

Draft 1

Do we/can we have an authoritative evolution document?

Part 1

Creating An Authoritative Evolution Document

If we were serious about creating a balanced and authoritative document from scratch concerning the Church position on evolution, we would probably want to start by interviewing all of the men who had held the position of apostle in this new dispensation, and compile and summarize the results. Since that is not always possible, because they are not all still with us, we might go to their written works and find what they may have had to say on the topic, if anything.

We do have statements collected from quite a few of the brethren. So far the accumulated score is about 30 for creationism, and zero for evolution. We do have a few who have waffled in some small way, or made minor ambiguous statements, but none of them were willing to accept the full evolutionist position of spontaneous generation plus descent with modification, certainly not in the most important case of Adam himself.

From the Reid Bankhead compilation we have these men speaking for creationism:

Bruce R. McConkie, apostle
 The First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund) – November 1909
 Marion G. Romney, apostle and counselor
 Mark E. Petersen, apostle
 Joseph Fielding Smith, apostle and president
 Brigham Young, apostle and president
 James E. Talmage, apostle
 Joseph Smith Jr., apostle and president
 John A. Widtsoe, apostle
 George Q. Cannon, apostle
 Mark E. Petersen, apostle
 A. Theodore Tuttle, President of First Quorum of 70
 George Q. Morris, apostle
 B.H. Roberts, President of First Quorum of 70
 Ezra Taft Benson, apostle and president
 Boyd K. Packer, apostle

In the second compilation we find an even longer list of people quoted, and, naturally, the Church leaders are all creationists, while many of the others are skeptical of evolution's broad claims. Not all the people quoted are general authorities, the exceptions being marked by an asterisk. The "- 2" designation means that this person also appeared in the prior Bankhead compilation.

The First Presidency, in a letter to Samuel O. Bennion, 1912 (Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose)
 The First Presidency, "Mormon" View of Evolution, 1925 (Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, Charles W. Nibley)
 Marion G. Romney – 2
 Harold B. Lee, apostle and president
 David O. McKay, apostle and president
 George Q. Cannon – 2
 Orson F. Whitney, apostle
 Boyd K. Packer – 2

Robert J. Matthews,
 Spencer W. Kimball, apostle and president
 John Taylor, apostle and president
 James E. Talmage – 2
 Brigham Young – 2
 *Chauncey C. Riddle, BYU philosophy professor
 Orson Pratt, apostle
 B. H. Roberts – 2
 Mark E. Petersen – 2
 Bruce R. McConkie – 2
 Ezra Taft Benson – 2
 *Melvin A. Cook, geology professor at University of Utah
 Joseph Smith – 2
 Joseph Fielding Smith – 2
 Hyrum M. Smith, apostle & *Janne M. Sjodahl (authors)
 *Hugh Nibley, Book of Mormon scholar at BYU
 George Albert Smith, apostle and president
 Delbert L. Stapley, apostle
 Earl C. Tingey, 7th President of First Quorum of 70
 Gordon B. Hinckley, apostle and president
 *Joseph Fielding McConkie, BYU religion professor
 *Keith S. Thomson, geologist
 *O. H. Schindewolf,
 *Hollis D. Hedberg,
 *Henry M. Morris,
 *James H. Shea,
 *Nancy Pearcey,
 *D. L. Cuddy,
 *Sharon Begley
 *Dr. Donald J. Spencer
 *George R. Hill III
 *Paul Recer
 *Armin J. Hill, BYU professor

Even those few who quibbled slightly or ducked the question would never say that man was not the direct offspring of God. Those that I could discover, who are not clearly 100% against evolution and for creationism, who may have wobbled, stumbled, or misspoke an iota, are Talmage, Roberts, Widstoe, McKay, and Hinckley. Three of the men have written on the topic, two extensively. They did try to find an accommodation between the gospel and organic evolution, but were unwilling to describe man as anything but a child of God.

The following link and associated topic and question present the words of the three "doubters," actually showing that none were willing to accept the conclusions of organic evolution, even though they grappled at times with unexplained geologic findings.

15) TALMAGE – WIDTSOE – ROBERTS: Were James E. Talmage, John A. Widstoe and B. H. Roberts followers of the theories of Darwin?
<http://www.josephsmithforum.org/research/faqs/15-talmage-widstoe-roberts-were-james-e-talmage-john-a-widstoe-and-b-h-roberts-followers-of-the-theories-of-darwin/>

B. H. Roberts had an interesting theory whereby there were two creations. The first one mostly followed the standard atheist philosophy on evolution, but then that process was ended by a cataclysm, and a completely new start was begun which would conform with the Book of Genesis account. At least he never accepted that man could have come from any place except as an offspring of God.

This really leaves nothing left for the LDS evolutionists to hang their preferences on, at least as far as supposed cracks in the statements of the leading brethren.

It appears that it is crucial in the frame of reference of the LDS evolutionists that a way be left open for Adam to have come into being physically through some evolutionary process from lower animals. Without maintaining that crack through which the full-blown atheist evolutionary theories can be drawn, the basis for their behavior and teaching and research at BYU seems to be put in great jeopardy.

On his personal website describing his philosophy concerning religion and evolution, BYU zoologist William Bradshaw (retired) lists the possible ways in which Adam might have come into this physical world. Conspicuously absent is the option for Adam simply to be born of a woman as was Christ, thus completely ending the speculation about Adam's ascent from lower animals. He also postulates that the Garden of Eden was a terrestrial spot on an otherwise celestial world. Presumably that leaves open the option for the massive amounts of mutation and death which underlie the evolutionary theory of descent with modification.

The single most exhaustive and sophisticated answer to the claims of LDS evolutionists is the book by Joseph Fielding Smith entitled *Man, His Origin and Destiny*. His statements there are so extensive and so unequivocal that no one could imagine the standard atheistic organic evolution assertions getting past that book. Really, the only possible strategy for the LDS evolutionists is to somehow avoid any mention of that book, and hope that no one would have easy access to it. One might get the feeling that the very purpose of the BYU packet on evolution was to somehow erase the Joseph Fielding Smith book from the equation.

One of the documents crafted by the LDS evolutionists mentions that Joseph Fielding Smith was a "junior apostle" at the time he wrote his book, presumably trying to denigrate the authority of that massive compilation by minimizing the authority of the author. Of course Joseph Fielding Smith later became a senior apostle and president of the Church, giving his earlier statements some extra weight simply by the approval implied by the Lord letting him live long enough to become president of the Church. While president of the Church he specifically restated his beliefs in the same materials he placed in the book, perhaps for the very purpose that no one could claim that he had left those opinions behind upon assuming the presidency. This leaves a mountain-sized philosophical roadblock in the way of the evolutionists.

The foreword by Apostle Mark E. Petersen to Joseph Fielding Smith's book makes it clear that Elder Peterson approves of that publication. Also, Apostle and President Ezra Taft Benson praised the book and recommended it highly. That means we have at least three apostolic witnesses to the need for the book and the accuracy of its content. Elder Peterson in his foreword, mentions that

Knowing the great need to provide Latter-day Saint students of science with material which would help them to preserve their faith and coordinate in their minds the pure truth of both science and revelation, some of us have hoped for a book which could make the facts readily available to them.

This raises the question of who "some of us" included. It seems highly likely that the "us" referred to other of the leading brethren holding the position of apostle. One might try to discern whether the opinions of the three apostles in the presidency outweigh the opinions of more than three apostles who are not in the presidency. In this case, it would be a pointless exercise, because they are all in complete agreement.

Part 2

The BYU packet re-examined

I see the BYU packet as a strange and tortured document for a strange and questionable purpose.

The packet itself tells us two interesting things: 1) it was not intended to be a balanced treatment of the subject, and 2) it was not intended to prevent BYU professors who are skeptical about or hostile to evolution from providing other materials to their students on the topic.

1. One might reasonably ask why a BYU professor would go to such lengths to get an official position statement on evolution approved if there was no intent for the result to be balanced? Doesn't it seem likely that carefully and consciously presenting an unbalanced document would be the source of much confusion on campus, and why would a professor want to promote the cause of confusion? The implication is that if any one particular student wishes to gain a balanced view on the question of evolution, they are going to have to do all their own research themselves, with no help from the administration. Doesn't that seem like an absurd position for pro-evolution professors and the BYU administration to take? The obvious reason for this unbalanced presentation would be because it was meant to benefit the BYU evolutionists, to the detriment of those with opposing opinions.

2. The packet claims that it is not intended to serve the purpose of preventing professors from presenting their own potentially anti-evolution materials. But this appears to be disingenuous. Again, if helpful balance was intended, why not supply a large number of references which could be considered adequate to bring about a balanced view? It is a simple matter these days to provide those documents directly or through Internet links to make them quickly and easily available.

Apparently Professor Evenson was the major moving force behind getting this document assembled and approved. Because the packet materials were chosen with his help, including his own entry on the topic of evolution in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, it seems appropriate to note his own interpretation of the effect of the packet. The actual answer to this issue of the nature and intent of the BYU packet can be seen from the comments of Evenson in his review of portions of the B.H. Roberts' book *The Truth, the Way, and the Life*:

"Statements made by the First Presidency in 1909, 1925, and 1931 contain the position of the Church on evolution: anything else is opinion...." (page cxxv -- 1994).

In this side comment within his review, we now see the real purpose of this BYU packet. The entire point of the exercise was to find some minimal amount of Church material which was conveniently at least slightly ambiguous on the critical points concerning evolution, and then to say that all other materials were mere opinion which could safely be ignored. Most of the other materials are completely unambiguous in their anti-evolution stance. In truth, even the materials in the BYU packet are unambiguously pro-creationism and anti-evolution, at least to normal people reading these materials. Only the LDS evolutionists think that, by carefully parsing the text, they have found a way to wrest a small exception or lacunae from these materials to help support their professional interests.

But this tortured logic is indeed a weak reed on which to hang one's professional preference for teaching unadulterated atheistic evolution at BYU. Notice that the "opinion" materials which he denigrates here include the full length book by President Joseph Fielding Smith on the topic, in which Elder Smith intends to and accomplishes the complete obliteration of any acceptance by the LDS Church of the speculations of atheistic evolution. Although he wrote the book while he was a "mere" apostle, he specifically reaffirms his position while he was president. Another apostle and later president, Ezra Taft Benson approves and highly recommends the book. Another apostle, Mark E. Peterson, endorses the book by having his comments published with the book. There were other unnamed apostles who encouraged Joseph Fielding Smith to write the book. In all, there are perhaps 30 of the apostles in the 20th century who made their own statements for creationism and against

evolution.

Evenson would have us ignore this enormous body of apostolic approval of creationism and disapproval of organic evolution as nothing but opinion. This seems like a gross twisting of the history and words of this topic. We constantly mention the fact that the words of the leading brethren in conference are themselves forms of scripture which are to be considered authoritative. Is this normal principle of interpretation to be ignored only in the case of evolution? That is an absurd claim. It is obviously a self-serving claim for one who wishes to maintain the maximum flexibility for teaching atheistic evolution on the BYU campus.

As a simple example, we might consider the question of the Proclamation On The Family. Was that proclamation prepared for the very purpose of stopping the leading brethren from saying any further words on the question of the family, it being the final statement on the matter? That would be absurd, and anyone making such a suggestion would be laughed to scorn.

Did the then-current First Presidencies in their 1909, 1925, and 1931 statements intend for their statements to be the final word for the Church for all time, and to prevent further statements on the matter by other leading brethren? Assuredly not. Was the book by Joseph Fielding Smith, published in 1954, condemned by these earlier statements before it was even written? Were apostles Mark E. Peterson and Ezra Taft Benson nothing but rebels against the other leading brethren in their encouragement and approval of the work of Joseph Fielding Smith? That would be ridiculous. We might note that Apostle James E. Talmage and Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith both made extensive public statements on the evolution topic after the "final authoritative" statements were made by First Presidencies in earlier years. These personal statements were even encouraged by the then-current First Presidencies. The jealous exclusiveness and implied silencing of others is just not a pattern here.

Getting even more detailed, we might say that *all* statements by the leading brethren are opinions, or perhaps "testimony," because there is no way to prove anything about these matters. It is not possible to *have* anything but opinions on these points. The fact that the Quorum of the First Presidency all happen to agree does give that opinion more weight, but it is certainly not exclusive, nor was it intended to be. Raising the statements to an artificially high "super scripture" status, towering over all other sources of information, is not justified, and there is no evidence that any such status was intended by any of the first presidencies.

We might note here that one of the original First Presidencies to issue a statement on the topic of evolution was president Joseph F. Smith. He is the only one I have found so far who has been willing to say the exact words implied by all of the other statements by first presidencies and apostles who were trying to be diplomatic and stop the smallest possible distance from saying their actual intent.

I know that God is a being with body, parts and passions and that His Son, Jesus Christ, grew and developed into manhood the same as you or I, as likewise did God, His Father, grow and develop to the Supreme Being that He now is. Man was born of woman; Christ, the Savior, was born of woman, and God, the Father, was born of woman. Adam, our earthly parent, was also born of woman into this world, the same as Jesus and you and I. Joseph F. Smith, delivered Dec 7, 1913 at Mesa, AZ, Deseret Evening News, Dec. 27, 1913, Sec. 3, p. 7.

Rather than leave some polite vagueness by saying such things as that man was a lineal descendent of God, Joseph F. Smith simply made the obvious statement and said that Adam was born of a woman just as Christ was born of a woman. There. Perhaps we can stop tap dancing around this item of information which has been treated with such great delicacy by so many men.

Why would Evenson and Bradshaw and other pro-evolution BYU professors want to prevent us from reading this simple and straightforward statement about the source of Adam's body? As soon as you so unequivocally remove the source of Adam's body from any processes of organic evolution, you have not quite completely destroyed the basis for teaching atheistic evolution at BYU, but you have come close. Instead of allowing organic evolution to explain all sources of biological life on the planet, including its grandest accomplishment, man, organic evolution is suddenly no more than a sideshow, at most explaining only the lower forms of life. Rather than allowing LDS evolutionists to imagine that they are going to discover all the principles of life and perhaps make man himself nearly immortal in this temporal condition, or accomplish some other such astonishing, but probably occult and non-gospel goals, that could bring them fame, they are suddenly consigned

to merely studying bugs and bones, and the thrill is gone.

The first statement appeared in a Church publication about the time of the celebration of the 100th year of Darwin's birth and the 50th year of his publication of the book *Origin of Species*. That would be an excellent time to remind the Church members and the world that the LDS Church did not accept the atheistic teachings of Darwinism. How the clear historical purpose of this statement could be twisted by BYU evolutionists into permission to teach atheistic evolution on the BYU campus is beyond me. The 1925 statement was similar. It was a statement published in a Church publication during the time of the famous Scopes monkey trial on the issue of evolution. Is someone really going to say that this was a statement intended to show that the Church was neutral on the question of evolution? Certainly not. It mostly consisted of quotes from the 1909 statement which made it very clear that man was the offspring of God, without getting quite so precise and graphic as President Joseph F. Smith did in his statement about the birth of Adam. If all men were direct descendents of God, as was Christ himself through being born to a mother, what is there left to the process of evolution that really matters?

We might notice that Bradshaw presents a list of the possible sources for Adam's body, and he conspicuously leaves out the most obvious option which is that Adam was born of woman as was Christ himself. Obviously, it is a matter of first importance to pro-evolutionist BYU professors to deny and obfuscate this simple truth concerning the source for Adam's body. If that issue is ever settled, their claim for Church approval, or at least tolerance, is mostly gone.

I want to say something more about the "opinion" word. Notice that he does not make a distinction between public and private opinion. It might be a valid distinction to say that there is a difference in authoritativeness between what is said by the leading brethren in public and what they may think or say in private, although when a person has become the president of the Church, and thus a prophet -- the Prophet -- then it may be quite a task to differentiate between what is public and authoritative or private and thus supposedly not so authoritative. But with the great weight of the public statements of the leading brethren being against evolution, and with only a few of them leaving open minor quibbles on the point, this distinction between public and private opinion hardly seems to matter. The careful parsing of words done by the LDS evolutionists seems to have the same intent and effect as some of the parsing of words done by our country's politicians -- to obfuscate the real issues and leave them maximum flexibility for their private acts and interpretations.

Unfortunately, one statement in the BYU packet seems like a major copout on the issue of evolution, and thus a crack in the otherwise fairly solid wall of rejection of evolution by Church leaders. It is all very well to

Leave geology, biology, archaeology, and anthropology, no one of which has to do with the salvation of the souls of mankind, to scientific research, while we magnify our calling in the realm of the Church.... [First Presidency Minutes, Apr. 7, 1931].

but that ignores the nature of evolution and the discussion concerning it at least since 1859 when *The Origin of Species* was published. We have the militant atheists using their physical observations (and extensive speculations) in these scientific areas for the very purpose of attacking religion. So while the brethren are off attending to other matters, the atheist "termites" are hard at work trying to counter any of the Church's successes. In fact, the "termites" seem to be winning the battle, being essentially unopposed by the LDS Church, and even aided to a substantial degree by the hospitality with which these religion-hostile ideas are accepted and propagated at BYU and elsewhere.

Most likely, since this comment was recorded in internal minutes, the First Presidency was simply tired of the extended and mostly non-productive discussions they had entertained between James E. Talmage and Joseph Fielding Smith on the topic of evolution. This note in the First Presidency minutes appears to be directed towards the leading brethren, hoping to put an end to these unproductive internal discussions, as opposed to being intended to give those outside the Church hierarchy free rein to do anything they want with their scientific findings and opinions, including challenging gospel teachings with them.