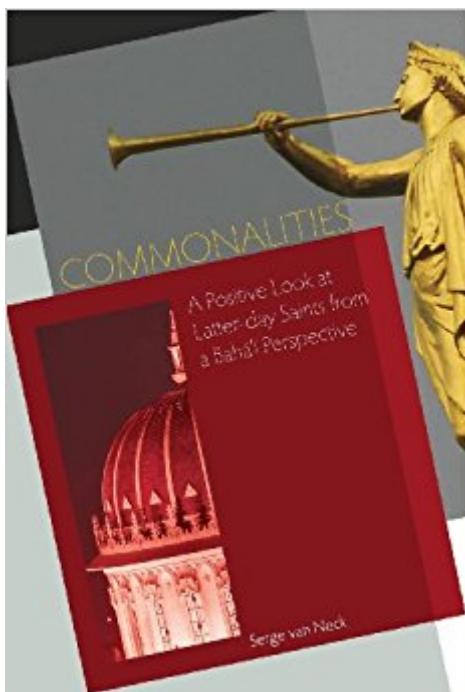


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# Commonalities: A Positive Look At Latter-day Saints From A Baha'i Perspective



## Synopsis

How can Baha'i's engage in meaningful dialogue with Mormons? By highlighting the many principles Mormons and Baha'i's have in common, and providing an in-depth look at core Mormon beliefs and scriptures, this book aims to increase understanding and enable Baha'i's to look beyond outward differences and reach out to the members of this fast-growing community in a spirit of true friendship.

## Book Information

Paperback: 460 pages

Publisher: George Ronald Pub Ltd (August 1, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0853985375

ISBN-13: 978-0853985372

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,256,427 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #133 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Baha'i #1765 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Mormonism

## Customer Reviews

"This is a thorough and helpful introduction to the Latter-day Saint beliefs for Bahá'í-s and may serve thoughtful Mormons who want to understand how the Bahá'í-Faith compares to their own beliefs." - The UK Bahá'í-Journal, Winter 2009-2010 "... the most balanced and comprehensive book on the interrelation of the Bahá'í-Faith with another religion that this reviewer has read. ... Highly recommended." - Planet Bahá'í (planetbahai.org) "This work is a sterling example of respectful dialogue with another faith ... Commonalities is highly recommended as a worthwhile read. Its style is also well worth emulating as future authors address the Baha'i relationship to other religions." - Baha'i Studies Review, Volume 17 / Issue 1

I wrote this book to help Bahá'í-s understand and appreciate LDS beliefs and practices so they feel free to associate more closely with Mormons. It is not a manual on how to "teach" Mormons the Bahá'í-Faith. It seeks merely to break down any perceived barriers on the part of the Bahá'í-audience by highlighting the many things Mormons and Bahá'í-s have in common, and by

providing an in-depth look at the very core of Mormon belief. This increased understanding, I hope, will motivate Bahá'ís to reach out to their Mormon family, friends, neighbors and co-workers in a spirit of true friendship, and thus to contribute to the promotion of religious harmony. My primary motivation was to share with others the many things I learned by reading the Mormon scriptures and by regularly attending LDS church services, which I did to support my wife (who is Mormon), and in answer to my Faith's call to "go to each other's churches and mosques for, in all of these worshipping places, the Name of God is mentioned." Not only did I find countless interesting bits of commonality between the Mormon and Bahá'í- faiths, but I also gained new and lifelong friends. My subsequent research into the Mormon faith was driven both by an innate curiosity and a deep desire to better understand my wife's beliefs. While this book primarily addresses a Bahá'í- audience - and as such assumes a basic familiarity with the principles, teachings and Central Figures of the Bahá'í- Faith - it contains many explanations of Bahá'í- teachings that make it accessible to others, including Mormons, who have a sincere interest in learning about the Bahá'í- Faith. In addition to the many commonalities between the Mormon and Bahá'í- faiths, naturally there are a number of differences as well, some quite considerable. It's important for Bahá'ís to recognize where these points of disagreement may arise in conversation, and to have a basic understanding of the specific beliefs held by Latter-day Saints. In this book, I highlight these differences where appropriate to provide a context for the many similarities. Some unique historical LDS Church policies and practices are addressed in the appendices. By presenting an in-depth, frank and balanced analysis that draws primarily upon the Church's own publications, I intend to enable the reader to come to terms with this history so it does not interfere with the loving exchange of ideas with Mormons today.

I have been profoundly impressed with Serge's depth of scholarship in both Mormonism and the Bahá'í- Faith. Indeed, "Commonalities" has clarified or reinforced aspects of the Bahá'í- teachings to me, an unanticipated benefit of reading the book. The book is balanced, well-written, and deeply respectful to its subject. It is widely known that there are aspects of Mormon teaching which can be hard to square with science or generally accepted history; while Serge does not shy away from acknowledging those facts or certain significant differences in doctrine between the two faiths, he convincingly makes the case that such issues should not lead the serious scholar to reject that which is true and good and positive about the LDS Church and its teachings and practices. In other words, the author avoids the too-common false dichotomy of "all or nothing," "true or false." This offers many benefits to the understanding of the reader.

"Wow!" is the response I got when showing Commonalities to an LDS friend. Until that moment, I don't believe my friend fully appreciated how much we have in "common" in matters spiritual. Whether your goal is to learn more about LDS or the Bahai Faith, Commonalities is an excellent resource!

Come at this book with two bookmarks. The first will mark your place in the reading and the second will keep pace in the "references." This is scholarship at its best. It is well presented, well organized, and well edited. The focus is on the positive effect both belief systems bring to the believers. The depth is stunning. The Family Responsibilities chapter (chapter 7) is an interesting comparison. Both belief systems acknowledge the rightful place of fathers, mothers, and children, and the responsibilities they share. The whole discussion reinforces the certain knowledge that there is only One God. Both reflect the light. Both honor the family. Sure. There are differences. Baha'i belief in the equality of men and women is strong while Mormons believe that the father is "the priesthood holder and has the duties of priesthood leadership." The similarities are stronger than the differences. It is often a matter of wording and tone. Commonalities is an even-handed look at both belief systems. Humanity gains with the proper understanding and respect other beliefs.

"Commonalities: A Positive Look at Latter-day Saints from a Baha'i Perspective" sets the standard for books on comparative religion between the newest world religion, the Baha'i Faith, and other religious traditions. Van Neck coming from a Baha'i background treats the Mormon Church with the utmost respect and compassion. Like the book title suggests this book truly comes from a positive outlook in what these two Faith groups can find in common with each other such as their core values, outlook on life, time of establishment in the mid 1800's, and the prophecies concerning the Return of Christ and God's Kingdom on Earth. Van Neck does point out the differences shared by both Faith groups, but it is done in a way that is factual and non-offensive. Baha'is from a Mormon background would appreciate this groundbreaking research as well as any Baha'i student of religious studies. Mormon friends please understand this research is coming from a Baha'i perspective, so a basic understanding of the Baha'i Faith would be suggested, otherwise this book illustrates how many Baha'is such as Van Neck (and myself) honor your great Faith, your founding Prophet Joseph Smith, and the genuine Spirit that animates The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

This book shares what the Mormon LDS and the Baha'i Faith have in common in order to facilitate discussions on spiritual topics. An overview of the Mormon religious history and traditions are provided; and then it breaks down major discussion topics to illustrate the Mormon and Baha'i perspectives. The focus is on what these faiths have in common, hence the book's title. This is probably the most thoroughly researched book I've ever read. However, if one isn't interested in detail, you can always read the chapters you are interested in. This is a well written resource that's easy to read and understand. I especially appreciated the unbiased treatment given to both religions. Overall this is a helpful book to learn about the Mormons.

I was a bit skeptical at first, as there are several comparative religions book out there between the Baha'i Faith and other religions. But when I saw this book at the Baha'i Bookstore at the Baha'i Temple in Wilmette, I knew it had to be good, since the curators are very picky about what books go on the shelves (it's a pretty small bookstore). As I flipped through it, I knew right away what an even-handed approach the author had on the subject matter. So glad to know this book exists!

This book should be must reading for Bahais because it give us tangible tools to demonstrate the Oneness of Religion principle when introducing the Faith to seekers who are familiar with Mormonism. Now its time to have Missionaries share a latte with you at Starbucks. Serge we need shorter pocket sized version of your wonderful book!

Commonalities is by far one of my favorite pieces of literature. The Author, Serge Van Neck, beautifully captures and connects two of today's most recent Faiths. Combined with his talent and his wealth of knowledge in the field of Religion, Serge establishes within the reader a heart penetrating understanding of both Faiths in a unifying and unbiased light. I look forward to future publications from this Author.

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