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## Credo

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# CREDO

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**Daniel C. Peterson**

**Abstract:** *The Restoration began with the stunning divine declaration to the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Christian sects of his day were “all wrong,” that “all their creeds were an abomination in [God’s] sight.” It’s a powerful condemnation, but what, exactly, does it mean? Later in his life, Joseph reflected that he felt that creeds set limits “and say ‘hitherto shalt thou come & no further’ — which I cannot subscribe to.” Certainly, as I realized during a wonderful musical experience many years ago, there is little if anything in one of the great ecumenical creeds with which a believing Latter-day Saint must, or even should, disagree.*

Many years ago, while I was studying at the American University in Cairo, my wife and I joined the Ma’adi Community Choir. It took its name from the Ma’adi Community Church, a largely expatriate Protestant church that was located in a southern suburb of the Egyptian capital and that was pastored at the time by our American downstairs neighbor, the late Rev. David Johnson.<sup>1</sup>

During our time with the choir, which rehearsed in the church itself, we prepared and performed two especially ambitious pieces, Antonio Vivaldi’s “Gloria in D Major” (RV 589) and Franz Schubert’s Mass in G — strictly, his Mass No. 2 in G Major, D. 167. Both are wonderfully beautiful and very powerful, and those long-ago performances with that choir remain among our most memorable musical experiences. In this little essay, though, I would especially like to focus on the Schubert Mass, and particularly on the section of it that is called the “Credo.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. On whom, see “David Lowell Johnson,” *LNP* (Lancaster, PA), September 13, 2013, [https://lancasteronline.com/obituaries/david-lowell-johnson/article\\_2e77cdf-34e4-5c6d-a37e-15791afbc56.html](https://lancasteronline.com/obituaries/david-lowell-johnson/article_2e77cdf-34e4-5c6d-a37e-15791afbc56.html).

2. I strongly encourage the reader of this essay to listen to Schubert’s music. A serviceable performance of Franz Schubert’s Mass in G is by the Israel NK Orchestra

Incredibly to me, Schubert composed his Mass in G in less than a week, during the first part of March 1815. The portion of the work called the *Credo* — Latin for *I believe* — is a musical setting of an ancient Latin translation of the so-called Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. (The Creed was first composed in Greek.)<sup>3</sup> The name of the Creed comes from the fact that it is a modified version of the original AD 325 Nicene Creed that was adopted by the Second Ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople in AD 381. Interestingly, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the only formal statement of Christian faith that is accepted as both ecumenical and authoritative by the Orthodox churches, the Church of the East, many Protestant communions (including the Anglicans), and the Catholic Church (with one modification that I'll describe shortly).

What I want to argue here is that Latter-day Saints, too, would be able — perhaps with some clarifications, and almost certainly with some surprise — to affirm the “Credo.” And that fact says something vitally important about the question, which still worries some of our friends and exercises some of our critics, about whether Latter-day Saints are really Christians. To lay out my position, I will individually cite and comment on every passage of the text:<sup>4</sup>

*Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.*

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

Obviously, no Latter-day Saint would have any difficulty at all in affirming this opening sentence. The first phrase of our first Article of Faith, after all, is “We believe in God, the Eternal Father.” And that first

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and Swedish Vocal Ensemble. See Christian Lindberg, “Schubert Mass no 2 in G Major D 167,” YouTube video, 22:43, October 22, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBeFxH8mMII>. The Credo begins at about 6:30. Another version that I can recommend is that of the Tel-Aviv Soloists Ensemble and Moran Singers Ensemble, conducted by Barak Tal, in which the Credo commences at 7:03. See Soloists1, “Schubert Mass No. 2 in G Major D.167,” YouTube video, 24:26, March 7, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E\\_UavnuPkow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_UavnuPkow). Many of the performers in these two performances are presumably far less committed to the truth of the Credo than are faithful Latter-day Saints.

3. For the Latin and English translation, see “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 325, 381),” *Heidelblog* (website), <https://heidelblog.net/nicene/>.

4. The translation of the Credo I use in this essay is one from my own notes, on which I have relied over the years.

Article of Faith goes on, of course, to declare our belief “in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost,” as does the Credo:

*Credo in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, [et] ex Patre natum ante omnia sæcula. Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine: Deum verum de Deo vero; [Genitum, non factum;] consubstantialem Patri, per quem omnia facta sunt.*

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; born of the Father before all ages. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God; [begotten, not made]; consubstantial with the Father, by Whom all things were made.

Here, the “Credo” picks up ideas expressed in John 1:1–11. The only problem that a Latter-day Saint might have with the foregoing is the idea that the Son is *consubstantialem Patri*, “consubstantial with the Father.” In the original Greek of the Nicene Creed, this is expressed by the famous and sometimes controversial term *homoousios*. But what, exactly, does that word mean? Some scholars have suggested that it simply means that the Son is of the same *nature* as the Father, that he is the same kind of being. And with that we Latter-day Saints can certainly agree.

Although Schubert omits the three-word phrase *Genitum, non factum* (“begotten, not made”) that occurs in the original text of the Creed, that phrase surely conveys what Latter-day Saints understand: The second person of the Godhead is a Son, not a creature or an artifact. His relationship is that of a child to the Father, not of a lightbulb to Thomas Edison. He is, as it were, genetically related to the Father. Accordingly, because he is “God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God,” he is essentially all that the Father is. It is in that sense that the saying of Jesus recorded at John 14:9 is probably best to be understood: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”

At this point, Schubert’s music becomes sublimely lyrical with the happy, saving thought that is at the absolute core of Christianity:

*Qui propter nos homines et [propter] nostram salutem descendit de cælis, Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo factus est.*

Who, for us humans and for our salvation, came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made human.

Here, yet again, the “Credo” simply rephrases thoughts from the first chapter of the gospel of John, at the fourteenth verse. They are thoughts with which every believer in the Restored Gospel will enthusiastically agree: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

A Latter-day Saint might, of course, wonder what is meant by the statement that the Son “became incarnate by the Holy Ghost.” Although, according to Luke 1:35, the angel Gabriel told Mary during the Annunciation that “the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,” the gospel writer doesn’t explain exactly what that means. Moreover, he had already identified the child that she would bear as “the Son of the Highest” (1:32), presumably referring to God the Father. Moreover, and strikingly, the scriptures nowhere describe Jesus as the Son of the Holy Ghost. Instead, he is always described as the Son of God. And this is all we really know; we are told essentially nothing about how it happened. Thus, for example, at 1 Nephi 11:13–21, Nephi saw “a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins.” Thereafter, she was “carried away in the Spirit” (note, again, the undeniable but also unspecified role of the Spirit in the account) and then Nephi “looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms.” Here, as everywhere else, a curtain seems to have been draped discreetly over the mechanism of Christ’s conception.

But Schubert’s music now turns grim, perhaps even angry, with the terrible next thought:

*Crucifixus etiam pro nobis; sub Pontio Pilato passus et sepultus est.*

He was also crucified for us, suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
and was buried.

A terrible end. Seemingly so, at least. Next, though, the choir erupts in exultant joy:

*Et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas. Et ascendit in caelum, sedet ad dexteram Patris.*

And the third day He arose again, according to the Scriptures.  
And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the  
Father.

Thus far, there seems nothing in the Credo that Latter-day Saints could not themselves affirm, not only with a clear conscience but with joy and devotion. As Joseph Smith put it,

The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He

died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.<sup>5</sup>

The Credo closes its section on the second person of the Godhead with its confident expectation for the future, clearly shared, as the title of our Church itself indicates, by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who pray that the kingdom of God may go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come.<sup>6</sup>

*Et iterum venturus est cum gloria judicare vivos et mortuos, cujus regni non erit finis.*

And He is to come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

The Credo then turns to the third member of the Godhead:

*[Credo] in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur [et] conglorificatur; qui locutus est per prophetas.*

[I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who, together with the Father and the Son, is adored and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

Here, the Latin or Western Christian church has added a word that separates it from the Greek Orthodox and from many other churches of the East: *Filioque*, meaning “and the Son.” (No equivalent word occurs here in the earliest — that is, the Greek — text of the Creed.) For reasons that I won’t go into here, Latin theologians in the West insisted that the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost “proceeds” — in a sense, that the Holy Ghost is somehow generated by — both the Father and the Son. But the Greek East could not go along with that idea, insisting that the Holy Ghost “proceeds” not from the Son but from the Father alone. And I think, although we don’t even use such language as “procession” anyway, that Latter-day Saints would probably sympathize with the Greeks on this matter if we were to take any stand at all. The Holy Ghost does not seem in any way, so far as has been revealed to us, to be a child of the Son of God.

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5. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 121.

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 65:6.

The Credo next turns to the matter of the Christian church, to what theologians often call the question of “ecclesiology”:

*[Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam,]  
Confiteor unum Baptisma in remissionem peccatorum.*

[I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.] I  
confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

For reasons that I do not know, Schubert, who was himself Roman Catholic, left out the phrasing about the “one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.” But Latter-day Saints would actually have no problem with such language, so long as it is understood that the word *catholic* originally meant “universal.” There was, at the time that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed was composed, no distinct Roman Catholic or Western Latin “denomination” of Christianity. Latter-day Saints believe the Restored Church to be “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20), and that its message is global and universal.

And then, in the end, the Credo closes with a statement of the Christian hope for an embodied life to come, beyond the grave:

*[Et expecto resurrectionem] mortuorum, et vitam venturi  
sæculi. Amen.*

[And I expect the resurrection] of the dead, and the life of the  
world to come. Amen.

That expectation is central to the faith of the Latter-day Saints and to their hope.

As we were rehearsing and performing Schubert’s Mass in G those many years ago in Egypt, the question often occurred to me: How can a person who can and does affirm every portion of the Credo possibly be considered a non-Christian? There was some specific irony to that question at that particular time because, as our little group of Latter-day Saints had begun to grow rather steadily in Cairo back then, we had approached the leadership of the Ma’adi Community Church to inquire whether we might be able to meet for our worship services in their space. The church building often served as a center for the expatriate community even beyond those who were involved in its specifically religious and ecclesiastical functions and, since the Cairo Branch by that point met on Fridays, we promised that we would in no way interfere with their Sunday services. Rev. Johnson, I think, was not opposed to our proposal, but the lay leadership of the church — heavily southern



Evangelical, as I recall — rejected it on the grounds that we were not Christians.

We soon found our own place to meet, so no lasting problems caused. But does it make even the most minimal sense to deny the Christianity of people who can affirm Schubert’s “Credo” with full confidence? I submit that it does not. And so, to those who still claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Latter-day Saints themselves must be counted outside the bounds of Christendom, I say that they have no solid grounds for such a judgment.<sup>7</sup>

The Interpreter Foundation exists, functions, and, indeed, flourishes because those involved with it believe deeply in the propositions affirmed in the Credo, as those have been explained, reaffirmed, and expanded by the Restoration. I express my gratitude here to the authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and other volunteers who make the work of the Foundation possible. In connection with this particular volume of the Foundation’s signature journal, I thank the authors who have contributed their time and energy, along with those directly responsible for its managing and its production, Allen Wyatt, Jeff Lindsay, and Godfrey Ellis. As all of the other officers of The Interpreter Foundation are, they are volunteers. I’m deeply grateful for their devoted service.

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7. For a more sustained examination of many of the reasons that are commonly advanced for denying the Christianity of Latter-day Saints, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints*, FARMS Reprint Edition (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998).

