



Review of What is Mormonism? A Student's Introduction, by Patrick Q. Mason; Mormonism: The Basics, by David J. Howlett and John Charles Duffy

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Title Review of *What is Mormonism? A Student's Introduction*,
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church will need to continue to wrestle with how to deal with its past, especially when scholars still have many questions about the historical accuracy of elements of the Book of Mormon. Nevertheless, the church has for decades trained an army of truly top-tier historians who teach in some of the best universities in the country. I have no doubt they will continue to offer many insights into how best to deal honestly with and make sense of the church's past.

In sum, this is an excellent and provocative collection of essays. The editors have done a superb job of putting it together, choosing the topics, and ensuring that every piece is clear and well organized and makes a significant argument. It will, I am sure, inspire much debate and new scholarship for many years to come.

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Patrick Q. Mason. *What Is Mormonism? A Student's Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

David J. Howlett and John Charles Duffy. *Mormonism: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Reviewed by Jennifer Graber

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TWO INTRODUCTORY TEXTS ON MORMONISM have much to offer scholars, like myself, who are not specialists in the tradition yet regularly return to it when teaching undergraduate classes in American religions and American history. Mason's volume, *What Is Mormonism? A Student's Introduction*, focuses on the Latter-day Saints and explores the tradition's historical development, global expansion, daily practice, and function as a response to existential problems. Howlett and Duffy's book, *Mormonism: The Basics*, surveys the Latter-day Saints, the Reorganized Latter Day Saints (RLDS, now Community of Christ), and fundamentalist groups with an emphasis on Mormon history, relations with non-Mormons, ritual life, and worldwide reach. Both texts respond to the "Mormon moment," in which the tradition has been represented in presidential elections, Broadway musicals, global sporting competitions, and popular fan fiction. For the nonspecialist professor, they provide useful information, chapters that can be easily integrated into a syllabus, and pedagogical suggestions. The books will prove most useful to teachers when situated within broader developments in the historiography of Mormonism.

Mason's book includes two chapters of special interest to nonspecialists teaching about Mormonism. He opens the book with a re-creation of one family's week. He follows parents and their two teenage children as they participate in family life, school, work, and LDS organizations. The chapter's rich details offer a look at the day-to-day ways Mormon affiliation shapes individual lives. At the same time, the chapter also includes references to the ways that Mormon families are like any other family. As a pedagogue, I have often started my unit on Mormonism with clips from the 2007 PBS special *The Mormons*. I show sections about young people making decisions about college, missions, family, and love. In this way, I have hoped that my non-Mormon students can move beyond popular culture stereotypes to see Mormon young people as remarkably like themselves. That exercise has paid off for me in the classroom. Mason's chapter chronicling one Mormon family's typical week could do similar work.

Mason's chapter on twentieth-century Mormonism, narrated through the life of Ezra Taft Benson, also offers a lot for pedagogues. First, it provides a coherent narration of the Latter-day Saints in the twentieth century, something I have struggled to find in the past. More important, Mason does a terrific job narrating Mormonism's "recalibrations" during the period, touching on internal debates about these changes and the tradition's changing public image that resulted from them. In this chapter, Mason manages to narrate LDS history between the twin poles of most students' minimal knowledge, namely, late-nineteenth-century declarations ending polygamy and the 2003 South Park episode "All about Mormons." It introduces students to the complexity of Mormon life and its particular twentieth-century developments.

From Mason's book, I turn to Howlett and Duffy's volume. Also excellent, the text offers different things to the nonspecialist pedagogue. Most commendable is the authors' coverage of Mormon traditions outside the Latter-day Saints. This breadth helps students understand how the descriptor *Mormon* might be applied to Mitt Romney as well as to fundamentalist women wearing prairie dresses. It also supports the authors' larger goal to consider how Mormons both differ and resemble other religious bodies in the United States. Their discussion of how Mormon groups have debated questions of authority and tradition compels students to make comparisons with other denominations. Indeed, Howlett and Duffy's chapter on gender, sexuality, and the family, as well as their reflections on global expansion, do important work to describe Mormon particularities, even as these developments in some ways mirrored (or at least looked similar to) changes within other religious communities.

Howlett and Duffy also provide some interesting pedagogical recommendations, including the possibility that their book could anchor a course on the history of American religion. To be sure, everyone teaching in the field chooses some sort of organizing theme or question for survey courses. Failing to do so leads to incoherence. While I have typically organized my class around themes rather than particular religious bodies, Howlett and Duffy make a convincing argument for organizing

a course around Mormons. The chapters provide a helpful way to place Mormon traditions within national developments regarding church-state relations, religious pluralism, and missionary tactics. Pedagogues interested in switching up the focus of their survey courses have a viable option in Howlett and Duffy's proposal.

As I have noted, both texts offer a great deal to nonspecialists. While teachers can benefit immensely from the information and teaching ideas presented therein, they will also be well served by considering where each book stands in relation to recent trends in Mormon historiography. Like me, many nonspecialists have probably received their earliest education in Mormon traditions from works by Jan Shipps, Richard Bushman, and Terryl Givens. They and others worked in what some have called the "new church history," which includes writing by church insiders less constrained by older orthodoxies that prevailed in earlier forms of church history. Texts produced by scholars working in this vein often explicate Mormon scripture, LDS theology, and institutional life within a broader American context. While these scholars produced several important monographs, a few also produced helpful introductory texts. Both Bushman and Givens have published in Oxford's Very Short Introduction series. Reflecting earlier developments in Mormon historiography, these authors' introductory offerings share an emphasis on the Latter-day Saints, issues of theology and belief, and explication of Mormon distinctiveness.

The texts by Mason and by Howlett and Duffy reflect more recent developments in the historiography of Mormonism, what some have identified as Mormon studies. Younger scholars writing in this mode have typically been trained in top-notch history and religious studies programs. They use tools from these disciplines to expand what counts as church history, pushing beyond belief, texts, and particularity to also embrace daily practice and correspondences between Mormon history and other religious groups. These scholars write about Mormon traditions with a decidedly outward focus. While many of these authors, though hardly all, have some connection to Mormonism, they write books of interest to a broader academic and popular readership.

Mason's introductory book is representative of this trend. As noted above, the book opens with a thick description of one LDS family's daily life. Chapters follow on the variety of ways Mormons have been shaped by visions and the kinds of gatherings they created in response to those experiences. The topics of scriptures and beliefs do not appear until chapters 5 and 7, respectively. Mason also focuses on historical context, pointing out Mormon particularities as well as overlaps with other movements. And while Mason puts the LDS at the heart of his study, his last chapter on "Mormonisms" acknowledges the diversity of Mormon experience and provides some explanation of historic splits among practitioners. In all these ways, Mason writes about Mormonism in dialogue with broader conversations in the field of religious studies about ritual practice, sacred spaces, and the vitality created when minority practitioners encounter dominant Protestant traditions.

Howlett and Duffy's book also reflects trends in Mormon studies. Indeed, their introductory treatment offers no chapters explicitly focused on theology or scripture. The authors aim to identify not only Mormon distinctiveness but also resemblances to other religious bodies. Their chapters on sacred space and ritual life, especially, reflect trends in the larger religious studies academy. Two aspects of their book go further and push the boundaries of Mormon studies. First, as noted earlier, Howlett and Duffy survey three forms of Mormonism. To be sure, an argument based on sheer numbers justifies Mason's LDS focus. But Howlett and Duffy's decentering of the Latter-day Saints is refreshing. As a pedagogue, I have not talked enough about the disputes within early Mormonism that led to the RLDS offshoot. This volume gives me more tools for doing so. Second, Howlett and Duffy offer much reflection on gender and sexuality within Mormon traditions. Their focus on the construction of certain kinds of gendered and sexual identities makes a point not only about Mormonism, but also about the ways these constructions have been integral to religious communities throughout American history. As a pedagogue, I see their chapter on gender and sexuality as a way to move my non-Mormon students away from their

focus on polygamy and toward a bigger conversation about sexuality throughout Mormon history, as well as in other religious bodies.

Both texts are innovative and well written. They offer nonspecialists a way to update their teaching about Mormonism, bringing their labors in line with trends in the historiography of Mormonism, as well as with the teaching of American religions.

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Nicholas J. Frederick. *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Cory Crawford

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IN THIS MONOGRAPH NICHOLAS FREDERICK tackles the directional literary relationship between canonical Mormon scripture and the King James Bible with a methodology more secure and transparent than has been applied in the past. He advances substantively the study of Latter-day Saint sacred texts by trying to get an analytical handle on what attentive readers detect easily, namely, that the rhetorical space created and occupied by Joseph Smith's canonized writings, produced in English, is inseparable from the English of the King James Bible in ways that complicate the question of historicity and translation. For Frederick, detecting and decoding allusion in LDS scripture allows the reader to investigate creative operations performed on the source text. He looks under the hood in sharper focus at the literary engines