



Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism

Terryl L. Givens, Matthew J. Grow

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After Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt was the most influential figure in early Mormon history and culture. Missionary, pamphleteer, theologian, historian, and martyr, Pratt was perennially stalked by controversy--regarded, he said, "almost as an Angel by thousands and counted an Imposter by tens of thousands."

Tracing the life of this colorful figure from his hardscrabble origins in upstate New York to his murder in 1857, Terryl Givens and Matthew Grow explore the crucial role Pratt played in the formation and expansion of early Mormonism. One of countless ministers inspired by the antebellum revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening, Pratt joined the Mormons in 1830 at the age of twenty three and five years later became a member of the newly formed Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, which vaulted him to the forefront of church leadership for the rest of his life. Pratt's missionary work--reaching from Canada to England, from Chile to California--won hundreds of followers, but even more important were his voluminous writings. Through books, newspaper articles, pamphlets, poetry, fiction, and autobiography, Pratt spread the Latter-day Saint message, battled the many who reviled it, and delineated its theology in ways that still shape Mormon thought.

Drawing on letters, journals, and other rich archival sources, Givens and Grow examine not only Pratt's writings but also his complex personal life. A polygamist who married a dozen times and fathered thirty children, Pratt took immense joy in his family circle even as his devotion to Mormonism led to long absences that put heavy strains on those he loved. It was during one such absence, a mission trip to the East, that the estranged husband of his twelfth wife shot and killed him--a shocking conclusion to a life that never lacked in drama.

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