

## REVIEWS

# FUNDAMENTALIST POLYGAMY: TOLERATING THE INTOLERABLE

KIDNAPPED FROM THAT LAND:  
THE GOVERNMENT RAIDS ON THE  
SHORT CREEK POLYGAMISTS

by Martha Sonntag Bradley  
University of Utah Press, 1993  
260 pages, \$29.95



Reviewed by Massimo Introvigne

THE SHORT CREEK, Arizona, raid of 26 July 1953 is the most notorious episode in the story of the post-Manifesto confrontation between U.S. authorities and Mormon polygamous fundamentalists. Martha Sonntag Bradley's *Kidnapped from That Land* is the first book-length treatment of that infamous episode within the general context of the story of Mormon fundamentalism. The first section of the book offers a short overview of pre-Manifesto polygamy from Joseph Smith's revelations to 1890, although a reader unfamiliar with Mormon history might want to consult Richard S. Van Wagoner's *Mormon Polygamy*<sup>1</sup> and Carmon Hardy's book *Solemn Covenant*<sup>2</sup> in order to understand the historical complexities of the subject. Bradley also explains the roots of modern-day fundamentalism and the history of the pioneer settlements in the Short Creek area. The largest portion of the book is devoted to a description of the fundamentalist community in Short Creek, its relations with fundamental-

ists in the Salt Lake area, and the raids by Arizona and Utah authorities culminating in the 1953 raid. The 1953 raid is usefully placed within the context of both United States and Arizona politics of the 1950s, with an outline of the political career of Arizona Governor Howard Pyle, a close associate of Barry Goldwater, and the prime mover behind the raid. Although an evangelical Protestant, Pyle kept the Mormon church in Salt Lake fully informed concerning the raid, and his project was warmly endorsed by some general authorities in Utah. The book offers a detailed chronicle of the raid and of subsequent events, including a number of different legal cases. Finally, Bradley reports on her own visits to what was once called Short Creek (now the twin villages of Hildale, Utah, and Colorado City, Arizona) and surveys the current status of the fundamentalist community in 1992. Two appendices include a list of the families involved in the 1953 raid and the full text of the statement by Governor Pyle, a typical piece of 1950s patriotic rhetoric exposing the fundamentalists' activities of "insurrection within [Arizona's] own borders."

While describing the lifestyle of the polygamous families in Short Creek and the 1953 drama, Bradley is at her best. She exhibits impressive command of primary sources and considerable literary skills. Although Bradley clearly does not share the fundamentalists' theology or world view, she has obviously developed both respect and

sympathy for their peculiar and at times paradoxical lifestyle. Even while arguing from a feminist point of view, Bradley disagrees with Governor Pyle's characterization of the women of Short Creek as "white slaves." Quite to the contrary, Bradley maintains that fundamentalist women had fulfilling relationships with both their religion and their husbands in a patriarchal setting. "Paradoxically," she writes, "it could be maintained that fundamentalist women triumphed by accepting limitations" (111). Another important point Bradley makes is that fundamentalism was not—and is not today—about plural marriage alone. In fact, she offers a detailed analysis of Short Creek's peculiar economic communal organization, the United Effort Plan, and explains its similarities with early Mormonism's social experiments. It is also true that fundamentalist groups exist that do not practice plural marriage, such as the Aaronic Order, which has been described in sociological terms by Hans Baer in his important book *Recreating Utopia in the Desert*.<sup>3</sup> Like Baer's book, Bradley's analysis confirms that fundamentalism is a larger phenomenon that cannot be stereotypically reduced to polygamy. Fundamentalists maintain a number of features of nineteenth-century Mormonism that disappeared after the Manifesto and the "Americanization" of Utah. Ultimately the dialectics between the fundamentalist groups and the mainline LDS church are the well-known tensions between community and society, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, which has been observed in many communities, particularly during the crucial passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. It was, in a sense, unavoidable that Mormon community developed into Mormon society. Fundamentalists—whether polygamists or not—did not accept this passage, but elected to keep their small *gemeinschaft*, in a desert society, real (Short Creek's) or psychological (clandestine life in metropolitan Salt Lake City).

There is little doubt, according to Bradley, that the raid itself was an ill-fated venture and a political disaster for Governor Pyle and other state officials. It was also ultimately embarrassing for Mormon authorities and the press who initially endorsed it. It did not achieve any of the intended results (more than forty years after the raid, polygamy is alive and well in Utah and Arizona), and it brought unnecessary suffering to men, women, and children, which is movingly detailed in the book. Apparently, however, the lesson of Short Creek has not been universally understood. The publication of Bradley's book coincided with raids very sim-

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ilar to Short Creek. In 1992 assaults against colonies of The Family, a religious group that traces its origins to the Children of God, occurred in Australia and Spain and the following year in Argentina and France. The Family was accused of perpetuating a way of living typical of the early Children of God, including polygamy, child abuse, and the use of sexual advances by female missionaries to secure converts ("flirty-fishing"). In the 1992-93 raids, hundreds of children were taken from their mothers in these four countries and made temporary wards of courts. Further investigations revealed that the notorious "flirty-fishing" had been discontinued

and that there was no evidence of sexual abuse of children. The only allegation that remained was polygamy and the charge that older men took juvenile wives. Although this may have been true in some countries, public opinion did not react as the authorities may have expected. Instead of being shocked by The Family's polygamy, the public reacted negatively against reports and photographs of children being taken from their mothers and placed in foster homes or public institutions against their will. Before the end of 1993, all children were returned to their mothers and to their religious communities in all countries involved. Although legal

cases are still pending in Argentina and France (with a parallel case in the United Kingdom), it is clear that the political careers of the authorities involved in the raids will suffer and that the support of some of the mainline churches of the raids against The Family was misguided.

The similarity between these recent events with the scandal of Short Creek is striking. The raids involving The Family demonstrate that Bradley's book not only addresses an historical episode, but also touches sensitive issues still important and relevant in the 1990s. The rhetoric of "protecting children" and the idea that child

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#### ARE RUSH LIMBAUGH AND HOWARD STERN

the two latter-day witnesses in Revelations 11, who "tormented them on the earth" for 1,260 days, and will destroy their enemies like "fire proceedeth out of their mouth?" (*Time* magazine cover, 1 Nov. 1993). For a free report, send name & address to *Witnesses Newsletter*, P.O. Box 8191, Bonney Lake, WA 98390. 095

#### STUDENT REVIEW

BYU's unofficial student magazine is now in its eighth year! Examine the life and issues at BYU through essays written by students and faculty—humorously, sometimes critically, but always sensitively. One-year subscriptions, \$15. *Student Review*, P.O. Box 2217, Provo, UT 84603. 099

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abuse is unavoidable in fringe communities with unorthodox beliefs is still promoted by secular anti-cult and evangelical counter-cult movements, and lies behind the grossly exaggerated charges of "ritual" sexual abuse of children, which are advanced (but almost never proved) against occult, neo-pagan, and various New Age groups.

Both the legal and theological aspects of the raid are exceedingly complicated. Bradley offers a useful summary of legal cases involving the Short Creek polygamists, and emphasizes the importance of the Vera Black case (1954). Readers of the book may not clearly understand why Vera was allowed to keep her children, despite her anticipatory breach of her 1956 pledge renouncing polygamy. Readers not familiar with Arizona law (and perhaps Arizona politics in the 1950s) may wish to consult Ken Driggs's article "Who Shall Raise the Children? Vera Black and the Rights of Polygamous Parents."<sup>4</sup> As far as the theology is concerned, the reader may have asked for more information about distinctions between the Short Creek community and other fundamentalist polygamist groups who separated themselves from the Mormon church. Although Bradley at times leaves the impression that the separation between Short Creek and other fundamentalist movements occurred primarily because of leadership questions, there were also differences in theology which should be considered in future research. D. Michael Quinn addressed some of these issues in his article "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism,"<sup>5</sup> but a complete survey of the many different groups and subgroups of Mormon fundamentalism remains to be completed.

Bradley's book proves that history of controversial episodes can be rescued from mere legend and analyzed with appropriate scholarly tools. Her masterful treatment of Short Creek will not only become a standard reference for students of Mormon polygamy, but will also be appreciated by a larger audience as a much needed lesson on cross-cultural understanding and religious tolerance. ☒

#### NOTES

1. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

2. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamist Passage* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

3. Hans Baer, *Recreating Utopia in the Desert* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

4. Ken Driggs, "Who Shall Raise the Children? Vera Black and the Rights of Polygamous Parents," *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Winter 1992): 27-46.

5. D. Michael Quinn, "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

## A CASE STUDY OF A MORMON WARD

MORMON LIVES: A YEAR IN  
THE ELKTON WARD  
by Susan Buhler Taber  
University of Illinois Press  
376 pages, \$27.00



Reviewed by Gordon Shepherd

ACCORDING TO AUTHOR Susan Taber, *Mormon Lives* "is primarily an attempt to portray what it is like to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at a particular place and time" (4)—what it is like, that is, to be a modern Mormon living in the contemporary United States.

The time depicted by Taber is circa 1985, while the place is not the Mormon heartland of Utah or its Rocky Mountain environs, but the Elkton Ward, a smallish LDS congregation in Newark, Delaware. Thus, in part, the lives of these particular Latter-day Saints must be understood as unfolding at a time and place where they are not the complacent majority, but a distinct religious minority. This position, of course, is still the rule and not the exception for most Mormons throughout the world. To live as a religious minority can strengthen members' sense of camaraderie while simultaneously, and ambiguously, intensifying commitment challenges to remain faithful. This is especially true for new converts to a missionary church that requires unstinting lay participation at the congregational level in order to function. The concurrent sacrifices and rewards of Mormon lay participation, in conjunction with the demands of daily life in modern society, emerge as the *leitmotif* of this book.

*Mormon Lives* had its origins in a unique project (for Mormons) of congregational self-examination, initiated by well-known LDS

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scholars Richard and Claudia Bushman, who were themselves members of the Elkton Ward. Their idea was to collect an extensive set of documentary materials about the functioning of the ward and its members to serve as a data base for future historians and scholars of community life to analyze. Bushman, who was then the Elkton Ward bishop, obtained permission from Church headquarters to organize a year long data-gathering project, which included a member attitude survey, numerous written accounts of special ward events, minutes of meetings, personal journals, and oral histories taken from over 100 ward members. As a member of the Elkton Ward's "Record Year Committee," Taber agreed to develop interview protocols for the oral histories. Eventually, it was these oral histories, superbly organized and edited by Taber, that became the substantive focus of *Mormon Lives*. The project's entire collection of material has been deposited in the Brigham Young University archives.

As in most good case studies, the richness of ethnographic detail in *Mormon Lives* is achieved at the expense of confident and precise statistical generalizations based on representative samples. Is the Elkton Ward a reliable microcosm for comprehending the nature of Mormon life at other times and places? No doubt it is not in many respects, but, impressionistically at least, there are certain consequences of Mormon organization and belief that appear to be experienced more or less universally by participating members, whether they are in Provo, Utah;

Mexico City; or Newark, Delaware. In my judgment, many of the oral history accounts given by members of the Elkton ward resonate in varying degrees with the experiences

of Latter-day Saints throughout the world. The way to test this impression, as well as to identify group patterns that are particularistic and not universal, would be to conduct a se-

ries of additional congregational studies, controlling for regional and national differences. Official Church reluctance to sanction such studies by independent scholars who

## RECENTLY RELEASED

Compiled by Will Quist

This section features recent titles from the Mormon press; the descriptions are often taken from promotional materials. Submissions are welcome, especially for books of LDS interest that are not by the major LDS publishers. SUNSTONE neither promotes nor sells these titles.

### CHRISTIAN LIVING

**Follow the Living Prophets: Timely Reasons for Obeying Prophetic Counsel in the Last Days.** By Brent L. Top, Larry E. Dahl, and Walter D. Bowen. Bookcraft, hardback, 208 pages, \$11.95.

Written to combat the "notable increase in doubt, disbelief, disregard and even defiance of counsel given by Church leaders."

**From Pain to Peace: Help for Parents with Wayward Children.** By Sharon Clonts and Janice Chalker. Bookcraft, hardback, 155 pages, \$9.95.

Written "from their combined backgrounds of experience, observation, and study" to provide "comfort, help, and hope" to parents and families.

**Gone Too Soon: The Life and Loss of Infants and Unborn Children.** By Sherri Devashrayee Wittwer. Covenant Communications, paperback, 97 pages, \$7.95.

An LDS mother's "book of comfort and counsel for those who have lost (or know someone who has lost) little [or unborn] children."

**Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not.** By M. Russell Ballard. Deseret Book, hardback, 64 pages, \$6.95.

"This message gives help and provides hope to those who've felt the sting when a loved one or friend takes his or her own life."

### HISTORY & BIOGRAPHY

**Father of the Prophet: Stories and Insights from the Life of Joseph Smith, Sr.** By Mark L. McConkie. Bookcraft, hardback, 198 pages, \$12.95.

Joseph Sr.'s life is treated thematically to show who he was, what role he played in the lives of others, and why his own life is a worthy example to follow.

**Having Authority: The Origins and Development of Priesthood during the Ministry of Joseph Smith.** By Gregory A. Prince. John Whitmer Historical Association

Monograph Series, Independence Press (Herald House), paperback, 99 pages, \$6.00.

The author's "years researching the evolution of the Mormon priesthood . . . offer a useful corrective and a much-needed expansion on previous conceptions."

**In the Company of Prophets: Personal Experiences of D. Arthur Haycock with Heber J. Grant [to] Ezra Taft Benson.** By Heidi S. Swinton. Deseret Book, hardback, 124 pages, \$12.95.

Haycock, who worked with these presidents for almost five decades, "provides an inside look at the [ir] lives and personalities."

**Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man.** Ed. by Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate, Jr. Religious Studies Center, BYU, hardback, 352 pages, \$12.95.

Contains the proceedings of the dedication of BYU's new Joseph Smith Memorial Building and 23 papers from the 1992 Joseph Smith Symposium.

**Life before Life: A Collection of Mother's Experiences with Their Pre-Born Children.** Comp. by Sarah Hinze. Cedar Fort, hardback, 153 pages, \$13.95.

These stories from mothers about their children "make a powerful statement about the sanctity of life and its origins."

**The Millennial World of Early Mormonism.** By Grant Underwood. University of Illinois Press, hardback, 213 pages, \$24.95.

"Shows how Mormonism from 1830 to 1846 was profoundly influenced by its views of an imminent second coming of Christ and millennial transformation of the earth."

**The Mormons' War on Poverty: A History of LDS Welfare, 1830-1990.** By Garth Mangum and Bruce Blumell. University of Utah Press, hardback, 320 pages, \$29.95.

"Identifies the welfare principles advocated by the Mormon church and traces their application through a century and a half of experimentation."

**My Best for the Kingdom: History and Autobiography of John Lowe Butler, a Mormon Frontiersman.** By William G. Hartley. Aspen Books, hardback, 511 pages, \$24.95.

Early convert, Danite captain, Joseph Smith bodyguard, missionary, and polygamist—this is "a rich source for numerous events in Mormon history."

**Utah People in the Nevada Desert: Homestead and Community on a Twentieth Century Farmers' Frontier.**

By Marshall E. Bowen. Utah State University Press, hardback, 150 pages, \$24.95.

This book draws on "an impressive array of both standard and rarely used records to recount [the] history" of these twentieth-century settlements.

### SCRIPTURE & THEOLOGY

**Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, vol. 6, no. 1.** Ed. by Daniel C. Peterson. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, paperback, 566 pages, \$12.95.

The entire issue of this periodical responds to *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Signature Books, 1993); different essays review the book in whole or in part.

**Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.** Sel. and arr. by Joseph Fielding Smith; annotations and introduction by Richard C. Galbraith. Deseret Book, hardback, 539 pages, \$19.95.

"The scriptures the Prophet used" have been referenced in this version of an LDS classic to "help all students of the gospel to better understand the Prophet's profound teachings."

**Sermons and Writings of the Restoration, Volume 1.** Comp. by Ogden Kraut. Pioneer Press, paperback, 269 pages, \$6.00.

"The first in a series of several volumes containing sermons and writings of early LDS Church leaders . . . contains information from 1840 through 1850," with additions from the 1830s.

**Teachings of the Prophets: Statements of LDS Leaders on Contemporary Issues.** Comp. by R. Clayton Brough. Horizon Publishers, hardback, 176 pages, \$13.98.

Under 62 major subject headings, this book "fills the growing need for quick, easy access to recent statements of LDS leaders."

**Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Volume 2.** Comp. by Fred C. Collier. Collier's Publishing Co., hardback, 319 pages, \$24.95.

Includes variant accounts of the First Vision, visions of Moroni, testimonies of the Three Witnesses, and various Spirit manifestations, to the close of the Missouri period.

wish to publish their results, however, makes an extended undertaking of this sort unlikely. It also makes Taber's book all the more valuable as a pioneering achievement.

As an organizing format, Taber introduces readers to her subjects' personal accounts in the context of their participation in particular ward events or lay callings during the record year of observation. Thus, for example, there are chapters organized around baptisms, a marriage, a stake temple excursion, choir rehearsals and performance, a missionary farewell, fund raising and welfare projects, ward conference, personnel changes in the bishopric and auxiliary organizations, youth activities and Primary children's events, testimony meeting, the persistent problem of inactive members, priesthood meeting, Relief Society socials, and so on. One important result of this format is that we clearly begin to see ward members not merely as individuals but as social actors, whose experiences are mutually shaped by their interlocking roles in the religious community. One begins to get a good sense of the demanding yet supportive—oftentimes encapsulating—character of Mormon group life.

In each chapter the spotlight falls on three to ten ward members whose oral history interviews have been selectively transcribed into seamless monologues. Those interviewed talk about how they came to be members of the Church, about their religious and secular backgrounds; their families, occupations and working lives; their church callings and lay involvement over time; their beliefs, priorities, and aspirations; their personal concerns and struggles in life. The book's success ultimately depends on the clarity and insights offered by these monologues. Collectively, they make for engrossing and, at times, poignant reading, as members of the Elkton Ward speak with simplicity and apparent candor about their lives in the Church. As they tell their stories, a constellation of basic themes gradually emerges.

Like adherents of other faiths, Elkton Ward members find transcendent meaning and comfort in the teachings of their church. At the same time, Mormon doctrines seem to offer them not just pious abstractions, but common sense solutions to the problems of everyday existence. They are attracted by the LDS concept of a personal God, a literal father who watches over them daily and cares for them individually; a father in heaven who, they believe, entrusts them with sacred lay responsibilities in the only true church, inspires their leaders through revelation, and guides them in making life decisions. Trust in the efficaciousness of personal prayer and the

power of the LDS lay priesthood are especially important to them as vehicles for attaining supernatural aid and comfort in times of trouble or crisis.

Parallel to the reiteration of these basic beliefs, many ward members allude to the dilemmas of exercising personal conscience and individuality, virtues celebrated by certain LDS scriptures, in an authoritarian organization that places a premium on orthodoxy and conformity. Through their oral histories we, in fact, see revealed the diversity of active members' personal beliefs, motives, and religious attachments. We are drawn to the proposition that the LDS religion appeals to a fairly broad range of individuals, who come from many walks of life and possess differing levels of educational attainment; who often selectively emphasize those aspects of Mormonism that are most congenial to their own intellectual dispositions or existential needs, while they pragmatically ignore or de-emphasize the importance of other tenets and/or practices of the faith.

Significantly, ward members frequently speak of striving to balance the structural strains and satisfactions of Mormon community life; of the need to accommodate the competing demands of work and family with the insistent claims that lay callings impose on their time and resources. A fair amount of ambivalence is expressed by both men and women toward the changing status of women in society, especially women's traditionally subservient roles in a church dominated by priesthood hierarchy. The principal concerns of Elkton parents, however, tend to revolve around the religious development of their children. For them, religious loyalty and intensive family activity in LDS programs typically are justified as the best way to protect their children from the moral chaos of the outside world. Many members, of course, assign a priority value to their church involvement because it keeps them in sustaining contact with a supportive community. Lay participation in an LDS community provides them with a social identity, a sense that they have a meaningful place in the world, that they are contributing personally to a great cause. It appears, however, that it is more difficult for single adults to maintain their communal attachments with the ward than it is for those participating together as a family.

For at least some ward members interviewed by Taber, lay activity, with all the attendant demands and sacrifices it entails, clearly functions to satisfy their moral longings to purify themselves in the service of others. Thus, in his interview, Richard

Bushman concludes:

I believe that a calling is redemptive. I see this [for example] in women who will lose patience with their children at home, but in primary class they are marvels of patience, kindness, and understanding. Learning to act that way provides an anchor and a place to refer back to. For me, having to counsel people, having to say something in difficult situations that will be useful and kindly has deeply affected my personality and character. . . . One of the primary reasons that the church is powerful in peoples' lives is that it compels them to move into a role where they have to act for God (180).

BYU sociologist Larry Young recently cited *Mormon Lives* as a notable exception to the current dearth of Mormon congregational studies. According to Young, congregational studies offer a potentially critical analysis to Mormon scholarship because they typically "address questions of leadership, policy, and power. Frequently they provide models that explain differential rates of performance across congregations."<sup>1</sup> Certainly leadership, policy, and power emerge both directly and indirectly as highly important topics of concern for ward members in many of Taber's interviews, but she does not attempt any systematic critique, nor does she formulate any explanatory models of Mormon power arrangements. Her book is almost entirely descriptive. It lacks an explicit theoretical framework and has no rigorous thesis to argue beyond: (1) the basic methodological premise of the book that, assembled in sufficient quantity and appropriate context, oral histories shed light on the meaning of Mormonism as experienced by ordinary members themselves; and (2) Taber's statement in the introduction that "Mormon belief and activity in the church require the working out of a dialectic between two of the religion's fundamental principles—free agency and obedience to authority. . . . I have tried to portray how members confront and resolve this dialectic" (6–7). It is primarily *verstehen*, or empathic understanding, that Taber has sought to achieve through the voices of her subjects, not critical analysis. ☐

#### NOTE

1. Lawrence A. Young, "Confronting Turbulent Environment: Issues in the Organizational Growth and Globalization of Mormonism," in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspective*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 350.