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**Title** *Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith: A Sharp Stick in the Eye*

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**Abstract** Review of *Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith* (2002), by C. Reynolds Mackay.

*MUHAMMAD, JUDAH, AND JOSEPH SMITH:*  
A SHARP STICK IN THE EYE

Brian M. Hauglid

I don't think any good book is based on factual experience. Bad books are about things the writer already knew before he wrote them.<sup>1</sup>

When I was much younger and something bad happened to me, my dad often tried to remind me that things could be worse by saying, "Well, it's better than a sharp stick in the eye." After reading *Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith*, I firmly believe this book is a sharp stick in the eye. I am saying this as a human being who is offended by a very one-sided and inaccurate viewpoint of fellow human beings. Preceding its large-print title is what looks like, but is not, a series title (or subtitle) that reads *Ideologies in Conflict*. I am not exactly sure what this subtitle means, but from the contents of the book, it appears that it refers to two ideological conflicts: Muslims against everyone else and Mormonism above (and better than) everyone else. However, I have enough faith to believe, perhaps somewhat naively, that most will see through this unorganized, uneven, distorted, prejudicial, and, I think,

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1. Carlos Fuentes (b. 1928), Mexican novelist, short story writer, quoted in *International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 5 November 1991.

Review of C. Reynolds Mackay. *Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith*. Springville, Utah: Bonneville Books, 2002. xiii + 153 pp., with index. \$12.95.

extremely untrue image of Islam. Furthermore, I believe most will see through the author's polemical attacks against Islam (and sometimes Judaism) done in the name of the restored gospel.

If all you needed to know about this book is that it *is* a bad book then you do not really need to read any further. But if you want to understand *why* it is a bad book and perhaps even learn something about Islam in the process, then read on.

The first major defect of the book is its tendency to overgeneralize and oversimplify complex and multifaceted teachings and practices in Islam. Throughout its short, large-print, and unprofessional-looking chapters, sweeping and unsupported statements are made about Islam that lead one to believe that the book presents a common, everyday Islam. Here are a few examples of actual claims about Islam found in a handy, two-columned chapter entitled "Islam vs. Mormonism": "Polygamy is acceptable" ("Common among Muslims today," p. 86), "Women are inferior to men," "Abortion allowed" (Mackay cites pre-Islamic infanticide as equivalent of late-term abortion, pp. 72–73), "Make war in the name of God," "Divorce is by a statement," "Islam by force," "America is Satanic."

Of course, the other column lists the virtues of Mormonism. For instance, the Islam column reads: "Polygamy is acceptable," whereas the Latter-day Saint column professes: "Polygamy was acceptable only for a brief period. It is an abomination by God and is no longer permitted." Islam column: "Women are inferior to men," LDS column: "Women are equal to men. They are to be loved, educated, cared for, and exalted." Taken as a whole, one could (and probably should, according to the author) likely conclude that the claims in the Islam column are bad and the corresponding claims in the LDS column are good.

I do grant that the statements in the Islam column do point out negative aspects that one can find in Islam. Mackay's interpretations are believed and practiced by *some* Muslims to *one* degree or another; however, this book does not even attempt to show that such practices as divorce, polygamy, and abortion (practically nonexistent) are extremely rare. Nor does it discuss any of the debates taking place within Islam about these issues, particularly about hot topics such as

the status of women, jihad, pluralism, or Muslim relations with the United States. All the book manages to do is bring together all that is negative, bad, sensational, and controversial in Islam in order to create an unreal picture of Islam that resembles nothing so much as a giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man rampaging through the streets of our cities, terrorizing and threatening our destruction if we do not submit to Islam. And the only solution, according to this book, is to employ Islambusters (Christianity, of course), who will triumph over Islam through converting the evil Muslims.

To me the overall message of this book is quite clear: the author knows just enough about Islam to be extremely dangerous. My fear is that this book will find its way into our church meetings, especially high priest group meetings, to be held up as *the* source for information about Islam. Even worse, I shudder to think how a Muslim would respond to this book, particularly since it comes from a Latter-day Saint. Wouldn't most Muslims likely wonder, "Is this what Mormons think of us?"

*Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith* makes another major mistake at the outset that is anathema to anyone who knows something about Islam. While the author refers to adherents of Islam as Muslims, he also, and sometimes on the same page (p. 2), frequently calls Muslims "Islams." When I alerted Daniel Peterson to this crass flaw in the book, he declared, "I wish all of us Mormonisms could learn how to properly refer to the Islams and their religion. The same goes for Judaisms and Catholicisms, too."<sup>2</sup> With this statement I think Dan nailed the problem so that anyone can understand how offensive it would be to Muslims to call them Islams. I am surprised I did not see a statement in the book that "all Islams are A-rabs." Along these lines, we also do not refer to Muslims as "Muhammadans," since Muslims do not worship Muhammad. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of all people, should be sensitive to this kind of labeling since we too have been accused of being Joseph Smith worshipers.

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2. Daniel Peterson, e-mail correspondence to the author, 7 November 2002.

I believe Mackay incorrectly interprets some Qur'anic passages and some hadith statements (sayings of Muhammad or his Companions) to argue that Muhammad started a military holy war during his lifetime to convert all people to Islam and that this armed holy war continues today. Mackay refers to this war as the "Oily Jihad" (pp. 10–11), using the pun, "Oil is fuelling [*sic*] the continuing Jihad against the West," which implies that the principal motivation behind the current military holy war, if one actually exists, rests on the Muslim possession and use of oil. This blatant oversimplification can only create more animosity in Latter-day Saints toward Muslims. Certainly oil is a factor in the international geopolitical arena, but outside of the oil-producing Muslim countries, such as in Indonesia or Pakistan, oil is not the main issue. From characterizations such as this, I think the author's biggest fan club will likely come from the minority of people who follow the Usama bin Ladens of this world, rather than the majority of the 1.2 billion Muslims, a majority that is, by the way, much more moderate in their views and certainly do not believe they are in a holy war (i.e., armed struggle) against the West.

To set the record straight, the term *jihad* means "struggle" or "striving," and most Muslims see jihad in two important ways: the greater jihad and the lesser jihad. According to one Islamic tradition, after the famous Muslim victory at the Battle of Badr, Muhammad is said to have declared, "You have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad." When asked what the greater jihad was, Muhammad responded, "It is the *jihad* against your passionate souls."<sup>3</sup> Armed struggle in the Qur'an and in the traditional teachings of Muhammad is not to be lightly entered into—certainly not in an offensive posture and only in self-defense when in imminent physical danger. This is why terrorist leaders work very hard to carefully persuade their followers that they have been put in a position of self-defense. In general, Muslims divide the world into two camps: the Dar al-Harb (the abode of war) and the Dar al-Islam (the abode of peace); however, the abode of war, in most

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3. As found in Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 260, emphasis in original.

cases, is not interpreted as a military, armed war. It is the war against such things as materialism, immorality, exploitation of women, and anything that can tempt a Muslim to forget his God. Therefore, the real holy war for a Muslim is the personal struggle to be the best Muslim possible, to be diligent in practices such as saying prayers, giving alms, and fasting, all of which helps the Muslim to remember his God through his active participation in his religion.

What really irks me about this book is comparing the worst of Islam—using every negative, biased, twisted fact—to the best of Mormonism, pointing out all that is right, good, and true. I often tell my students in classes on Islam and the gospel and on world religions that Islam is not a monolithic religion. It is a multicultural, multifaceted, multidimensional religion. It embraces many races, languages, and geographical areas. The largest population of Muslims is not even in the Middle East, but in Indonesia. Most Arabs are, of course, Muslim, although many Arabs are Christian too, but most Muslims are not Arab. One really cannot pigeonhole Islam any more than one can pigeonhole any religion that has been around for a reasonably long period of time. Islam, like any other religion, has violent extremists. It probably has more than most other religions since Muslims number one-fifth of the world's population. However, the majority of Muslims are peace-loving, law-abiding people who go to school, work, and care deeply about their families. I tell my students that the Muslims I know are very offended at the extreme behavior of a few loud, violent radicals who put forth their views as orthodox, common Islam.

Most Muslims do not want Islam to be defined by an Usama bin Laden any more than most Christians would want Christianity defined by a David Koresh, or any more than a Latter-day Saint would want Mormonism defined by a Tom Green or a Mark Hofmann. Unfortunately, this book focuses heavily on extremist viewpoints such as are available in a tabloid but does not give any explanation or analysis to the majority moderate view in Islam. In my opinion, this fatal flaw propels the book into an irredeemable abyss.

I will offer a few more excerpts of actual quotations and phrases from the book (some accompanied by my commentary) that I think should ward off the serious-minded inquirer after the truth.

“Islam has always shown hatred of atheists, pagans, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Jews, Buddhists, and Christians, *despite some parts of the Koran which plead for tolerance*” (p. xii, emphasis in original). This overgeneralized statement is simply not true. Islamic history attests that Muslims have at many times lived alongside people of other faiths in peace. Between the eighth and the tenth centuries, for example, when the Muslim empire stretched from Spain to India, not only did Muslims and non-Muslims from many cultures live together, but major Islamic contributions were made in fields such as science, mathematics, literature, philosophy, and linguistics. From the period of Muhammad, Muslims are also under Qur’anic injunction to view and treat Jews and Christians as kindred spirits, or “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitab*), because they had been caretakers of the scriptures up to the time of the revelation of the Qur’an.

“Most American Muslims love the United States’ economy, and they try to enjoy the American Dream. Their religion doesn’t prevent them from doing all they can to acquire vast wealth, much like the Sikhs in Arabia” (p. xiii). How is this characterization of American Muslims as money-grubbers any different from the anti-Semitism exhibited during the Middle Ages in Europe against the Jews? Modern history has recorded the sad end of such blatantly ignorant and prejudicial views. And since when did the Sikhs move from the Punjab in northwest India to Arabia? I somehow missed that one.

You may also be interested to know that Muhammad “acquired a Harem of a dozen wives and concubines” (p. 1) and is billed (the author refers to John Keegan for this but does not provide a citation) as a “man of violence. He bore arms, was wounded in battle, and preached holy war, or Jihad, against those who defied the will of God as revealed to him, Muhammad. He said, ‘The sword is the key to heaven and hell.’ This is the opposite of Christ’s admonition, who said, ‘He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword’” (p. 3). I was not aware that Muhammad had so many wives (I think he had seven



or eight) and that this was called a *harem*, a term not used until the ninth or tenth century. Mackay's description of Muhammad's character harks back to the polemical eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Muhammad was also proffered as an evil charlatan subject to epileptic fits and hallucinations. Recent scholarship has seen through the polemics and has since produced much more balanced studies on the life of Muhammad; most have concluded that Muhammad was, at least in part, a product of his times and sincere in his efforts to spread his message.

“In addition to praying three times a day in a prostrate position, the religion of Islam governs many aspects of living” (p. 8). Wrong again! Muslims pray five times a day. Yes, Muslims do bow and prostrate themselves before God to indicate humility and submission. Prayer is basic to the religion and is one of the Five Pillars of Islam (not even mentioned in the book), which are considered mandatory for all Muslims, along with the Shahada, or witness (to become a Muslim the following is recited: “There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God”), fasting (month of Ramadan), alms, and the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. It is too bad these Five Pillars didn't receive any attention. This omission is only one example of a number of many basic things the author could have explored and discussed. Truly this book would have been much improved had it dealt with the basic history, beliefs, and practices of Muslims instead of its constant harping on the extremists' points of view.

“Muslims believe the Koran to be the word of God as given to Muhammad. Jews believe the Torah to be the word of God. Mormons believe the Bible is the word of God as long as it is translated correctly” (p. 28). Here is another unfortunate oversimplification, especially since the author says virtually nothing else about the Qur'an outside of the quotations used to emphasize his points throughout the book (except in the chapter with columns, mentioned earlier, which reads, “The Koran is incongruous and full of fallacies” [p. 134]). Of course, any first-year student of Islam knows you really cannot lump the Qur'an, Torah, and Bible together without creating some major misconceptions and misunderstandings. It should be understood

first and foremost that the Qur'an is to the Muslims as Jesus is to the Christians. That is, Muslims consider the Qur'an to be the Word of God and the literal words of God. Muslims do not believe the Qur'an was translated, compiled, or edited. It was revealed to Muhammad in Arabic as if the words came directly from God's mouth. This is why Muslims love to hear the Qur'an recited in Arabic and why Muslims do not, properly speaking, view it as the Qur'an when it has been translated into any other language. Hence, many Muslims in non-Arabic speaking areas learn how to pronounce the Arabic in the Qur'an using transliterated characters from their own tongue. For example, for an English-speaking Muslim to say the *bismallah* (a phrase at the beginning of all but one chapter of the Qur'an), it could be transliterated in English to read (and say) *bismallah al-rahman al-rahim* ("In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate"). In this way the English-speaking Muslim could pronounce the actual words of God without even knowing Arabic.

Alongside the appallingly inaccurate portrayal of Islam, the author seeks to extol the virtues of Mormonism by citing all sorts of bizarre comparisons and other topics that seem to have little or nothing to do with anything. What follows are some examples of chapter titles (in quotation marks) and subtitles (in italics): "Homosexuality and Immorality," *AIDS and Immorality*, "Food and Fantasies," *Masturbation, Slavery and Equality*, "Creation and Evolution," *Abraham and the Urim and Thummim*, and *Jews Don't Believe in Unisex*. Many quotations throughout the text are from the Qur'an or the Torah or are outdated or extreme views of lesser-known scholars, with little explanation or synthesis. For instance, the section titled *Jews Don't Believe in Unisex* features Deuteronomy 22:5 with absolutely no discussion of what it really means within the context of the message of the chapter. Yet the discussions on points of Mormonism fill many more pages. And the underlying message of the sections on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that Mormonism is better than all other religions, especially Islam.

Mackay's use, or nonuse, of sources contained in the bibliography is very disappointing. Unfortunately, the author never gives a page

reference to his secondary sources. He even includes a few noted scholars (W. Montgomery Watt, Gustave von Grunebaum, Alfred Guillaume, etc.) in his bibliography but does not cite or use their work in the book, which indicates that he either did not read them or purposely left them out because they do not square with his views of Islam. He also lists Daniel Peterson's *Abraham Divided* and Spencer Palmer's *Mormons and Muslims* in the bibliography, but again he does not refer to them in the book.

For the serious Latter-day Saint who wants to know more about Islam and perhaps even compare Islam with Mormonism, this book is definitely not the source. Instead, I would suggest the following: James A. Toronto, "Islam," in *Religions of the World*;<sup>4</sup> the articles in Spencer Palmer's updated *Mormons and Muslims*;<sup>5</sup> and Daniel Peterson's *Abraham Divided*.<sup>6</sup> More recently an entire issue of *BYU Studies* was devoted to the study of Islam.<sup>7</sup> The *Ensign* as well has published several good articles on Islam or Islamic topics.<sup>8</sup> A very good non-Latter-day Saint text used for the class on Islam and the gospel at Brigham Young University is Fred Denny's *An Introduction to Islam*.<sup>9</sup> Anyone who takes a look at any of these publications will quickly identify appropriate ways in which to discuss Islam or any other religion, for that matter. Even the worst of these publications is better than *Muhammad, Judah, and Joseph Smith*, a sharp stick in the eye.

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4. Spencer J. Palmer, Roger R. Keller, Dong Sull Choi, and James A. Toronto, *Religions of the World: A Latter-day Saint View*, rev. and enl. ed. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 213–41.

5. Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations*, updated and rev. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002).

6. Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1995).

7. *BYU Studies* 40/4 (2001).

8. See James B. Mayfield, "Ishmael, Our Brother," *Ensign*, June 1979, 24–32; Joseph B. Platt, "Our Oasis of Faith," *Ensign*, April 1988, 39–41; James A. Toronto, "A Latter-day Saint Perspective on Muhammad," *Ensign*, August 2000, 50–58; Orin D. Parker, "A Life among Muslims," *Ensign*, March 2002, 50–52.

9. Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994).

