
REVIEWS

PLURAL MARRIAGE AND THE MORMON TWILIGHT ZONE

SOLEMN COVENANT: THE
MORMON POLYGAMOUS PASSAGE

by B. Carmon Hardy

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992

445 pages, \$34.95



Reviewed by D. Michael Quinn

THIS BOOK IS a wonderful addition to the library of anyone interested in American social history or in Mormon history. It is essential for the study of Mormon polygamy.

There is a personal dimension in my response to *Solemn Covenant*. The first paragraph of the book acknowledges Victor W. Jorgensen as Carmon Hardy's co-researcher. I first met Jorgensen twenty years ago in a graduate seminar at the University of Utah. He had prepared a long paper on post-Manifesto polygamy, and his work was more than casually interesting to me. I had already spent five years researching post-1890 polygamy along the same lines. Later I met Carmon Hardy.

Hardy, Jorgensen, and I continued to traverse the same historical terrain without ever comparing notes, research designs, or anticipations for publication. *Solemn Covenant's* American context, case history approach, distribution tables for marriages, and appendix of polygamists make it the kind of book I expected to write. Hardy and Jorgensen have every reason to be proud of this study;

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the book has many strengths.

Solemn Covenant is a classic analysis of the relationship between Mormon polygamy and American society's values during the last half of the nineteenth century. The chapter "Civilization Threatened" explains the deep social, cultural, and psychological sources for the intense anti-polygamy crusade in America. Hardy's mastery of the relevant literary sources in Victorian America and Victorian England is staggering. He juxtaposes this broad social analysis with an intensive look at the Mormon inability (then and now) to understand that polygamous society deeply threatened Victorian Americans.

The chapter "Blessings of the Abrahamic Household" argues persuasively that Mormon polygamous theology bore a dangerously symbiotic relationship with American society. "The Saints spoke directly to questions absorbing many others at the time—sexuality, health, and home," but posited polygamy as the solution to these ills. Mormon polygamy was not simply counter-cultural, it was the highest form of marriage relationship.

The Latter-day Saints did not recognize the disaster if non-Mormons believed Mormon defenses of polygamy. If polygamy was the real answer to society's ills, then "Gentiles" had every reason to fear that Mormon polygamy was the marriage relationship to end all other marriage relationships. If, as Wilford Woodruff frequently preached, polygamy could not be surrendered without destroying Mormonism, then anti-Mormons had every reason to press for a public aban-

donment of the practice.

Hardy's chapter on the 1890 Manifesto is similar to previous discussions by Kenneth Godfrey, Henry J. Wolfinger, E. Leo Lyman, Thomas G. Alexander, and this reviewer. Its most significant contribution is Hardy's analysis of how the Manifesto evolved to the status of revelation. That discussion is as important as his careful explanation of the illegality of every allegedly safe haven for Mormon polygamy—in Mexico, Canada, and on the high seas.

Two of *Solemn Covenant's* essays will certainly polarize the reactions of various readers. The concluding chapter, "Monogamous Triumph," describes what most contemporary Mormons see as the best of all possible worlds. Hardy cites surveys that reveal 80 percent of LDS church members today would refuse to obey even a direct, personal command from a living prophet for them to enter polygamy! However, the chapter rings melancholy for Mormonism's modern Fundamentalists and others who look back wistfully on Utah's old-time religion.

Carmon Hardy's appendix, "Lying for the Lord," is sure to disturb most readers. This essay is the longest discussion in print for what I described in 1985 as Mormonism's "theocratic ethics." In my view, the words "lying" and "situational ethics" do not apply to Mormonism's theocratic context and nineteenth-century world view. However, few modern readers see reality through early Mormonism's prism, and they will resonate with Hardy's perspective. Even on its own, Hardy's "Lying for the Lord" is a notable contribution to Mormon studies.

As I've written elsewhere, history isn't the same as the past. Beyond the human limits of historians who try to make sense of the past, the unrecorded event is history's Twilight Zone. That event may be a conversation or an action that appears in no contemporary document, nor even in a reminiscence. Because of its continual illegality, much of the Mormon polygamous experience disappeared into that Twilight Zone of unrecorded events and conversations. However, crucial documents about the Mormon past do exist, but are currently unavailable for historians to analyze. These historical documents have disappeared into vaults at LDS headquarters or are in the private possession of individuals—an artificial Twilight Zone for historians.

But whether the absence of evidence is real or artificial, historians have two alternatives: either say nothing about the event, or make plausible recreations of the past based on circumstantial evidence that does exist.

Hardy chooses the latter. For example, he suggests and evaluates multiple scenarios for Apostle Abraham H. Cannon's polygamous marriage(s) several years after the 1890 Manifesto. This is important in the historical effort to attempt a reconstruction of the past. Some may prefer that Hardy and other historians speak only of incontrovertible events in the past. Still others would like everyone to maintain a respectful silence about any "sensitive" matter in the Mormon past, no matter how much evidence exists. *Solemn Covenant* ventures tentatively into post-Manifesto polygamy's Twilight Zone, as well as confidently into sensitive developments that have clear verification.

I have only two objections about Hardy's forays into the past. First, on several occasions, he undercuts his analysis by saying someone "allegedly" or "supposedly" made a statement, when in fact a diarist recorded the words on the day they were spoken. The top of page 177 has an example of an unnecessarily tentative use of a quote.

On the other hand, Hardy sometimes asserts without qualification certain statements by one person that were only alleged decades after the fact by others. The top of page 178 confidently affirms a reported statement from a third-hand source. Another instance is a quote alleged by a non-participant on the basis of written evidence which Hardy did not examine. Unlike the words of one person recorded the same day by a listener, statements claimed decades after the fact by non-participants are more needful of such qualifications as "supposedly" or "allegedly."

My second objection, and *Solemn Covenant's* principal weakness, is that it does not communicate sufficiently the human dimensions involved in the Manifesto and the subterranean continuation of polygamy. Until this year, my own historical publications have neglected women, so I'll mention them first in this regard. Hardy frequently cites women by name, and even describes the circumstances of many post-Manifesto wives. However, the book does not communicate to me the intensity of their personal experiences. I'm reminded of Wallace Stegner's awe for Mormon pioneer women whom he presented so well in his *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail*.

For example, several of the legal wives in Hardy's appendix were unable to bear children and consented to a post-Manifesto polygamous marriage. In some cases, a childless first wife was the one who repeatedly asked Church authorities to grant a post-Manifesto wife to her husband. In a case

of which I'm aware, the first wife said she could not be happy if she thought the new plural wife was unhappy. The self-doubt, anguish, love, familial devotion, and religious faith of these remarkable Mormon women simply are not explored in this book. Those personal dimensions of women's experiences are essential dimensions of post-Manifesto polygamy.

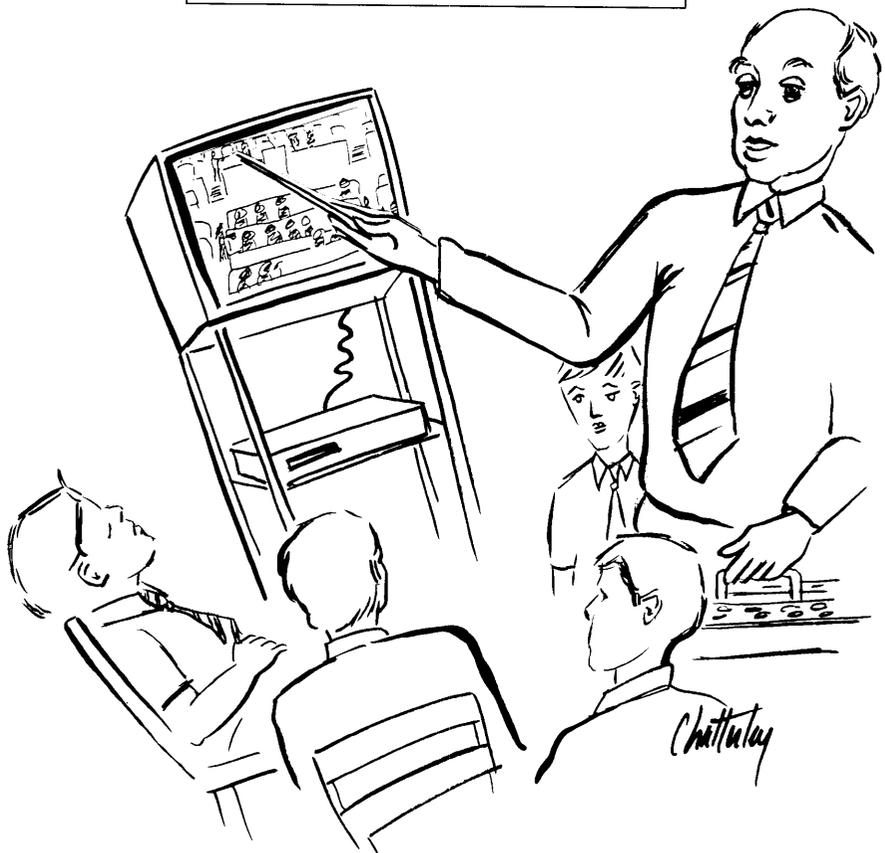
The book presents even more impersonally the general authorities involved in post-Manifesto polygamy. One sentence characterizations are always distortions of any person. However, here are my suggestions for what is lacking in Hardy's descriptions of these LDS leaders.

- Wilford Woodruff as a guileless personality caught in the impossible situation of trying to save the temples he valued most in the Church by giving up the polygamous living that he had preached for years was impossible to surrender.
- Brigham Young Jr., living constantly in the shadow of his famous father, painfully insecure, and feeling a fundamental disagreement with a Church president he

adored about a principle they both revered.

- Joseph F. Smith, frequently on the edge of expressing strong emotions (often tears or anger), now faced with upholding policies he disagreed with, and alternately being accused of compromise or duplicity.
- Francis M. Lyman, haunted his entire life by his father's apostasy and rebellion against one Church president, now being told by the majority of his quorum that he was out of harmony for trying to enforce the official statements of three other Church presidents about the Manifesto.
- Heber J. Grant, confused by the contrast between the Church's official position and his knowledge of the private acts by members of the Presidency and the Twelve, and torn between his desire to sustain the official position and his need to marry again to have sons who would outlive him and carry on his name.
- John W. Taylor, who married polygamously a week after the issuance of the Manifesto and again a decade later, yet

POST-SACRAMENT ANALYSIS



"You, Allen, see how you're holding the tray too high?
You're almost hitting Sister Kolon's chin!"

who performed few polygamous marriages himself, and who felt his closest friend Matthias F. Cowley was too ardent an advocate of post-Manifesto polygamy.

As much as it is possible to feel affection for distant historical persons, I respect and love these men. Although they were sometimes at cross-purposes, all of these leaders were devoted and righteous men in a transitional era that strained each of them to their limits.

Among the prominent actors in the drama of post-Manifesto polygamy, I feel the greatest love for Apostle Matthias F. Cowley. Of the Church authorities involved in continued polygamy after 1890, Elder Cowley received the most criticism during his lifetime. The stigma outlived him and bothered several of his children until the day they died. Yet while he lived, even his severest critics in the Twelve continued to call him "Mattie." This gentle man was loved by all who knew him. What I know of his experience I gleaned from diaries and official minutes, but neither *Solemn Covenant* nor any other study does justice to Matthias F. Cowley's complexities as I perceive them. Also, more than other leaders in turn-of-the-century Mormonism, Elder Cowley's personality and life experiences are accessible for historical reconstruction. Like several of his apostolic associates, he kept a detailed, personally revealing diary throughout his life. Then in his seventies, Elder Cowley used those original documents to write thousands of pages of an autobiographical and even more reflective "revised journal." This sets him apart from his other associates in the Mormon hierarchy. I once handled both the original and revised journals before two of his children donated the manuscripts to the First Presidency. Hopefully, one day a descendant of Matthias F. Cowley will resurrect these sequestered documents to help recreate his remarkable life and times.

As extraordinary as *Solemn Covenant* is, B. Carmon Hardy has not fully communicated the personalities of Church leaders who called each other such nicknames as Mattie, Abram, F. M., Hebe, and Johnny. And there are also hundreds of names, dates, places, and circumstances missing from Hardy's textual discussion and from his appendix of post-Manifesto plural marriages. One day, I will make such a separate contribution. Nevertheless, this book is the most thorough examination of the subject published in the century since the Manifesto. *Solemn Covenant* is erudite, lucid, provocative, informative, and a must-read for anyone interested in the Mormon past. ☐

SYMPATHETIC BUT HONEST

THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF
WILFORD WOODRUFF, A MORMON PROPHET

By Thomas G. Alexander

Signature Books, 1991, \$28.95, 484 pages



Reviewed by Kenneth L. Cannon II

THOMAS ALEXANDER'S recent biography of Wilford Woodruff is an intriguing addition to the growing canon of important works on the history of the LDS church its members. Utilizing his own painstaking and voluminous primary research conducted over decades, as well as recent historical scholarship of others, he provides both a perceptive and sympathetic portrait of Woodruff and one of the most comprehensive histories of nineteenth-century Mormonism. In short, this is the best kind of biography: it not only provides a compelling view of an important historical character, through his experience it also provides new insights into the history of the movement in which he played a significant role.

The title of the book is well chosen. Alexander presents Wilford Woodruff as a man who, although obsessed with "things in heaven," also had one foot firmly set on earthly soil. Woodruff's formal education was unusual for his time. His natural curiosity prompted him to pursue educational opportunities beyond his formal schooling, making him one of the most educated of early Church leaders. He forced himself to develop practical leadership skills that helped him lead the Church through one of its most difficult times. Alexander develops well the dual themes of the spiritual and the practical in Woodruff's life.

The first two chapters are devoted to the background and early life of Woodruff. Alex-

ander introduces the reader to a relatively well-educated, hard-working Connecticut youth surrounded by religious revivals. Woodruff's own naturally spiritual nature led him "to become a Christian primitivist, a millennialist, and a seeker" not formally associated with a particular denomination. Alexander tells us of Robert Mason, a fascinating prophet with whom young Wilford became acquainted. This "Simsbury Prophet" told Woodruff about a revelation he had received that convinced him he would never find the true church. Mason prophesied, however, that Woodruff would find the truth. This experience helped young Wilford, who had a strong sense of his own mortality because he was unusually accident-prone, to focus on things spiritual. Woodruff recognized the profound influence Mason had on his life, and one of the first vicarious baptisms for the dead that he conducted in Nauvoo was for Mason. Later, shortly after the completion of the St. George Temple, Woodruff completed Mason's other temple work and "adopted" Mason.

Fully utilizing Woodruff's extensive diaries, Alexander sets forth in detail Woodruff's remarkably successful missions and chronicles the occasional disputes with other, less committed Church leaders. His success among the United Brethren in Great Britain is unique in Mormon history. Woodruff began preaching to members of this group at the Benbow farm in March 1840. Thirty-six days later he left the area after having baptized 158 people.

Through Alexander's narrative, the reader experiences the early ordinances, the "intensive charismatic experience," and the academic studies conducted in the Kirtland

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Temple, although Woodruff missed the initial dedication of the temple. The murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith are seen through Woodruff's eyes as well as the difficult transition that soon followed. The inner workings of the Church hierarchy are followed first-hand throughout the administrations of Brigham Young and John Taylor. Woodruff's further visions and revelations and his service in the St. George Temple are fully described.

Alexander carefully chronicles Woodruff's temporal life. He describes in detail Woodruff's participation in the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society, the Poly-sophical Society, and several other, less well known early Utah groups. He follows Woodruff through museums and libraries. He analyzes Woodruff's experiments with plants and the practical steps Woodruff took to further Utah's pioneer economy by introducing certain strains of plants and animals to the territory. Alexander describes Woodruff's business pursuits as a merchant and farmer, and discusses openly and sympathetically his family life, noting both his successes and failures.

Alexander closely examines Wilford Woodruff's tenure as Church president, one of the most difficult periods for the Church. Woodruff led the Church through radical changes that ushered the Church into the twentieth century. The Church's woes caused by the Edmunds-Tucker Act and the related official abandonment of polygamy, the major modifications in Church views and practices, and the accomplishment of statehood are treated as well or better than they are treated in other works.

Alexander's writing style is lucid and readable with little flourish. Some might find portions of the book too detailed, but the cumulative effect is one which makes the book hard to put down. There are several typographical errors and one or two misplaced endnotes, but these are so few and far between that only the most careful reader will ever find them.

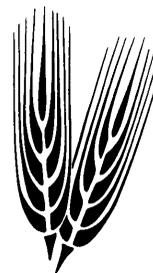
Alexander's view of Woodruff is sympathetic but honest. Although his conclusion that Woodruff was the third most important nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint (behind only Joseph Smith and Brigham Young) is subject to dispute, there is little doubt that this work is one of the two or three best and most important biographies of nineteenth-century Church leaders both because of the breadth of Wilford Woodruff's role in Mormon history and because of the scholarly and careful manner in which Thomas Alexander researched and presented the work. ☪

A CRASH LIKE A SHOT

THINGS HAPPEN: POEMS OF SURVIVAL

by Emma Lou Thayne

Signature Books, 1991, 80 Pages, Cloth \$18.95



Reviewed by Dennis Clark

PEOPLE'S TASTE in poetry reveals its values as fully as do its tastes in music or painting, sculpture or drama. Mormons haven't earned Emma Lou Thayne's poetry yet. If they had, this book would be selling like Carol Lynn Pearson's books and be quoted in sacrament meeting more often than Edgar A. Guest, since it arises from the encounter, at times harrowing, at others harvesting, by turns horrible, hortatory, ecstatic, of an honest Mormon soul with the inadequacy of language.

We don't often talk about the arts as a survival mechanism, but that is exactly what

they are—for the artists that produce the works we value, for the culture that nurtures the artists, for the audience that treasures them. Thayne is a poet we should treasure in the only way poetry can be treasured: by giving it away. We should be reading these poems aloud, to ourselves and to each other, all the time, sharing the richness of her experience.

And it is a wealth of experience. Thayne groups the poems in three sections: "Come to Pass"; "The Map of the World"; and "Things Happen." She captures the ecstatic quality of experience in poems like "Morning is My Time," from the first section:

MORNING IS MY TIME

Morning is my time for making love. Away, anonymous
I stalk from sleep adrift in dreams that tell
me who I am. Unprotected by the surfaces I

polish in a day, deflectors set in careful
place to fend off thoughts, unconscious as the clouds
of beauty in their conformation, I cover

with a mystic wand the impertinent intrusions so
born of joy that they would curl about my edges
and claim a hand, a cheek, a burrowing, and race me,

unprotected, home. But after sleep, when morning
catches them let down and you beside me mysterious as
what has so delivered us well kept and ringing

with the music our nights have so supplied, I wonder
how my surfaces would yield to yours, or if, in
holding, there would be no surfaces at all.

DENNIS CLARK is a librarian at the Orem Public Library and co-editor of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*.

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The sense of the world here, that it comprises a mysterious beauty barely kept from overwhelming the reader, from flushing one away in a rush of joy, permeates the poems in this book. Even the third section, "Things Happen," which details the pain of an accident that sparked these poems of survival, is a collection of poems on healing, not disaster.

This sense of joy arises from an optimism fundamental to Thayne's life, and to the Mormonism she lovingly embodies in her poems. Her sense that the joy is incarnate in her, in each of us, that the ecstatic can only be kept from racing her, "unprotected, home" (surely one of the most positive images of death in poetry), by the surfaces she polishes into deflectors—this sense of the poem clearly expresses how we each use the mundane to shelter us from the divine, how housework preempts the mansions of glory. And it culminates not in the ecstatic state of the traditional Christian mystic, burning, sweetness and light infusing oneself, but in the yearning for another body, in the hope that "in holding, there would be no surfaces at all": a carnal union that heals the divided spirits.

But this poem also exemplifies the most interesting problems with Thayne's poetry. It is a poetry of strong feeling that expresses itself in structures of logic that sometimes fail. For example, in the second line, grammatically, the core sentence, "I stalk," is modified by two adverbial phrases, the prepositional "from sleep" and the verbal "adrift in dreams that tell me who I am." I think the second phrase is intended to modify "sleep"—but it doesn't. The resulting sense is "I stalk . . . drift in dreams," a sense inconsistent with the tenor of the poem. It brings up images of a night stalker, anonymous, not one being told "who I am."

The next basic sentence, "Unprotected . . . I cover . . . the impertinent intrusions," would seem to refer to the speaker's drifting, half-waking state in the first stanza (with perhaps unconscious phallicism in the "mystic wand"). In that case, "unconscious as the clouds of beauty in their conformation" would seem to modify the subject, "I," rather than the "thoughts . . . the impertinent intrusions" that seduce with that race toward home. But the following sentence denies that this one applies to the half-waking state.

The next sentence begins "but after sleep, when morning catches them let down. . . ." The conjunction "but" signals a contrary state, and the pronoun "them" refers either to the "deflectors" or to the "intrusions"—in either case, this introductory adverb indicates that the condition does not apply. The deflectors are not up; the intrusions are not

rampant. The wand is treated grammatically as one of the deflectors, not as a protection of the half-sleep. This is a time when no protection is needed, when the possibility exists that "in holding, there would be no surfaces at all." This last sentence is a wonderful contrast to those polished deflectors, but it renders the second and third stanzas problematical.

That may seem like an overly technical analysis, the kind of dissection that yields only murder, never knowledge. To me, however, the question at the heart of the poem is that of the third stanza, the question of the relation of wand and intrusions to both the morning languor and the polishing day. That is not what is primary to the poem: the ecstasy is primary. But is the poem a sufficient construct to amplify the ecstasy, to pass it on whole?

Perhaps it is. I do not like the poem less for having spent so much time on it. And I certainly don't want a greater rigor in the logic of Thayne's language. The problem I sense in these poems, and it is a dissonance in the poems, not a failure of Thayne's art, is that they often rely on bald statement, rather than the sensuous elements of language—sound, rhythm, repetition—to carry the poem. An example, from "Tourist":

I want to hold onto the idea of Russia's
equivalent of bougainvillea or acacia
or lilacs.

Till I am actually there.

Maybe I am simply up against Thayne's personality here. Perhaps this is just the way her language works. But I yearn after an even more sensuous expression of this idea, some startling image, or figure of speech, to give me the experience whole, not the assertion of it.

I overstate my case. The more I read the poems, the more often I return to read them again. Mine is a lover's quarrel with Thayne: if the poems weren't so steeped in her love for the world, could I care so strongly about them? 



Our Sundays may well be the zaniest,
Our leaders by far the brainiest.

We've consolidation

With real innovation—

Our meetings are all simultaneous!

—KAREN ROSENBAUM