

refer to individual premortal existence, with implications for subsequent earthly existence. In support of this, it may be pointed out that various Christians and Christian groups in the early Christian centuries taught the same doctrine (cf. Origen, *De principiis* 1:7; 2:8; 4:1), and that it is also to be found in Jewish belief of the same period, including Philo (*De mutatione nominum* 39; *De opificio mundi* 51; *De cherubim* 32); in some apocryphal writings (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19–20; 15:3); and among the Essenes (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.11, as well as in the Jewish Talmud and Midrash).

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CREEDS

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no creed, as that term is understood in traditional theology. Truth and the things of God are comprehended by study, faith, reason, science, experience, personal revelation, and revelation received

through the prophets of God. Creeds, on the other hand, tend to delimit this process.

From the beginning of the Church until the present, its view has always been that such formulas are incompatible with the gospel's inclusive commitment to truth and continual revelation. The Doctrine and Covenants states, "He that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24). In his FIRST VISION in 1820, the young Prophet Joseph SMITH was told that the creeds of the competing churches around him "were an abomination in [God's] sight" (HC 1:19). These sweeping words were clarified in his WENTWORTH LETTER (1842): "all were teaching incorrect doctrines." During the April 1843 conference of the Church, the Prophet said: "It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine" (HC 5:340), and later he elaborated: "I cannot believe in any of the creeds of the different denominations, though all of them have some truth. I want to come up into the presence of God, and learn all things, but the creeds set up stakes, and say, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further,' which I cannot subscribe to" (HC 6:67).

Since Joseph Smith's day, the Christian world has moved in this direction by acknowledging that creeds are "historically conditioned," and that confessions of faith are to be seen as "guidelines" rather than as final pronouncements.

Authoritative statements found in LDS literature are not viewed as elements in a creed. For example, although its thirteen ARTICLES OF FAITH are scriptural, they are open-ended. One of them says, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (A of F 9). During fast and testimony meetings, usually on the first Sunday of each month, the conviction is often expressed by members that they know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that Joseph Smith and the living prophets are true prophets of God. These words in some respects parallel the Islamic confession of faith, or Shahadah, which is also not considered a creed.

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