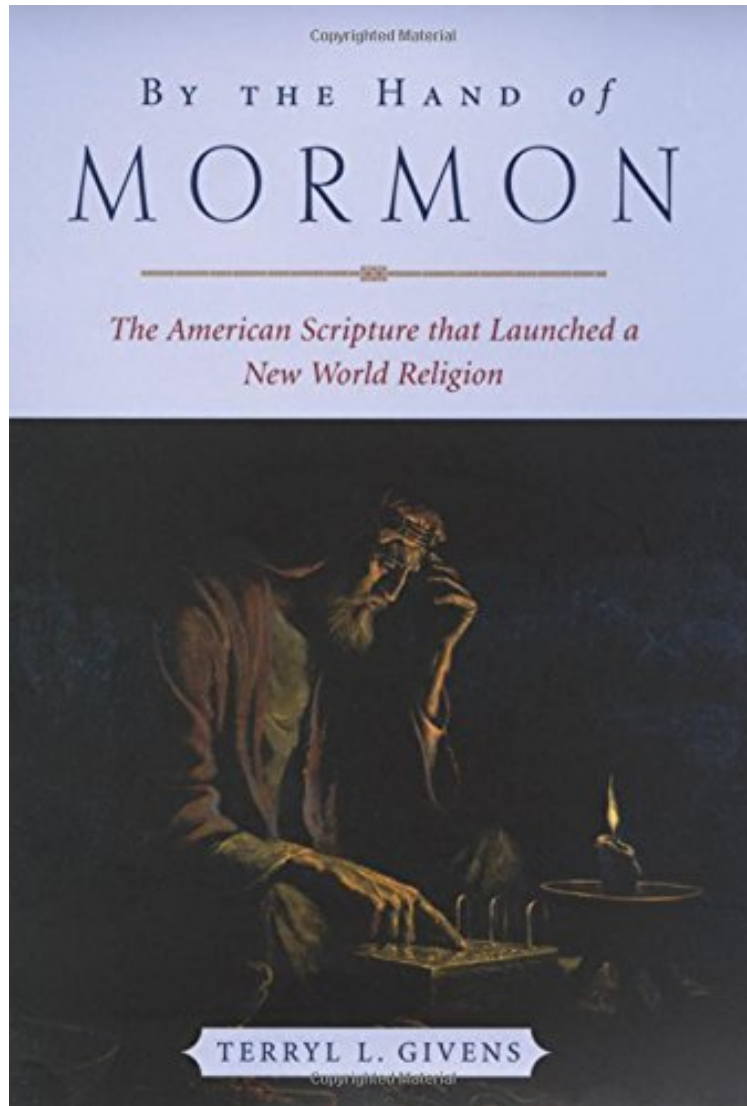


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By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion

Terryl L. Givens

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With over 100 million copies in print, the Book of Mormon has spawned a vast religious movement, but it remains little discussed outside Mormon circles. Now Terry L. Givens offers a full-length treatment of this influential work, illuminating the varied meanings and tempestuous impact of this uniquely American scripture. Givens examines the text's role as a divine testament of the Last Days and as a sacred sign of Joseph Smith's status as a modern-day prophet. He assesses its claim to be a history of the pre-Columbian peopling of the Western Hemisphere, and later explores how the Book has been defined as a cultural product--the imaginative ravings of a rustic religion-maker. Givens further investigates its status as a new American Bible or Fifth Gospel, one that displaces, supports, or, in some views, perverts the canonical Word of God. Finally, Givens highlights the Book's role as the engine behind what may become the next world religion. The most wide-ranging study on the subject outside Mormon presses, *By the Hand of Mormon* will fascinate anyone curious about a religious people who, despite their numbers, remain strangers in our midst.

From Library Journal
In 1830, Joseph Smith, founder of the Christian sect known as Mormons, published writings he had translated from golden plates reputedly delivered to him by the angel Moroni. These writings were to become the controversial sacred writings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and were titled the "Book of Mormon." Although more than 100 million copies of the Book of Mormon are in print in 94 languages, it has been roundly ignored as a legitimate topic of academic study. To correct the situation, Givens (English, Univ. of Richmond; *The Viper on the Hearth*) has written a thickly detailed book covering the theology and history of the Book of Mormon and its influences on American culture. The result is not a casual read, and the depth of detail makes the reading difficult for those not familiar with basic theological concepts. Yet for scholars of American religious movements and those with more than a passing interest in the LDS Church, this book is a worthy place to begin one's research and study. Recommended for academic and theological libraries. Glenn Masuchika, Rockwell Collins Information Ctr., Cedar Rapids, IA
Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. "This outstanding book investigates the history and theology of the Book of Mormon, which Givens calls 'perhaps the most religiously influential, hotly contested, and, at least in the secular press, intellectually underinvestigated book in America.' Givens persuasively demonstrates how the Book of Mormon was trumpeted by early Latter-Day Saints more for the fact of its existence--which to them indicated an imminent apocalypse--than for its content per se. He notes that it was only during the late 20th century that Mormons began to regard the Book of Mormon as a cultural and spiritual 'keystone.' Givens's well-argued, engagingly written book takes the emerging field of Book of Mormon Studies to a new level."--Publishers Weekly
"Givens is fair-minded, sympathetic, and knows his Mormon history, as well as the history of visionaries.... Givens's surest ground is in folding Joseph Smith in with the religious mystics who claimed immediate and intimate knowledge of the supernatural. The importance of his book lies in its scholarly, unbiased, and disinterested examination of a sacred text."--Harpers
"A closely written, thoughtful (if polemical) book by a devoted scholar. It is certainly provocative reading, whether you happen to be a Mormon or not."--Benson Bobrick, *New York Times Book Review*
"By the Hand of Mormon, Terry L. Givens's study of the Book of Mormon, is vastly informative, particularly to the general reader who seeks for insight into this extraordinary work. There are enigmatic splendors in the Book of Mormon, whether it was revealed to Joseph Smith or whether it emerged from his indubitable religious genius." --Harold Bloom, author of *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*
"This is an exceptional study. Terry L. Givens has written an important work that increases our understanding of both the Book of Mormon and of Mormonism generally. He demonstrates how a single literary work gave rise to an enduring community, a theology, a religion, and a culture, and helps to explain not only the book's history but also the persisting success of Mormonism as an enduring belief system and worshipping community. *By the Hand of Mormon* is an achievement of real distinction." --Jan Shipps, author of *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons and Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition*
About the Author
Terry L. Givens did graduate work at Cornell University in intellectual history and at UNC Chapel Hill, where he received his PhD in comparative literature. He holds the Jabez A. Bostwick Chair of English and is Professor of Literature and Religion at the University of Richmond, where he teaches courses in nineteenth-century studies and the Bible's influence on Western literature. His writing has been praised by the *New York Times* as "provocative reading," and his numerous books include *When Souls Had Wings*, a history of the idea of premortal life in Western thought, as well as *The God Who Weeps* (with Fiona Givens) and *Wrestling the Angel*.