josephine Donna Smith, later became known as Ina Coolbrith, California's poet laureate.

The only mother-daughter pair married to Joseph was Patty Bartlett Sessions and her daughter Sylvia Sessions. Sylvia was married to Smith first in 1842 and a month later her mother was sealed to him as well. Sylvia later claimed her daughter Josephine was fathered by Joseph. Patty became famous as a midwife and reportedly delivered nearly 4,000 babies. Her story in the West is a poignant one as the wife of John Parry, an active Latter-day Saint.

Elizabeth Davis had five husbands total, the most of any of Smith's wives. Many of them had three husbands, and only one, Hannah Ells, could claim Smith as the only man she had been married to. Even his first wife, Emma Hale, later married a non-Latter-day Saint.

Each biography is well researched and gives ten to twenty pages about each wife and family. Along with two other works, Jessie Embry's and B. Carmon Hardy's, this is a definitive work on the subject of early Mormon polygamy. Hardy's work continues where Compton's stops and Embry's research and interviews with descendants of polygamous families rounds out a fairly complete picture of this unusual practice. Some may be troubled with the lack of definitive evidence for these thirty-three marriages. A lot seems to rest on an assumption that the word "was" in a sentence concerning two people was a code word for "wedded and sealed." That may be the case, but there is no conclusive evidence and therefore skepticism may be warranted. Compton recognizes this and presents all information he has found in his impressively researched work. The book is well worth the price and the effort due to the scholarship of the author and the interesting lives revealed.

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Early Mormon Documents. Vol. 1. Edited by Dan Vogel. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996. xvi + 708 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

A collection of more than 450 documents, this book offers primary sources on Mormon origins in Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania. The entries document certain aspects of the lives of members of the Joseph Smith Sr. family down to January 1831, when Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, moved to Ohio. The editor attempted to include all known authentic documents relating to the Smith family and Mormonism except the affidavits gathered in 1833 by Dr. Philastus Hurlbut. He considered these of little value because of the prejudice in their