

## Exploring the Intersection of Faith and Esotericism: A Review of Forsberg's "Divine Rite of Kings" within the Context of Pakistan and Canada

### Dr. Samina Noor

Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, and a Virtual Research Fellow at the Fatima Zahera Society for Women Development in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan (Islamabad Office)

### Dr. Muhammad Asim (Corresponding Author)

Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, Government Graduate College Asghar Mall Rawalpindi and Honorary Vice-President at Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum (Islamabad Office)

Email: [asimsheikh62@yahoo.com](mailto:asimsheikh62@yahoo.com)

#### Publication History:

**Received:** September 01, 2023

**Revised:** September 12, 2023

**Accepted:** September 19, 2023

**Published Online:** October 01, 2023

#### Keywords:

Mormonism,  
Mormon Church,  
Esotericism,  
Same-Sex Issues,  
Social Developments,  
British Colonialism,

#### Research related to Academic

##### Areas:

Christianity, Religions in Pakistan,  
Religions in Canada, Critical  
Religiosity,

#### Acknowledgment:

This paper is an exclusive research of the authors, based on primary and secondary research methods.

#### Ethical Consideration:

This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

#### Abstract

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.'s *Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition* is a thought-provoking exploration of the intricate intersections between faith, power and the esoteric within the context of Mormonism. This book review critically examines Forsberg's comprehensive work, offering insights into the book's thematic richness, historical depth and relevance to broader discussions within the social sciences.

Forsberg's scholarly journey takes readers on a multidimensional exploration of Mormonism, shedding light on its historical evolution and its intricate connections with esoteric traditions. Drawing from social sciences theories, notably Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, Forsberg delves into how Mormonism's belief system and power structures have been shaped by historical and cultural forces. The first paragraph of this review discusses the book's thematic framework, emphasizing its emphasis on divine authority, sacred landscapes, race and sexuality within the Mormon tradition. Forsberg's adept analysis, informed by Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of power-knowledge, unveils how religious leaders in Mormonism have been viewed as divinely ordained and how this perception has influenced the religion's power dynamics.

In the second paragraph, the review delves into the book's examination of esoteric influences within Mormonism, underscoring its contribution to the broader discourse on religious mysticism. The review acknowledges Forsberg's nuanced treatment of esotericism, grounded in the works of scholars like Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996) and its manifestations within the Mormon faith. Furthermore, the review highlights the book's relevance to social sciences theories of identity and agency, drawing connections to the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Judith Butler (1990). Overall, Forsberg's *"Divine Rite of Kings"* emerges as a significant addition to the scholarly landscape, offering a compelling

narrative that invites readers to explore the intricate intersections of faith and the esoteric within the unique context of Mormonism.

Copyright © 2023 IMSTS Journal as an academic research-oriented non-profit initiative of Rehmat and Maryam Researches (SMC-Pvt) Limited, working in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lodhran under the Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). This is an open-access article. However, its distribution and/or reproduction in any medium is subject to the proper citation of the original work.

## Introduction

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.'s seminal work, "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" offers a profound and comprehensive exploration of the intricate interplay between faith, power and the esoteric within the context of Mormonism. Published in 2016, this book stands as a significant contribution to the fields of religious studies, sociology and cultural studies, offering a compelling narrative that invites readers to delve into the multifaceted world of Mormonism and its complex relationship with esoteric traditions (Jr., 2016).

At its core, Forsberg's work unearths the deep-rooted themes that have shaped the trajectory of Mormonism, a uniquely American religious movement with a complex history and theology. The book presents a multifaceted examination of Mormonism's belief system, practices and the ways in which it has positioned itself in the broader religious landscape. Forsberg takes readers on a scholarly journey that traverses sacred landscapes, divine authority, race relations, same-sex issues and the dynamics of empire within the Mormon faith. Through rigorous research and insightful analysis, he offers readers a lens through which to understand the complexities of religious identity and power dynamics (Jr., 2016).

The significance of Forsberg's work extends beyond the realm of religious scholarship; it intersects with broader discussions within the social sciences, making it an essential read for those interested in the dynamics of religious traditions and their intersection with sociopolitical forces. In this review, we embark on a journey through Forsberg's "Divine Rite of Kings", where we will explore the thematic richness of the book, delve into the historical contexts it unravels and engage with the nuanced analyses it presents, all within the context of faith and the esoteric. Through this journey, we will gain a deeper understanding of the intricate connections between religion, power and mysticism as they manifest within the uniquely American tapestry of Mormonism (Nichols, 2023).

Forsberg's work begins by illuminating the central theme of divine authority and the complex narratives of leadership within Mormonism. Within this religious tradition, the concept of divine leadership has played a pivotal role in shaping the structure of the church and the authority granted to its leaders. Forsberg draws from social theory, notably Anthony Giddens' structuration theory (1984), to examine how religious belief systems and power structures are deeply intertwined. By exploring how religious leaders within Mormonism have been perceived as divinely ordained, the book reveals the profound influence of this perception on the religion's power dynamics and the experiences of its adherents (Nichols, 2023).

The book further investigates the theme of sacred landscapes, emphasizing the significance of land within Mormonism's historical and theological framework. Forsberg explores the idea of "Zion" as a sacred place deeply ingrained in Mormon theology, examining how notions of pilgrimage, sacred territory and the quest for a utopian homeland have shaped the identity and practices of the Mormon faithful. The book's analysis extends to the historical connection between Mormonism and specific geographic regions, such as Utah, where the faith established a significant presence. By drawing on historical and sociological

insights, Forsberg sheds light on the complex relationship between faith, identity and the landscapes Mormons consider sacred (Nichols, 2023).

Forsberg's exploration then takes us into the intricate terrain of race relations within Mormonism. He confronts the religion's complex history of race, including its historical exclusion of Black individuals from certain religious rites and leadership positions. By examining the historical dynamics of race within the church, Forsberg offers a critical examination of how religious institutions grapple with issues of identity, inclusion and discrimination. The book engages with social sciences theories of race, referencing works by scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010), providing a framework for understanding the evolving perspectives within Mormonism regarding race (Nichols, 2023).

Continuing the journey, Forsberg navigates the theme of same-sex issues within the Mormon tradition. The book addresses the complex terrain of gender and sexuality, exploring Mormonism's historical stance on same-sex relationships and the evolving perspectives within the church. By delving into the intersections of faith, sexual orientation and religious identity, Forsberg contributes to broader discussions on LGBTQ+ issues within religious contexts. The book engages with the works of contemporary scholars like Judith Butler (1990) and Michel Foucault (1977) to examine the dynamics of power and resistance surrounding same-sex issues in religious communities (Nichols, 2023).

Lastly, Forsberg's exploration leads us into the realm of empire, both in terms of the global expansion of Mormonism and its ambitions as a religious movement. The book analyzes how the church has positioned itself in relation to broader geopolitical and cultural contexts, addressing questions of power, influence and missionary work on a global scale. Through Forsberg's lens, readers gain insights into the complexities of religious imperialism and its impact on the identity and mission of the Mormon faith (Nichols, 2023).

As we embark on this journey through "Divine Rite of Kings" we encounter a tapestry of themes that intersect, diverge and converge within the world of Mormonism. Forsberg's scholarly rigor and insightful analysis provide readers with a comprehensive view of the faith's historical and contemporary dynamics, inviting us to contemplate the intricate connections between religion, power and mysticism. Throughout this review, we will delve deeper into the thematic richness of the book, offering a critical examination of its contributions to the understanding of faith and the esoteric within the context of Mormonism.

### **Author's background**

Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., the author of "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" is a scholar with a profound interest in the intersection of religion, culture and esotericism. As a professor of Religious Studies at the University of Mary Washington, his academic background and research interests have deeply influenced the themes and perspectives explored in his book. His academic journey and expertise are rooted in the field of religious studies, where he has established himself as a prominent scholar with a specialization in Mormonism and American religious history. His scholarly pursuits have led him to delve into the complex narratives, historical contexts and sociocultural dimensions of Mormonism, a uniquely American religious tradition with a rich and multifaceted history (CUP, 2004).

The author's motivation for writing "Divine Rite of Kings" can be traced to his broader academic interests and a desire to contribute to the understanding of Mormonism's intricate relationship with the esoteric tradition. Forsberg's research agenda reflects his commitment to exploring the intersections of religion,

mysticism and power dynamics within the context of American religious movements. In this book, he embarks on an ambitious journey to unravel the themes of divine authority, sacred landscapes, race, same-sex issues and empire within the Mormon faith, drawing upon his expertise and extensive knowledge of religious studies (CUP, 2004).

It has been significantly observed that Forsberg's ideology, as discerned from his scholarly work, is characterized by a critical and analytical approach to the subjects he explores. His writings reflect a commitment to academic rigor and a dedication to shedding light on the complexities and nuances of religious traditions, particularly Mormonism. Forsberg's work can be situated within the broader context of academic scholarship, where the pursuit of knowledge and understanding is guided by a commitment to intellectual exploration and the examination of religious phenomena from diverse perspectives (Google-Books, 2023).

While the book "Divine Rite of Kings" does not overtly espouse a particular ideological stance, it engages with a wide range of perspectives, historical contexts and sociocultural dynamics within the Mormon tradition. Forsberg's approach is characterized by a scholarly detachment that seeks to critically analyze and illuminate the themes and complexities inherent to the subject matter. As such, readers can expect an intellectually rigorous and nuanced exploration of Mormonism, the esoteric tradition and the interplay of faith, power and mysticism within the context of this religious movement.

### **Critical analysis of the Book**

As with many academic works, "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" by Clyde R. Forsberg Jr. has not been without its critics. While the book has received praise for its in-depth exploration of the intersections of Mormonism and esotericism, it has also faced scrutiny and critique from various scholars and readers. Below, we delve into some of the criticisms and objections raised against Forsberg's work.

One of the criticisms leveled against Forsberg's book is the perception of bias in his analysis. Some critics argue that Forsberg's background in religious studies and his particular interest in the esoteric tradition may lead to a skewed perspective on Mormonism. They suggest that his focus on esotericism may overshadow other aspects of the Mormon faith, potentially resulting in an incomplete or one-sided portrayal of the religion. Critics also contend that Forsberg's emphasis on certain esoteric elements within Mormonism might downplay the broader religious and cultural context in which these beliefs and practices are situated. This critique raises questions about whether the author's specialization in esotericism influenced his interpretation of Mormonism to the detriment of a more comprehensive understanding (Asim, 2023).

Another criticism pertains to the book's treatment of historical accuracy and context. Some readers and scholars have argued that Forsberg's exploration of historical events and figures within Mormonism lacks thorough contextualization. They contend that the book occasionally simplifies or generalizes complex historical developments and figures within the religion. Critics assert that this oversimplification can lead to a misrepresentation of the historical realities of Mormonism. They call for a more nuanced and comprehensive examination of the historical events and individuals discussed in the book. This critique highlights the importance of historical accuracy and contextualization in scholarly works, particularly when dealing with religious history (Asim, 2023).

Critics have also taken issue with the book's approach to certain controversial topics within Mormonism, such as race and same-sex issues. Some argue that Forsberg's analysis of these subjects may be overly critical or judgmental of the Mormon faith. They suggest that the book's examination of race and same-sex issues may not fully consider the evolving perspectives and attitudes within the Mormon community. Critics contend that a more balanced and empathetic approach to these topics would provide a more accurate and fair representation of Mormonism's complex relationship with these issues. This critique underscores the importance of sensitivity and fairness when addressing sensitive and contentious subjects within religious studies (Asim, 2023).

Lastly, there are concerns raised by some scholars and readers regarding the accessibility of Forsberg's book. Critics argue that the dense academic language and complex theoretical frameworks employed in the book may limit its accessibility to a broader readership. They contend that the book's esoteric and academic language may deter non-specialists or casual readers from engaging with its content. This critique highlights the challenge of striking a balance between academic rigor and readability in scholarly works, particularly when addressing topics with broader societal implications (Asim, 2023).

## **Findings of this Book**

In "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" Clyde R. Forsberg Jr. explores a complex tapestry of themes, historical narratives and sociocultural dynamics within Mormonism and its connections to the esoteric tradition. The book is a scholarly endeavor that seeks to shed light on various facets of the Mormon faith and its intersection with esotericism. While the author does not explicitly present a set of "crux" or moral points, the following are key findings, themes and insights that Forsberg portrays in his work:

### **1) The Complexity of Mormonism**

Forsberg underscores the multifaceted nature of Mormonism as a religious tradition. He delves into the religion's historical evolution, theological diversity and intricate belief systems. Through his exploration, readers gain a deeper understanding of the richness and complexity of Mormonism beyond surface-level perceptions (Jr., 2016).

### **2) Esoteric Dimensions**

The book illuminates the esoteric elements within Mormonism, revealing how esotericism has been interwoven into the religious fabric of the faith. Forsberg explores practices and beliefs that are not always readily apparent to outsiders, providing insights into the hidden or mystical aspects of Mormonism (Jr., 2016).

### **3) Historical Context**

Forsberg places Mormonism within its historical context, examining how the religion emerged and evolved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. He discusses the challenges and controversies faced by early Mormons, shedding light on the socio-political dynamics of the era.

### **4) Race and Same-Sex Issues**

The book critically engages with sensitive topics, such as the historical stance of the Mormon Church on race and its evolving perspectives on same-sex issues. Forsberg explores how these issues have shaped and been shaped by the Mormon faith, offering a nuanced perspective on their significance within the religion (Jr., 2016).

**5) Sacred Landscapes**

Forsberg delves into the concept of sacred landscapes within Mormonism, highlighting the importance of physical locations in the religious narratives and practices of the faith. He examines how notions of land and place are intertwined with Mormon religious identity (Jr., 2016).

**6) Power and Authority**

The author explores the themes of power and authority within Mormonism, particularly the concept of divine authority and its implications for the religious community. He examines how these dynamics have influenced the organization and leadership of the Mormon Church (Jr., 2016).

**7) Empire and Expansion**

Forsberg discusses the concept of empire within Mormonism, examining the religion's historical connections to notions of territorial expansion and dominion. He considers how these ideas have influenced Mormon beliefs and practices (Jr., 2016).

**8) Intersection of Faith and Esotericism**

The book's overarching theme is the exploration of the intersection between faith and esotericism. Forsberg demonstrates how esoteric traditions have played a role in shaping Mormonism and how the two intersect in the religious experiences of Mormons (Jr., 2016).

**9) Continuity and Change**

Throughout the book, the author highlights the dynamic nature of religious traditions. He examines how Mormonism has adapted and evolved over time, responding to changing social, cultural and political contexts (Jr., 2016).

While "Divine Rite of Kings" does not provide explicit moral or prescriptive conclusions, it invites readers to engage with the complexity of Mormonism and esotericism, encouraging critical reflection on the themes and historical dynamics presented in the book. Forsberg's work contributes to the ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding Mormonism, esotericism and the intersections of faith and mysticism.

**Implications on Pakistan**

The implications of the findings and themes presented in Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.'s "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" for Pakistan are limited, primarily due to the substantial differences in religious, cultural and historical contexts between Mormonism in the United States and the predominantly Muslim society of Pakistan. While the book provides valuable insights into the interplay of faith and esotericism within the context of Mormonism, attempting to directly apply these findings to Pakistan faces significant challenges (Asim, 2023).

Firstly, Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim country with a rich Islamic heritage and diverse religious traditions, vastly different from the historical and theological landscape of Mormonism. The themes explored in Forsberg's book, such as race, same-sex issues and esotericism, have limited relevance in the Pakistani context, where Islamic beliefs and practices are central to the majority of the population. The religious dynamics and theological discourses in Pakistan revolve around interpretations of Islamic doctrine and jurisprudence, making comparisons with Mormonism impractical (Asim, 2023).

Secondly, the historical and sociocultural factors that have shaped Mormonism in the United States, including its early history, interactions with other religious groups and experiences of persecution, are distinct from those that have shaped Islam in Pakistan. Pakistan's history is marked by a unique trajectory

of political and social developments, including the partition of British India, the creation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and subsequent political challenges. These historical factors have shaped Pakistan's religious landscape in ways that are fundamentally different from the historical forces that influenced the development of Mormonism (Asim, 2023).

While the themes explored in Forsberg's book offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between faith and esotericism within the context of Mormonism, applying these findings directly to Pakistan is not feasible due to the significant disparities in religious traditions, historical backgrounds and sociocultural contexts. The book's relevance lies primarily within the context of American religious history and the specific dynamics of Mormonism, making it less applicable to the religious and cultural milieu of Pakistan. Researchers and scholars interested in Pakistan's religious landscape would need to draw from the rich body of scholarship on Islamic studies and South Asian religious traditions to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of faith in Pakistan (Asim, 2023).

### **Implication on Canada**

The implications of Clyde R. Forsberg Jr.'s book, "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition" for Canada are somewhat limited due to the distinct religious, cultural and historical contexts that differentiate the Mormon experience in the United States, as explored in the book, from the Canadian landscape. While the book sheds light on the complexities of faith and esotericism within Mormonism, it may not offer direct parallels to the Canadian religious and cultural milieu (Farhad & Asim, 2023).

Firstly, Canada is characterized by its religious diversity and multiculturalism, with a wide range of religious traditions and beliefs coexisting within its borders. The predominant religious landscape in Canada includes various Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and indigenous spiritual traditions, among others. This diversity contrasts with the predominantly Christian and Mormon context explored in Forsberg's book. While issues of race and sexuality are certainly relevant topics in Canada, they are typically approached within the broader framework of multiculturalism and human rights, rather than through the lens of a specific religious tradition like Mormonism (Farhad & Asim, 2023).

Secondly, the historical development of Mormonism in the United States, with its unique theological and social challenges, differs significantly from the history of religious communities in Canada. Canadian religious history is shaped by a blend of indigenous spiritual practices, European Christian traditions and diverse immigrant religious communities. The specific theological and cultural factors that have influenced Mormonism in the United States, such as its historical relationship with race and same-sex issues, have distinct parallels within the Canadian context. Canadian scholars and researchers interested in exploring similar themes would likely draw from the broader field of religious studies, multiculturalism and human rights, as opposed to focusing exclusively on the Mormon experience as examined in Forsberg's book (Farhad & Asim, 2023).

As Forsberg's book provides valuable insights into the intersection of faith and esotericism within the context of Mormonism, its direct applicability to Canada is limited due to the country's religious diversity, multiculturalism and distinct historical and religious dynamics. Researchers in Canada interested in exploring similar themes would need to engage with the multifaceted and pluralistic nature of the Canadian religious landscape, drawing from a broader range of religious traditions and sociocultural contexts (Farhad & Asim, 2023).

## Conclusion

In fact, this book offers a compelling exploration of the intricate interplay between faith, esotericism and the dynamics of power within the context of Mormonism. Forsberg's interdisciplinary approach, drawing from religious studies, history and cultural studies, provides valuable insights into the complexities of religious identity and its engagement with broader sociopolitical discourses. The book's examination of issues such as race, same-sex relationships and the notion of empire within the Mormon tradition serves as a thought-provoking case study, highlighting the ways in which religious communities negotiate and evolve their beliefs and practices in response to shifting societal norms (Nichols, 2023).

Forsberg's work resonates with the theoretical framework of Anthony Smith (1991), emphasizing the role of religious identity in nation-building and the construction of collective narratives. It underscores the malleability of religious traditions and their capacity to adapt to changing cultural and political contexts. Additionally, the book aligns with Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" (1977), showcasing how religious institutions exercise forms of power and influence over their adherents' lives. Forsberg's analysis contributes to our understanding of the intricate relationship between religion, esotericism and the broader sociocultural landscape, offering a lens through which we can examine similar dynamics within diverse religious traditions (Nichols, 2023).

As we reflect on Forsberg's exploration of Mormonism, we are reminded of the enduring importance of critically engaging with religious traditions and their impact on individuals and societies. It serves as a call to scholars, religious leaders and policymakers to navigate the complexities of faith in an ever-evolving world, respecting the agency and diversity of religious communities while upholding principles of equity and social justice. In a globalized and interconnected world, understanding the intricate intersections of faith and esotericism is paramount for fostering tolerance, inclusivity and dialogue among diverse religious traditions, ultimately contributing to the betterment of humanity.

## References

- Asim, D. M. (2023, September). *Navigating the Nexus of Religion, Critique, and Scholarship: Examining "Divine Rite of Kings" in the Context of Pakistan and Iran*. Retrieved from Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum: <https://wordpress.com/post/pakiranintellectualsforum.wordpress.com/857>
- CUP. (2004). *Equal Rites*. Retrieved from Columbia University Press: <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/equal-rites/9780231126403>
- Farhad, A., & Asim, D. M. (2023, September). *Religious Diversity and Multiculturalism: Exploring the Unique Canadian Context*. Retrieved from Rehmat and Maryam Researches: <http://rmrpublishers.org/religious-diversity-and-multiculturalism-exploring-the-unique-canadian-context/>
- Google-Books. (2023). *Playing It By Ear*. Retrieved from Google Books: <https://www.google.com.pk/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Clyde+R.+Forsberg,+Jr.%22>
- Jr., C. R. (2016). *Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex, and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition*. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Nichols, J. J. (2023). *Forsberg, "Divine Rite of Kings: Land, Race, Same Sex, and Empire in Mormonism and the Esoteric Tradition"* (reviewed by Julie J. Nichols). Retrieved from Association of Mormon Letters: <https://www.associationmormonletters.org/reviews/older-reviews/forsberg-divine-rite-of-kings-land-race-same-sex-and-empire-in-mormonism-and-the-esoteric-tradition-reviewed-by-julie-j-nichols/>