

MITT ROMNEY, MORMONISM, AND THE 2012 ELECTION. By Luke Perry. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. ix + 241 pp.

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Luke Perry's "Mitt Romney, Mormonism, and the 2012 Election" seeks to provide a one-stop introduction to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its involvement in American politics, with a specific emphasis on how Mormonism factored into the 2012 presidential campaign. In general, it accomplishes this goal with a compelling narrative and an impressive amount of detail.

Chapter 2 gives a very basic overview of the history and doctrine of Mormonism, which would be especially useful for people who are just starting from scratch in their understanding of the American-born religion. The author hits the important highlights and cites a good mix of Mormon and non-Mormon scholarship. Chapter 3 continues the historical overview through the 20th century, supplementing the narrative with data from the Pew Research Center's "2011 National Survey of Mormons" to paint a picture of the contemporary Mormon community. At one point the narrative is framed with Terryl Givens' "People of Paradox" paradigm (Givens 2007), pointing out that like all other religions, Mormonism has a number of unresolved tensions in its doctrine and culture (authority vs. freedom, certainty vs. searching, sacred vs. temporal, and particularism vs. universalism).

Chapter 4 presents a discussion of public perceptions of Mormonism, with a focus on how the LDS Church has dealt with controversial racial and economic issues. This chapter also includes a summary of the Church's public relations struggle to disassociate itself from the term "cult" over the past few decades. There is also a discussion of how Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign was a turning point in the eyes of the media, in that "Mormonism moved within the bounds of an acceptable religion" (pg. 76).

Chapter 5 turns to Mitt Romney himself, providing a short personal biography with an emphasis on his involvement in the LDS volunteer leadership positions he has held throughout his life. This chapter also describes the episodes of the 2008 and 2012 presidential primaries that dealt with his religious affiliation and public reactions to it. Chapters 6 and 7 provide introductions to the LDS Church's involvement in political matters stretching all the way from founder Joseph Smith's ill-fated campaign for the presidency in 1844 to the Church's involvement in California Proposition 8 in 2008. It also contains a summary of the various instances in which Mitt Romney explicitly talked about his faith on the campaign trail. (While Chapter 7 appropriately focuses its attention on LDS involvement in same-sex marriage debates, it glosses over other important areas that the Church has involved itself in recently, such as immigration). The book concludes

in chapters 8 and 9 with a discussion of the results of the 2012 presidential election and the author's perspective on how Mormonism may have factored into Romney's loss.

Generally-speaking, this book is well-written and detailed in its descriptions and narratives. The author, while disclosing to his readers that he is a non-Mormon, displays an impressive understanding of the LDS Church and Mormon culture. There are a few places, though, where the narrative shows a lack of familiarity and nuance in its understanding of the particulars of Mormonism.

For instance, Perry describes how Mormons believe that in the afterlife they will eventually "become Gods of their own planet" (pg. 63). While there are Mormon leaders who explicitly taught such as much in decades past, this hyper-literal belief is now somewhat dated in Mormon culture and certainly not an official teaching of the LDS Church (even though it made for a great line in the *Book of Mormon* musical!). Indeed, the Church published an online essay in February 2014 in which it explains: "Latter-day Saints' doctrine of exaltation is often ... reduced in media to a cartoonish image of people receiving their own planets. ... [although] few Latter-day Saints would identify with caricatures of having their own planet, most would agree that the awe inspired by creation hints at our creative potential in the eternities." (See <https://www.lds.org/topics/becoming-like-god>.)

Another example: the author summarizes on page 67 the theological rationale for the former ban on blacks being ordained to the Mormon priesthood (which ended in 1978) by quoting BYU professor Randy Bott who argued that the ban was due to the spiritual immaturity of black church members. While this is a correct summary of that portion of Bott's interview, it overlooks the more influential alternative Mormon folk doctrine that blacks were banned from the priesthood due to their being "less valiant" in their pre-earth life. This was a much more popular understanding of the cause of the priesthood ban among Mormons throughout much of the 20th century, having been explicitly taught by church leaders in 1949 and informally for the next several decades. (These folk doctrines were officially disavowed by the LDS Church in December 2013, see <https://www.lds.org/topics/race-and-the-priesthood>).

What is more surprising, however, is that this book gives little attention to dominant political science research on American elections and voting behavior. Chapter 5, for example, describes Romney's GOP primary victory in 2012 as "remarkable" given the difficulties that a Romney candidacy would likely face, such as questions about his religion, his personal wealth, and "gaffes" made during the primary debates. This stands in contrast to Sides and Vavreck's (2013) interpretation of the 2012 election results. They argue that Romney's primary victory was in fact very unremarkable given that he led in all the basic "fundamentals" that predict party primary victories: media attention, fundraising, support in polls, and party leader endorsements. Also, they show empirical survey evidence that the 2012 GOP primary base liked Romney just fine and saw him as both a consistent conservative and electable (Sides and Vavreck 2013, chapter

3). Contra Perry, Sides and Vavreck (2013) further argue that Mormonism was actually a very small factor in the 2012 primary election (208-212).

Similarly, the discussion of Romney's general election loss in chapters 8 and 9 focus on the types of explanations popular among cable news pundits and campaign strategists (e.g. Obama's ground operation, Romney's advertising missteps, Romney's awkward relationship with Evangelicals, etc.) but ignores the basic explanation offered by the political science paradigm: Romney lost because he was a challenger in an election year where the political and economic fundamentals (economic growth, president job approval, etc.) favored the incumbent (Sides and Vavreck 2013), and his Mormonism ended up not being a major factor in the final vote calculus. This finding is supported by Campbell, Green, and Monson (2014) in their recent analysis of Mormons and American politics. Speaking of the effect of Mormonism in determining vote choices in the 2012 election, they write: "There may have been an effect, but it was small and likely inconsequential. ... [Many] voters had no problem voting for a Mormon in the context of the 2012 election, even when those voters had theological concerns about Mormonism" (243-245).

In sum, Luke Perry's *Mitt Romney, Mormonism, and the 2012 Election* is recommended for those who are completely unfamiliar with Mormonism and want a basic overview of the religion and the details of how it was discussed in the 2012 presidential campaign. The book is largely descriptive and the analysis, while broad, is not very deep. Additionally, the absence of an index is inconvenient to researchers as well as casual readers. Those looking for a more in-depth, theoretically-driven empirical analysis of the role of Mormonism in driving American political behavior and attitudes, as well its influence in the outcome of the 2012 election, would do better to pick up *Seeking the Promised Land* by Campbell, Monson, and Greene (2014) and *The Gamble* by Sides and Vavreck (2013).

WORKS CITED

Campbell, David E., John C. Green, and J. Quin Monson. 2014. *Seeking the Promised Land: Mormons and American Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Givens, Terryl L. 2007. *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*. Oxford University Press.

Sides, John and Lynn Vavreck. 2013. *The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election*. Princeton University Press.