

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

MORMONISM

(A.K.A, THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS), ITS HISTORY, TEACHINGS AND INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN SOCIETY

Coordinators: Frank Carden and Arlene Spiller

Participants will broaden and enrich their understanding and appreciation of an American religious minority that through missionary work lives throughout the world but about whom we know very little. In this study group we will unravel many of the mysteries surrounding the Mormons from their mid-18th century origins in northern New York State and subsequent forced migrations to the Midwest, then to Salt Lake City, Utah. We'll follow their journey from being pariahs to respected citizens.

(This is an updated repeat of a Fall 2021 study group.)

Frank Carden was ordained a Catholic priest. Subsequently he earned a Ph.D. in clinical Psychology and was certified as a psychoanalyst. He is interested in the interplay of religious belief and human behavior.

Arlene Spiller developed a deep interest in religious teachings, philosophy and practice when helping to promote interfaith dialogue while working for the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Type of Study Group: Presentation followed by discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Viewing (no video subscription required for viewing):

The study group will take advantage of the huge amount of video material that is available on the internet concerning the Mormons. The Church itself produces video material designed to encourage converts. Video material critical of the Church and its teachings is also plentiful. Professional historians striving to be objective have also made a contribution. We will sample all of these areas.

Reading:

Chapters from books and articles from periodicals will be provided to participants through email attachments. They will be drawn from professional books and journals as well as from magazine and newspapers with a more popular appeal.

Examples follow of professional and popular publications from which material will be drawn:

Mormonism for Dummies by Jana Riess, (John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY,

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2005);

Deconstructing Mormonism: An Analysis and Assessment of the Mormon Faith by Thomas Riskas, (American Atheist Press, Cranford, NJ, 2011);

The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith by Matthew Bowman, (Random House, New York, NY, 2012);

Sunstone, (magazine which discusses issues of interest to Mormons and is directed to the general reader);

Ensign, (official publication of the Mormon Church which takes a more scholarly approach in its articles);

Dialogue (publication of the LDS Church);

Articles from *The New York Times*, *Mormon Heritage Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Deseret News*, *The Salt Lake City Tribune*.)

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Joseph Smith and the beginning of Mormonism

READING:

Mormonism for Dummies (Chapters 1 - 3)

QUESTIONS:

Why was northern New York State called the “burnt over district” in the time of Joseph Smith? Why was Joseph Smith murdered? In what ways did Brigham Young influence the development of Mormonism?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: The Mormon plan of salvation

VIEWING:

Nightline documentary on Mormonism (first three chapters)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ao6e-dkEVc>

QUESTIONS:

How does the concept of God in Mormonism differ from that concept in Protestant dominations? Explain what is meant by spirit life in heaven before earthly existence. Explain the three levels of heaven.

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Heavenly parents, Savior and the Holy Ghost

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READING:

The Mormon People - chapter 4.

QUESTIONS:

What is the role of “Heavenly Mother”? Jesus is the Savior. Why is a Savior necessary? What happens to people who go to Hell?

WEEK 4: Joseph Smith - “I am willing to sacrifice my life for your preservation.”

WEEK 5: Brigham Young - The Exodus: building the kingdom of God in Utah

WEEK 6: Brigham Young - A world transformed

WEEK 7: Hot Button Issues - Mountain Meadows Massacre; fundamentalism and polygamy; racism; women’s rights; gays

WEEK 8: Connecting with God and with each other

WEEK 9: Church organization and religious practice

WEEK 10: Mormonism and American politics

WEEK 11: Mormonism and business success

WEEK 12: Mormonism in the mainstream imagination