

## **“If People Only Knew What Mormonism Really Teaches, They Wouldn’t Vote for Mitt Romney” – Really?**

By Latayne C. Scott

There is a sense among many ex-Mormons and others that if the American public just knew what Mormonism really taught, they’d reject it – and Mitt Romney-- out of hand. I don’t think that’s the case.

When I was a Mormon, I was head-over-heels in love with the religion, the culture, the lore, the people. Attending BYU in the early 1970s, at the same time as Mitt Romney after he returned from his mission, it was all about being the plucky minority, the Osmond-clean-cut people with no facial hair and kneelength skirts in a miniskirt age.

I also understood and cherished that it was all being a good citizen and about family, attending “BYWoo,” the pre-digital Match.com of Mormonism. In those days, uncomfortable questions about Mormonism centered around why blacks didn’t hold our priesthood and why anyone would want more than one wife anyhow.

Fast forward to 2012, when Mitt Romney, still a faithful Mormon and consummate family man, wants to be president of the United States. And I, an ex-Mormon, missing Mormonism for all the good things it was, stand looking over its fence. As far as I can see, Mitt Romney is a good man. And if LDS apologists do their job, fewer and fewer people will have a theological bone to pick with him.

We all recognize that discussions about his faith aren’t advanced with descriptions of his underwear or looking at some of his disreputable ancestors or their theologies. Thoughtful Mormon apologists instead ask people to consider the common ground he has with all spiritual people. [LDS author Terryl Givens listed the following](#) things he believes should be bedrock for discussions about today’s Mormonism:

- 1. God is a personal entity, having a heart that beats in sympathy with human hearts, feeling our joy and sorrowing over our pain.*
- 2. Men and women existed as spiritual beings in the presence of God before progressing to this mortal life.*

*3. Adam and Eve were noble progenitors of the human family, and their fall made possible human life in this realm. Men and women are born pure and innocent, with no taint of original sin. (We find plenty on our own).*

*4. God has the desire and the power to save, through his son Jesus Christ, the entire human family in a kingdom of heaven, and except for the most perversely unwilling, that will be our destiny.*

*5. Heaven will principally consist in the eternal duration of those relationships that matter most to us now: spouses, children, and friends.*

The fact is, these things will ring true to a significant number of Americans, not because they are Christians but because they are post-Christians.

A god whose heart beats with our sorrows and pains—we want such a God! But the Mormon god has a literal, physical heart because he was once a man and now has a resurrected man's body. He knows the trials of life because he once lived such a life, in a literal somewhere else. He's not eternal, any more than we are, Mormons would say.

And that kind of god-brought-down-to-my level is the antithesis of Christianity. Jesus chose that humiliation. The Father never did. Somebody had to ride above all that, and that Being was our God who was always God and nothing less, nothing else.

But sadly, I don't think many Americans care if Romney believes in a god that has a different history than the God of the Bible. In fact, I think most Americans would be fine with that.

Which leads to Givens's second point. When I was a Mormon, we all lauded William Wordsworth's poem, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, part of which read:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:*

*The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,*

*Hath had elsewhere its setting,*

*And cometh from afar:*

*Not in entire forgetfulness,*

*And not in utter nakedness,*

*But trailing clouds of glory do we come*

*From God, who is our home. . .*

Yes, we Mormons all said, we were with God before. Wordsworth had it right. And I suspect that if you surveyed most Americans they would say they've always suspected they existed before this life. So if Mitt wants to believe that, they would be okay with it.

Which leads to Givens's third point, which follows logically both in Mormonism and post-Christianity: If you once lived before this life, and were with God, then it's no leap to the supposition that we're all basically good. In fact, when I was a Mormon, my belief was that not only did I pre-exist with God, I was born without a sinful nature, and that Mormonism would help such a good person to overcome this sinful world.

As a Mormon, I knew I was on the road to becoming a goddess myself. I cherished this idea. I believed that I was in training for godhood, and that ennobled me. Everyone I knew at BYU would have said that he or she was "a god in embryo." And Mitt Romney believes this, and undoubtedly believes it makes him seek higher, better things. And Americans want someone who seeks higher, nobler things.

I'll buy that, the concept that we're all good with the spark of divinity in us, most of post-Christian America would say, I'll buy that.

And the fourth point builds on that: If everyone is that good inherently, you'd have to really try hard to blow it, to not deserve heaven. A post-Christian American would really like to have a God who doesn't judge anybody and lets everyone into heaven.

So Givens is right. If people will buy into the first four points, they'll be fine with letting Mitt Romney think about being with his well-behaved children and extended family forever and ever. Even if they learn some of the truly weird things that go along with that theology.

But buy into that personally? Not the America I know. If our divorce and child abuse and abortion statistics say anything, they tell me that very few people in post-Christian America would want to hang around with their families that long.

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Bio: Latayne C. Scott was a faithful, happy Mormon who attended BYU with Mitt Romney. Her book, *The Mormon Mirage: A Former Member Looks at the Mormon Church Today* (Zondervan Academic: updated and revised edition, 2009) has stayed in print almost continually for over 30 years. She blogs about Mormonism at [Latayne.com](http://Latayne.com).