B. CARMON HARDY. *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. xxiv; 445 pp. 27 illustrations, 2 appendixes, 2 indexes. $34.95.

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In recent years, studies of Mormon plural marriage have multiplied almost as rapidly as polygamous families did more than a century ago. With this book, Carmon Hardy, who teaches American history at California State University in Fullerton, has made a major contribution to our understanding of the solemn covenant of plurality. His study, *The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (1831–1911), began with his 1963 dissertation on "The Mormon Colonies of Northern Mexico," and he has steadily expanded that research ever since. *Solemn Covenant,* Hardy's first book, serves as a marvelous, if belated, commemoration of the centenary of Wilford Woodruff's 1890 Manifesto.

The volume's length, vague title, and price should not deter any student of LDS plural marriage from purchasing it. If one discounts the indexes, the list of 262 post-Manifesto plural marriages, and the extensive notes at the end of each chapter, the actual text amounts to about 250 pages. The 5:9 ratio of text to total length reflects the confusion surrounding post-1890 polygamy and Hardy's penchant for documenting his sources.

The title barely hints at the scope and focus of the book, but the introduction makes clear its overriding aim: to trace "the transformation of Mormonism from a society that idealized polygamy to one that . . . now exalts the traditional monogamous home" of Victorian America (xxi). The book began as an attempt to explain why almost half of the Latter-day Saint Church's top authorities, along with more than two hundred other men, took plural wives *after* the 1890 Manifesto. Hardy soon realized that a full understanding of polygamy's protracted demise (1890–1911) required consideration of its equally prolonged birth (1831–52) and of the periods when Mormons practiced it openly (1852–85) or in hiding (1885–90) under federal pressure to abandon it.

Thus, the first three chapters treat the Church's efforts to make a plurality of wives as much a part of its patriarchal theology as a plurality of gods. As a historian of ideas, Hardy places this attempt in the context of a little-known current of early modern Western thought that favored polygamy over monogamy. He takes issue with those who "portray plural marriage as incidental to the major thrust of the Latter-day Saint past" (18). He insists they have underestimated the importance attached to a divine order that would allow males to satisfy their polygamous natures, eliminate prostitution, and even "whiten" Native Americans. Such beliefs gained strength as the Saints gathered west to populate an ever-expanding Great Basin Kingdom.

Ironically, in Hardy's view, polygamy emerged triumphant in Mormon theology just as Victorian America made monogamy a near religion. Reform-minded Americans soon viewed Mormon Utah in much the same way that orthodox Mormons now perceive worldly Nevada. Hardy sees the growing gentile attacks on the Saints as more than a mere ruse to wrest control of the territory from the Church. He concurs with an 1887 conclusion of the Utah Commission: "'The political history of the territory of Utah and the system of plural marriage are so closely interwoven that the one cannot be considered separate and apart from the other'" (57).

Only by recognizing the Mormons' strong belief in the "Blessings of the Abrahamic Household" (title of chapter 3), Hardy contends, can one fathom their extreme reluctance to abandon the plural principle. From 1885 until at least 1904, the Church, in its "Tactical Retreat: The Manifesto of 1890" (chapter 4), presented "itself as increasingly obedient while privately refusing surrender" (127). It issued not one but a dozen or more declarations designed to assure the nation that Latter-day Saints would honor the laws of the land. These manifestos invariably caused consternation among outsiders, controversy among Church leaders, and confusion among members.

Hardy's fine sense of irony manifests itself repeatedly as he examines the retreat from the principle. The Gentiles, notably Utah's governor and Salt Lake City's *Tribune,* pressured Mormon leaders into submitting the Manifesto to an immediate vote of the Church to make it more binding. Such pressure eventually helped

persuade the Church to make it an official revelation by adding it to the Doctrine and Covenants (1908). Hardy clearly agrees with Apostle Marriner W. Merrill's 1891 view: "'I do Not believe the Manifesto was a revelation from God but was formulated by Prest. Woodruff and endorsed by His Councilors and the Twelve Apostles for expediency to meet the present situation of affairs in the Nation or those against the Church'" (150).

The Church's frequent authorizations of plural marriage at home and abroad after 1890 provide the best evidence, in Hardy's eyes, of Mormonism's commitment to the principle. And he devotes the second half of the book (chapters 5–10) to polygamy's long and painful death. In the early 1890s, few plural marriages took place. But once Utahns gained statehood (1896), the number increased—first under Woodruff, then even more under a cautious Lorenzo Snow, and finally most of all under Joseph F. Smith (see graph, 317). Rather than inhibit Mormon interest in contracting new polygamous unions, the B. H. Roberts hearings seem to have intensified it, with the figure rising to forty in 1903. Chapters 5 and 6 (plus appendix 2) contain considerably more detail than Michael Quinn's 1985 article about the circumstances that prompted and enabled dozens of men, a majority of them prominent Church leaders, to imitate Abraham.[1]

John W. Taylor and Matthias F. Cowley were merely two of nine or ten General Authorities who did not let the 1890 Manifesto deter them from taking plural wives. Hardy even thinks it "likely that President Wilford Woodruff also took a new plural companion in 1897" (227), although Woodruff's latest biographer disagrees.[2] Whether the President did or not, the rising incidence of polygamy sparked new rounds of debate among national progressive crusaders and Church leaders. The Smoot hearings of 1904–6, discussed in chapter 7, failed to convince the nation of Mormon sincerity in giving up plurality. National skepticism compelled the Church not only to issue another manifesto but to request the resignations of Taylor and Cowley.

Even those actions did not end authorized plural marriages. Between 1904 and 1911, three dozen more were performed by a dwindling number of certain general and local authorities committed to perpetuating the practice. In response to the Salt Lake

Tribune's reports of a new "outbreak," the Church conducted its own hearings in 1910–11. And at Senator Smoot's urging, it excommunicated and/or removed from leadership positions a number of polygamists. Just as the principle's death knell finally seemed to sound, the Mexican Revolution forced the largest colony of Mormon "cohabs" across the U.S. border and brought polygamy once more under the national spotlight. By 1912, however, as chapters 8–10 make clear, monogamy had all but triumphed among a new generation of Mormons and had brought them "to a condition of estrangement from their polygamous past" (338). While hundreds had persisted in keeping plurality alive, tens of thousands had accepted the Church's public statements and turned their backs on the principle, even on the refugees from northern Mexico. The few who clung tenaciously to polygamy, the so-called fundamentalists, simply strengthened the Church's determination to defend monogamy.

For reasons not specified, Hardy's concluding essay appears as appendix 1 rather than as a chapter 11. Some readers may find the implications of its title—"Lying for the Lord"—as difficult to accept as Mormon responsibility for the Mountain Meadows massacre, but the phrase seems justified. Hardy demonstrates with numerous examples how the hierarchy rationalized its use of questionable measures to preserve the principle and to protect those striving to keep it alive. Each successive crisis after the Edmunds Act of 1882 naturally led to greater dissimulation. Some Church leaders recognized the trend and expressed their fear, in the words of Charles W. Penrose, that it might make the "'rising generation a race of deceivers'" (368). Hardy concludes that "the decision to project only the *appearance* of compromise" brought all kinds of agony upon the church, including the persistence of Mormon fundamentalism (376). He confirms what other scholars have found, but places post-Manifesto polygamy in a much broader and more balanced context.

Professor Hardy has achieved his aim of illuminating polygamy's imprint upon the palimpsest of Mormon history and in tracing "the trying passage of its decline." He urges his readers to "remember [that] there were thousands of devoted men, women, and children whose lives were given to its trial" (352). Appropriately enough, he dedicates the volume to them. Some may wish he had devoted

more space to the trials experienced by plural Mormons, particularly the wives who comprised the highest percent of the population involved and probably suffered the most. They certainly deserve another volume from Hardy's logical mind and generally lucid prose. Perhaps he can respond to that request by revising and publishing his doctoral thesis.

However, Hardy may hesitate to write another book about polygamy for the same kinds of "personal considerations" that prompted Victor W. Jorgensen to withdraw his name as coauthor (xi). Both authors found the experience a trying one because of negative reactions from certain kith and kin who seem to share the Church's view that the less written about Mormonism's plural past the better. Perhaps though, thanks to their superb illumination of Mormonism's rough passage from monogamy to polygamy and back to monogamy, others will find it easier to speak and write about the plural and tangled lives of so many nineteenth-century Saints.

To the credit of both Carmon Hardy and the University of Illinois Press, *Solemn Covenant* has very few typos and unclear passages. (For one example of the latter, see the last sentence on page 369.) The book contains a set of photographs, mostly of key leaders of the Church, but fails to integrate them directly with the text. Only three of the illustrations include wives, and the one I like best does not identify seven young mothers (each holding an infant) in exile in Mexico at the turn of the century.

Many readers may find *Solemn Covenant* a bit too solemn. In his relentless search for post-1890 polygamists, Hardy seldom offers any relief from the *Sturm und Drang* that accompanied the passing of the principle. His portrayal of the fate of the few who entered the plural order after 1890 evokes so much pathos that one longs for some humor from, say, Dixie or Sanpete folklore. Several portraits make the polygamists seem like rather pathetic figures (see, for example, Hardy's treatment of Apostle George W. Teasdale on pages 222–27). The book thus often conveys the impression that plural living had no redeeming features.

Such an image clearly counters the Pollyanna conclusion that "while some [polygamous families] were very unhappy, most seemed to have gotten along very well."[3] Neither view adequately represents

the complex reality of plurality for two generations of Mormons. Whether practiced openly or secretly, plural marriage affected its participants in such diverse ways that broad generalizations based on specific periods and sources become suspect. Even within a single plural family, members reacted to the principle in markedly different fashion, and their reactions often changed through time.[4]

The recent spate of polygamy studies may seem like a surfeit to some readers. But if *Solemn Covenant* is correct about the central place of plural marriage in nineteenth-century Mormonism, then "Polly Gamie"—Apostle Orson Hyde's favorite topic, according to one unmarried woman in Manti—deserves many more scholarly articles and books.

NOTES

[1] D. Michael Quinn, "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890–1904," *Dialogue* 18 (Spring 1985): 9–105.

[2] Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 326–29.

[3] Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 193.

[4] For a recent demonstration of how differently the principle operated upon individual lives, see Maria S. Ellsworth, ed., *Mormon Odyssey: The Story of Ida Hunt Udall, Plural Wife* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Eds. note: For extensive bibliographic information about other recent studies of the nineteenth-century practice of polygamy, see Thomas G. Alexander's review of Richard S. Van Wagoner's *Mormon Polygamy* in *BYU Studies* 32 (Winter and Spring 1992): 295–98; and Patricia Lyn Scott, "Mormon Polygamy: A Bibliography, 1977–92," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Spring 1993): 133–55.