

When I first read Orson Pratt, LeGrand Baker

A NOTE ABOUT how I came to be interested in the pre-mortal existence

I attend school, K through 9th, in Salem, then was bussed went to Spanish Fork for high school. So, since the story I am telling took place while I was at the Salem school, it happened during or before my 9th grade year.

Across the street to the east of the school was an open field that had two baseball diamonds on it. There were no weeds in those places, but the lower north side of the playground was carpeted with puncher weeds and no one ever went there. One day, I was playing on the playground when the old man who lived in a house across the fence from the puncher weeds called to me and asked me to come talk with him. I was reluctant (perhaps because I didn't know the man, but more especially because I didn't want walking over the punchers to his fence). He was persistent, so I went to where he was. He told me that he had two books that he wanted me to borrow and read. I was to come to his house after school and pick them up, take them home and read them, then return them to him in two weeks. I agreed, so after school I stopped at his house and got the books.

I took them home, showed the books to my mother, and told her the story. Our town only had one church building and one ward, so I knew everyone in town who came to church, but I did not know this old man, but my mother knew him. When I told her where he lived, she was both very impressed and very concerned. She told me he was a one of the best men she knew, but was very ill – that he was too ill (and/or too old) to come to church. She took the books from me and told be that we must be very careful not to hurt them. To insure that, she told I could not handle them again until the two weeks were passed. Then, for the next two weeks, she typed their contents. I still have her typewritten copies. My mother was not a fast typist, so her copying those books was a laborious task. Besides that, she had so many other things to do. Every time I came home from school she was sitting at the typewriter. For some reason, she felt that it was important that I have the books – not just for two weeks, but that I have their ideas to read over and over again.

When I returned the books, the man's wife came to the door. I asked if I could see her husband and thank him. She said he was too ill to talk to me, thanked me for returning the books, but did not invite me in. I walked away from the house quite sobered: I felt this experience had been important to me, but I did not know why.

The books he had given me were Orson Pratt's *Great First Cause*, and B. H. Roberts' *Seventy's Course in Theology, Second Year, Outline History of the Dispensations of the Gospel*. They were – still are – the most important treatise published in the church discussing the pre-existence of man, and our growth experiences from intelligences, to spirits, to mortals, and eventually to resurrected beings. I read them both with great interest, devouring their ideas as though they were the key to everything that was important. But I had no one with whom I could talk about their ideas. My mom said she had typed them, but didn't understand what they said; my dad didn't have time to read them; and none the kids my age were at all interested.

I was excited to go to high school because I thought there would be people there with whom I could talk. I thought I found one in my seminary teacher. He would begin each Monday's class period with an open question and answer time when we could ask him any questions we wanted. He asked me to stay after class one Monday, and said to me (I am sure this is an exact quote), "LeGrand, I don't understand Orson Pratt: *therefore* you don't understand Orson Pratt: so stop asking me questions about what he thinks." After that, I still liked him as a teacher, but I didn't talk to him about important things any more.

I believed then, and believe more firmly now, that understanding one's pre-earth lives is the key to one's understanding oneself. Most of what I believe about our pre-mortal existence is on this disk. There is a large section about it in the long letter to my family and friends called "Abinadi, on being a child of God." However, recently those ideas were substantially expanded as I reflected on a conversation with my dear friend Ashley Buchanan.

This folder, called "pre-mortal existence," contains, in addition to this note, three of the four items I have mentioned: Orson Pratt's *Great First Cause*, B. H. Roberts' *Seventy's Course in Theology*, and my note to Ashley describing my reflections on that conversation.