

Mormonism is different, but is it too Christian?

By [Joseph Walker](#) Jun 7, 2012, 5:00am MDT

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While some Christians insist that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not Christian enough, one Christian professor says “Mormonism is obsessed with Christ.”

Writing in the [First Things](#) blog site, Stephen H. Webb, a professor of religion and philosophy at Wabash College, says that “what gives Christianity its identity is its commitment to the divinity of Jesus Christ. And on that ground Mormons are more Christian than many mainstream Christians who do not take seriously the astounding claim that Jesus is the Son of God.”

“Mormonism is obsessed with Christ,” Webb continues, “and everything that it teaches is meant to awaken, encourage and expand faith in him. It adds to the plural but coherent portrait of Jesus that emerges from the four gospels in a way, I am convinced, that does not significantly damage or deface that portrait.”

Webb, who has studied Mormonism extensively as part of his academic study of theology, says that he came to this conclusion after reading the Book of Mormon.

“I was utterly surprised,” Webb writes. “I was not moved, mind you. The Book of Mormon has to be one of the most lackluster of all the great works of literature to have inspired enduring religious movements. Yet it is dull precisely because it is all about Jesus.”

Webb points out the ways in which “the Mormon Jesus is different from the Jesus of traditional Christianity,” concluding that “the Mormon metaphysic calls for the revision of nearly every Christian belief.”

“Still,” he writes, “not all heresies are equally perilous. If Gnosticism is the paradigmatic modern temptation — spiritualizing Jesus by turning him into a subjective experience — Mormonism runs in the exact opposite direction. If you had to choose between a Jesus whose body is eternal and a Jesus

whose divinity is trivial (as in many modern theological portraits), I hope it would be an easy choice.”

But for Tal Davis of Market Faith Ministries, the choice isn’t all that easy.

“When compared side by side,” Davis said during a webcast to help pastors and Christian leaders “understand” Mormonism, which was reported in [the Christian Post](#), “what they (Mormons) believe about God and Christ ... we have very drastic differences.”

Along with Ed Stetzer of LifeWay Research, Davis outlined those differences during the webcast, including the natures of God and Jesus Christ, the notion of salvation and LDS beliefs in additional scripture beyond the Bible.

“It’s not a denomination but it’s a different religion,” Stetzer said.

Still, both Davis and Stetzer urged their listeners to “drop the ‘cult’ language,” referring to some in the Christian community who have publicly labeled Mormonism as a “cult.”

“We don’t want to demonize people of other religions,” Stetzer said.

Rather than name-calling, Davis urged listeners to take a page out of the LDS book when talking to others about religion. “I’ve talked to hundreds of Mormons and I’ve learned something: they don’t argue. They tend to be self-assured,” Davis said. “That’s how we need to be. If we’re sure of our faith and we know what the Bible teaches, there’s really no need for us to engage in an argument.”

Unless, of course, you're among those deriving some pleasure from it.

"Making Mormons look bad helps others feel good," wrote J. Spencer Fluhman of the BYU History Department in an article published in [the New York Times](#).

"By imagining Mormons as intolerant rubes, or as heretical deviants, Americans from left and right can imagine they are, by contrast, tolerant, rational and truly Christian," wrote Fluhman, author of the forthcoming book, "A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in 19th Century America."

"Mitt Romney's candidacy is only the latest opportunity for such stereotypes to be aired."

And it is also an opportunity to eliminate some of the antipathy that Mormonism has historically evoked, he said.

"With politics and religion so inextricably linked in our culture, a Romney presidency would entail lasting effects for Mormonism and its image," Fluhman wrote. "Segments of the religious right might finally make peace with, if not quite accept, Mormonism's various heterodoxies. The left may struggle to comprehend a steadily diversifying faith that has increasingly global reach.

"This election, regardless of outcome, unquestionably pushes the United States onto new political terrain because neither candidate represents the religious old guard," he concludes. "But until Americans work through our contradictory impulses regarding faith, diversity and freedom, there is no reason to believe anti-Mormonism will go away anytime soon."