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What Is It About Mormonism?

By NOAH FELDMAN

Correction Appended

Our post-denominational age should be the perfect time for a Mormon to become president, or at least the Republican nominee. Mormons share nearly all the conservative commitments so beloved of the evangelicals who wield disproportionate influence in primary elections. Mormons also embody, in their efficient organizational style, the managerial competence that the party’s pro-business wing considers attractive. For the last half-century, Mormons have been so committed to the Republican Party that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints once felt the need to clarify that Republican affiliation is not an actual condition of church membership.

Yet the Mormons’ political loyalty is not fully reciprocated by their fellow Republicans. Twenty-nine percent of Republicans told the Harris Poll last year that they probably or definitely would not vote for a Mormon for president. Among evangelicals, some of the discomfort is narrowly religious: Mormon theology is sometimes understood as non-Christian and heretical. Elsewhere, the reasons for the aversion to Mormons are harder to pin down — bigotry can be funny that way — but they are certainly not theological. A majority of Americans have no idea what Mormons believe.

Mormonism’s political problem arises, in large part, from the disconcerting split between its public and private faces. The church’s most inviting public symbols — pairs of clean-cut missionaries in well-pressed white shirts — evoke the wholesome success of an all-American denomination with an idealistic commitment to clean living. Yet at the same time, secret, sacred temple rites and garments call to mind the church’s murky past, including its embrace of polygamy, which has not been the doctrine or practice of the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or LDS, for a century. Mormonism, it seems, is extreme in both respects: in its exaggerated normalcy and its exaggerated oddity. The marriage of these opposites leaves outsiders uncomfortable, wondering what Mormonism really is.

For Mitt Romney, the complex question of anti-Mormon bias boils down to the practical matter of how he can make it go away. Facing a traditional American anti-Catholicism, John F. Kennedy gave a speech during the 1960 presidential campaign declaring his private religion irrelevant to his qualifications for public office. For Romney, a Republican who would risk alienating “values voters” if he denied faith a central role in politics, emphasizing the separation of church and state is not an option. In his own religion speech, he coupled his promise to govern independently of the hierarchy of his own church with a profession of faith: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the savior of mankind.” Although this formulation is unlikely to satisfy those evangelicals who deny that the LDS church is Christian, Romney presumably calculated that speaking about Jesus Christ in terms that sound consistent with ordinary American Protestantism would reassure voters that there was in the end nothing especially unusual about Mormonism.
Something troubling is afoot here. From a constitutional standpoint, the religion of a candidate is supposed to make no difference. Even before the founding fathers dreamed up the First Amendment, they inserted a provision in the Constitution expressly prohibiting any religious test for office. The framers recognized, of course, that a candidate’s religion (or lack thereof) would enter political debate, and they were prohibiting only a formal test for taking office. But they were also giving their imprimatur to Jefferson’s appealing notion that a person’s beliefs about religion were no more relevant to his politics than his beliefs about geometry. Romney, by contrast, was staking his character and values on his religious beliefs while insisting that no one ask what those beliefs are.

It is easy to see why Romney would see some aspects of his Mormon identity as an asset. In the elite East Coast worlds where Romney has made his career, Mormonism signifies personal rectitude, professional competence and an idiosyncratic-but-impressive rejection of alcohol and caffeine. If anything, the systematic overrepresentation of Mormons among top businesspeople and lawyers affords LDS affiliation a certain cachet — rather like being Jewish, but taller.

Still, even among those who respect Mormons personally, it is still common to hear Mormonism’s tenets dismissed as ridiculous. This attitude is logically indefensible insofar as Mormonism is being compared with other world religions. There is nothing inherently less plausible about God’s revealing himself to an upstate New York farmer in the early years of the Republic than to the pharaoh’s changeling grandson in ancient Egypt. But what is driving the tendency to discount Joseph Smith’s revelations is not that they seem less reasonable than those of Moses; it is that the book containing them is so new. When it comes to prophecy, antiquity breeds authenticity. Events in the distant past, we tend to think, occurred in sacred, mythic time. Not so revelations received during the presidencies of James Monroe or Andrew Jackson.

For some, then, the objection to Romney may be that Mormonism is religiously false and that voters should choose a president who belongs to the true faith. If many Americans felt this way, that would be bad news for Romney but worse news for the country, since it would mean that we had abandoned the values that underlay the constitutional ban on religious tests. But most Mormonism-related discomfort with Romney may, in fact, reflect less a view of religious truth than a sense that there is something vaguely troubling or unfamiliar in the Mormon manner or worldview. This latter possibility presents Romney with an especially tricky political problem. For such reservations are not simple prejudice; they are a complicated outgrowth of the tortured history of the faith’s relationship to mainstream American political life over the nearly two centuries since God first spoke to Joseph Smith.

**Persecution and the Art of Secrecy**

Mormonism was born amid secrecy, and throughout its existence as a religion it has sustained a close yet complex relationship to the arts of silence. From the start, the Mormon penchant for secrecy came from two different sources. The first was internal and theological. Like many great world faiths, Mormonism has an important strand of sacred mystery. Mormon temples have traditionally been closed to outsiders and designed with opaque windows. Marriage and other key rituals take place in this hallowed space — a manifestation of religious secrecy familiar to students of world religion but associated in the United States more with Freemasonry than with mainstream Protestantism.

Like Mormon ritual, much of Mormon theology remains relatively inaccessible to outsiders. The text of the Book of Mormon has always been spread to a broad audience, but the text is not a sufficient guide to
understanding the details of Mormon teaching. Joseph Smith received extensive further revelation in the nature of sacred secrets to be shared with only a handful of close associates and initiates within the newly forming church.

The most famous such revelation was the doctrine of celestial — which was to say plural — marriage, revealed to Smith as early as 1833 but never publicized during his lifetime and formally announced to the world only in 1852, eight years after his death. And there were other doctrines of similar secrecy revealed to Smith, especially in the years just before his death. “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret,” he is reported to have said in one of his last communications with his followers.

The connections between the sacred and the secret in early Mormonism did not come out of nowhere. Believers, of course, consider the source to be divine inspiration — although over the course of the last century Mormon teaching has moved away from many of Smith’s more radical ideas, which are often not accepted by contemporary LDS members. Academic students of early Mormonism have traced the mysteries expounded by Smith to the hermetic tradition of secret magic dating back to the Renaissance and beyond. If this account is accurate, then Mormonism’s theological secrets actually have more than a little in common with religious mysteries that can be found in medieval Islamic esotericism, kabbalistic mysticism and ancient Christian Gnosticism. Successive generations have rediscovered these secrets and asserted their antiquity in ways very similar to Smith’s discovery of ancient tablets. For example, the most important work of the kabbalah, the Zohar, presents itself as a lost manuscript written by the 2nd-century mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, though scholars maintain that it was composed in the 13th century by the man who “discovered” it.

The greatest difference between the esoteric tradition and Smith’s version of it is that Smith’s faith has grown into an organized religion rather than remaining the preserve of a select few. Almost from the start of his career, Smith was denounced as a charlatan, an impostor and worse. Such criticisms sometimes pointed to his early pre-revelation career as a treasure seeker who used techniques like the seer stone (similar in function to a crystal ball) and the divining rod to seek treasure in the countryside of upstate New York. Notwithstanding these attacks, Mormonism grew steadily. Growth brought publicity — and with it came not merely prejudice but outright persecution. This external persecution created a second, externally driven source for secrecy: protection.

Not content with polemics, Mormonism’s opponents turned to violence. In 1838, after skirmishes between armed Mormons and state militia left several people dead, Gov. Lilburn Boggs of Missouri issued a military order declaring that the Mormons had made open war on the state and that therefore they “must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the state, if necessary, for the public good.” Later, at Nauvoo, Ill., the Mormon community under Smith’s leadership came under constant pressure from skeptical and sometimes violent neighbors. In response, Smith sought and received a measure of home rule for Nauvoo, including the authority to establish his own municipal militia. Though the militia grew until it was a substantial fighting force, Smith was nevertheless gunned down by a kind of quasi-organized lynch mob after having been arrested and jailed in nearby Carthage.

Unhindered by Smith’s death, the Mormons, now under the leadership of Brigham Young, went out to Utah to establish their own kingdom. In what felt like the relative safety of the intermountain West, Mormons began to practice plural marriage in the open — and ended up paying dearly for this lapse in secrecy. In 1856...
the Republican Party made the defeat of polygamy a key plank in its first national platform, characterizing it alongside slavery as one of the “twin relics of barbarism.” The federal government soon criminalized the practice and then in effect outlawed membership in the Mormon Church until it would agree to give up polygamy. The Mormons appealed this persecution to the Supreme Court, which turned them down flat, holding that religious belief was protected by the First Amendment but that religious conduct was not. After the Civil War, federal prosecutors in the Utah territory and in neighboring areas convicted and jailed thousands of Mormons in the most coordinated campaign of religious repression in U.S. history.

The reaction of the Mormon Church to this new wave of persecution was, initially, to take refuge in secrecy once again. In 1890, the president of the church, Wilford Woodruff, issued a manifesto in which he gave his “advice” to members of the Mormon Church not to enter into any marital relationships that would violate the laws of the land. Publicly this declaration had its desired effect of placating the federal government; in 1896, Utah was allowed to become a state. But like Jewish rituals under the Spanish Inquisition, plural marriage continued, secretly in Utah and also among refugees (like several of Mitt Romney’s ancestors), who fled to Mexico or other places the law could not reach.

This period of resisting persecution by living outside the law taught Mormons that secrecy can be a necessary tool for survival. As one apostle (there are 12 who guide the church) later put it in a speech recounted by the historian Kathleen Flake, “I am not dishonest and not a liar . . . [but] we have always been taught that when the brethren were in a tight place that it would not be amiss to lie to help them out.” Yet such secrecy, reminiscent of the taqiyya or dissimulation sanctioned by Shiite Islam under the threat of persecution, could be difficult to maintain. Matters came to a head when another apostle, Reed Smoot, was elected in 1903 to the U.S. Senate as a Republican from Utah, despite political opposition from President Theodore Roosevelt. Opponents of Mormonism, mostly Protestants, sought to block Smoot from taking his seat.

Over several years, the Senate engaged in a series of hearings that put Mormonism on trial. The president of the church, Joseph F. Smith, a nephew of the founding Smith, was called to testify and sought somewhat unsuccessfully to conceal both the continuing practice of plural marriage as well as his own status as seer and revelator. After returning to Utah, Smith issued a manifesto of his own, in 1904, this one somewhat stronger, aimed at ending plural marriage. After that, plural marriage gradually disappeared from the mainstream Mormon scene, until it remained only among peripheral fundamentalist or sectarian Mormons who defied the church authorities and claimed a more authentic line of succession to the first prophet. In 1907, the Senate finally voted to seat Smoot. The course was set for the Mormon religious practice of the 20th century: a process of mainstreaming, both political and theological, and would set the stage for Mitt Romney’s run for the presidency.

The Mormon path to normalization over the course of the 20th century depended heavily on this avoidance of public discussion of its religious tenets. Now that plural marriage was out of the picture, the less said the better about the particular teachings of the church, including such practices as the baptism of the dead and the doctrine of the perfectibility of mankind into divine form. Where religious or theological conversation could not be avoided, Mormons depicted themselves as yet another Christian denomination alongside various other Protestant denominations that prevailed throughout the United States.

Another part of the Mormon assimilationist strategy was to participate actively in politics at the state and national levels. The condition for political success was that nobody asked about the precise content of
Mormon religious beliefs and the Mormons themselves made no particular effort to tell. If 19th-century Mormon secrecy was a matter of survival, 20th-century Mormon reticence was a form of soft secrecy, designed to avoid soft bigotry. Revealing Mormon teachings would no longer have led to lynch mobs or federal arrest, but it certainly would have fueled the kind of bias that keeps politicians out of office.

What helped Mormons in maintaining theological radio silence was the way that American political norms until the late 1970s made religion a taboo subject in polite civil and political society. Probably the high point of the Mormon mainstreaming process took place when Ezra Taft Benson, like Smoot an apostle of the church, became secretary of agriculture under President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In just a century, the leaders of the Latter-day Saints had gone from being murdered outcasts to being appointed to the cabinet. Mormons began to succeed in national business and came to be seen as exemplars of the patriotic American ethos. George Romney, Mitt’s father, became chairman of the American Motors Corporation in 1954 and was elected governor of Michigan in 1962. Soft secrecy was holding soft bigotry at bay.

**Romney and Mormon Politics**

In politics, Joseph Smith was something of a radical. He preached, instead of democracy, a version of theocratic rule within a framework given by his own prophetic leadership. At Nauvoo, Smith affected a Napoleonic uniform and made himself into a general and quasi king of the polity he had constituted. He claimed that the home-rule permission given to the town by the State Legislature rendered him the equivalent of a governor or perhaps even president of a little republic on a par with the state of Illinois in which it resided. At the time he was assassinated, he was running for the presidency of the United States in a quixotic campaign that only a true person of faith could have believed in.

Ensniced in Salt Lake City, Brigham Young modified this initial political vision somewhat. Yet he still governed in an essentially autocratic fashion, constrained by only the federal requirement that Utah take on a republican form of government in order to be organized into a territory. In the territorial period, the Utah State Legislature remained very much under the control of the leadership of the church, and the democratic trappings of elections did not ensure real competitive politics. Mormons belonged to a single party, the People’s Party, which was not disbanded until 1891, when the LDS leadership determined it would need Republicans and Democrats in order to persuade Congress to grant statehood. Even then local LDS leaders apparently assigned church members almost at random to join one of the two parties in roughly equal numbers.

As of the 20th century, through engagement with the federal political sphere, Mormons came to embrace fully the American ideals of multi-party governance and electoral democracy. They also gradually embraced the Republican Party itself — a fact that would not seem so remarkable today were it not for the G.O.P.’s history of condemning Mormonism.

The Mormons’ passage from bugbears of the Republican Party to its stalwarts may be analogized to a similar move among middle-class white Southerners, to whom the Republican Party was anathema until the 1970s and ‘80s, after which it became almost the sole representative. In the case of Southern whites, a particular event shifted party allegiance, namely the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as promoted and passed by President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson knew he would be alienating Southern whites with the act, yet he went forward with it anyway.
In the case of the Mormons, however, no single event pushed them in the direction of Republicanism. To the extent that 19th-century Mormons sided with any national political force, it was the Democratic Party, the party of states’ rights — of great interest to Utah Mormons trying to buck federal control. What made the Mormons Republican was simply their move toward the conservative center of American public opinion. With Eisenhower especially, the Mormons found a leader they could admire and with whom they could work. Ike himself was famously indifferent toward the particularities of religious doctrine. Moderate Republicanism was therefore the perfect conduit for bringing Mormons into the American political mainstream.

According to Jan Shipps, a renowned scholar of Mormon history, anticommunism also played an important role in making Mormons Republican — Ezra Taft Benson, the apostle who became secretary of agriculture under Eisenhower, had ties to the John Birch Society. In the 1960s, as the Democratic Party increasingly began to embrace an agenda of civil and cultural liberties, the Mormon allegiance to Republicanism was cemented further still. Gone was the political radicalism and the concern for minority rights that accompanied plural marriage and other unusual Mormon behavior. Now the Mormons could look at the counterculture as a threat. The most prominent Mormon national politician in the 1980s and ’90s was Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah, now in his 31st year in the Senate, who on the Judiciary Committee has maintained a consistently conservative position, favoring judges who are simultaneously favored by the religious right.

The rise of the religious right posed a tricky political quandary for the LDS church. On the one hand, a vocal movement pressing for conservatism and moral values must have seemed to them like a natural home. After all, they, too, were religious believers who drew upon their faith for their political conservatism. Yet there was a strand of the religious right that could potentially put it at odds with Mormonism — its barely concealed commitment to evangelical Protestant theology.

Evangelical ideology was certainly flexible. Before Roe v. Wade, for example, abortion was not a major issue for most Protestant evangelicals in the United States, and it took the active efforts of the Catholic Church to bring evangelicals on board. Yet despite being pliant on some substantive issues, Protestant evangelicals nonetheless did share a commitment to biblical inerrancy and to a rather strict definition of salvation by faith alone. Their worldview certainly relied upon some basic and nonnegotiable propositions, like the acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ as a personal lord and savior.

Mormons were able to argue that they, too, believed in salvation and in the literal accuracy of the Bible. The difficulty was that in addition to the Bible in its King James Version, the Latter-day Saints had further scriptures with which to contend — the Book of Mormon, translated by Smith from “reformed Egyptian” and styled as “another Testament of Jesus Christ”; and supplements to various biblical texts known collectively as the Pearl of Great Price.

Whatever the variances among the four gospels, contemporary evangelicals, like their forebears, have long been committed to the exclusivity of these texts. Newly unearthed gospels or pseudo-gospels (like the so-called Gospel of Thomas, written in the Egyptian language Coptic and found at Nag Hammadi in 1945) have posed few theological doubts for these Protestant evangelicals, who have dismissed them as foreign heretical works, despite their antiquity. Against this backdrop, the rejection of the Mormon Bible is simple and formulaic. Coupled with concerns about what they consider Mormonism’s nontrinitarian theology, it has led
ineluctably to an unwillingness to recognize Mormons as full participants in the category “Christian.”

In theory, the evangelical political movement says that it is prepared to embrace Jews and even Muslims so long as they share the same common values of the religious right. In the case of a Mormon candidate, though, many evangelicals are not prepared to say that common values are enough. The reason seems to be the view among evangelicals that the substantive theological beliefs of Mormons are so radically different from their own as to constitute not a sect of Christianity but a Christian heresy, which would be worse than a different monotheistic faith like Judaism or Islam. One prominent evangelical, the Southern Baptist Richard Land, has proposed that Mormonism be considered a fourth Abrahamic religion — a compromise view that has found few takers in the evangelical camp and privately infuriates Mormons who insist on their Christianity.

Faced with the allegation that they do not believe in the same God as ordinary Protestants, or that their beliefs are not truly Christian, Mormons find themselves in an extraordinarily awkward position. They cannot defend themselves by expressly explaining their own theology, because, taken from the standpoint of orthodox Protestantism in America today, it is in fact heterodox.

What is more, what began as a strategy of secrecy to avoid persecution has become over the course of the 20th century a strategy of minimizing discussion of the content of theology in order to avoid being treated as religious pariahs. As a result, Mormons have not developed a series of easily expressed and easily swallowed statements summarizing the content of their theology in ways that might arguably be accepted by mainline Protestants. To put it bluntly, the combination of secret mysteries and resistance in the face of oppression has made it increasingly difficult for Mormons to talk openly and successfully with outsiders about their religious beliefs.

**Assimilation, Culture And Compromise**

The general pattern of Mormon history is one of growth leading to external pressure being brought to bear on the church. Internal resistance eventually gives way to change sanctioned by new revelation, followed in turn by new growth and success. This was the pattern not only for the abolition of polygamy but also for the extension in 1978 of the Mormon priesthood to black men. Mitt Romney’s run for the presidency is the occasion for the latest round in this cycle, with cultural and religious skepticism representing the vector for outside pressure. What will Romney — or the church — do in response?

One option is for Romney to try to devise a new language for talking about his religious beliefs that will make them seem accessible and familiar without compromising them. Romney has expressly said that he will not take this tack — but inevitably he has done so, and if he is chosen as the Republican candidate or elected to the presidency, he will have to do more. This could prove a tricky undertaking, full of pitfalls to the believer. Thus Romney has felt the need to minimize the centrality of Mormon scripture by saying that he reads the Gideon Bible when he is alone in his hotel room on the campaign trail.

The formulation may be seen as a clever hedge: to the ordinary Protestant listener, it sounds as if Romney is saying that he reads the same Bible that they do. To the Mormon insider, however, Romney is simply saying that when he travels to the hotel and finds himself, presumably, without a handy copy of the Book of Mormon, he reads the text of the Bible that can be found in the drawer beside the bed. Some LDS insiders have been heard to wonder quietly how Romney could come to be traveling without his own copy of the Mormon scriptures — or why he isn’t staying in Marriott hotels, where the Book of Mormon can be found in...
the nightstand drawer alongside the bible.

This is a perfect example of esoteric public speaking: the attempt to convey multiple messages to different audiences through the careful use of words. Something similar is perhaps contained in Romney’s outspoken admiration for Rick Warren, the megachurch pastor and best-selling author. To the general audience, the message is the embrace of an evangelical who is as mainstream as it gets. To a Mormon audience, however, the praise is presumably intended at most as a suggestion that it is possible to learn from the remarkable organizational and evangelizing effects of a well-known public figure.

Speaking esoterically about faith has a firm basis in LDS tradition — but history suggests it may not be enough for the church to overcome the strand of soft bigotry that it is now facing. And from the church’s perspective, facing up to the reality of such prejudice is not a trivial matter. Precisely because Romney is so accomplished, so telegenic, in short such an impressive candidate, it may be a slap in Mormons’ faces if he finds that he cannot garner the support of conservative values voters. If such voters prefer, say, a pro-choice Roman Catholic of questionable conservative credentials like Rudy Giuliani, the result may look like a public repudiation of Mormonism — from the very party to which Mormons have given their allegiance for the last half-century. (Even if the charge against Romney were that he failed because he was a dissimulating phony, that would hardly be an improvement for the church, given the similarity of that charge with the historical bias against Mormon secrecy.)

If the reality of soft bigotry does not today pose an existential threat to Mormons as explicit oppression once did, it would nevertheless undercut the hard-won public face of Mormonism as a distinctively American religion characterized by worldly accomplishment. For conservatives to reject a Mormon because he is a Mormon would be an especially harsh setback for a faith that has accomplished such extraordinary public success in overcoming a history of painful discrimination.

If Mormonism were to keep Romney from the nomination, the Mormon Church hierarchy may through continuing revelation and guidance respond by shifting its theology and practices even further in the direction of mainstream Christianity and thereby minimizing its outlier status in the culture. Voices within the LDS fold have for some time sought to minimize the authority of some of Joseph Smith’s more creative and surprising theological messages, like the teaching that God and Jesus were once men. You could imagine Mormonism coming to look more like mainline Protestantism with the additional belief not in principle incompatible with Protestant Scripture that some of the lost tribes of Israel ended up in the Americas, where a few had a vision of Christ’s appearance to them. If this hypothetical picture of a future Mormonism seems unimaginable to the contemporary LDS faithful, as it may, today’s Mormon theology would look almost as different to Brigham Young.

Religious development, driven by turns from within and without, is, after all, the mark of a vital faith. Today we do not think of the Catholic pope as the occupant of the pagan Roman office of pontifex maximus, but of course the pontiff is precisely that: the living exemplar of how Christianity met, conquered and was changed by the very empire that presided over the crucifixion. All religions assimilate and change, even as they claim to hew to the old truths.

America changes, too. Today the soft bigotry of cultural discomfort may stand in the way of a candidate whose faith exemplifies values of charity, self-discipline and community that we as Americans claim to hold dear. Surely, though, the day will come when we are ready to put prejudice aside and choose a president
without regard to what we think of his religion.

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An article on Jan. 6 about Mormonism referred imprecisely to the Gospel books of the Bible, mentioned in a comparison of Mormon and evangelical beliefs. Matthew, Mark and Luke are considered synoptic — that is, seen from the same point of view — but John is not.
It means seeking to understand what it is about that given belief that tends to produce virtuous behavioral outcomes. The late-Catholic theologian Stephen Webb observed that mocking Mormonism is one of the last frontiers of verbal lawlessness to be untouched by the vigilante powers of political correctness. He asks: What other group is ridiculed equally by Christians and secularists and not just any kind of Christian or secularist but the most fervent and hard core? Andersen, for his part, seems to have genuinely meant to applaud Mormon politicians like Senator Jeff Looking at what the Bible says about the construction of Solomon's temple, we find that it took 30,000 Israelites, 150,000 hewers of stone and carriers, 3,300 supervisors (I Kings 5:13-16) and about seven years to build it (See also I Kings 6). And how many people could Lehi have had in his group after 19 years? It becomes quite obvious to an investigator of Mormonism that after 1842 or so Joseph Smith changed his mind about who God is. He contradicted the Book of Mormon with the Doctrine and Covenants, i.e.: Alma 34:36: "And this I know, because the Lord hath said he dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of righteous doth he dwell..." Mormonism. Is it Christian or is it not? Does it teach that God is from another planet who has a wife and that we can become gods? Yes, it does teach those things. It is not Christian. Find out about its teachings of men becoming gods, temples, the Book of Mormon, and Joseph Smith who claimed to have seen God the Father. Introduction. Studying with the Mormons?