

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:



Paul Farber

Although much has been written describing the various reactions to the *Origin of Species* in America, the Mormon reaction to Darwinism has been largely ignored. This dissertation will recount the history of this reaction as exemplified by the life and works of B. H. Roberts. Roberts's intellectual pursuits early in life reveal a period of Latter-day Saint history when Mormons enjoyed relative intellectual freedom. However, the encroachment of secular knowledge upon the isolation of the Saints resulted in a conservative reaction to secular learning. The LDS response to Roberts's later work, including his own unique theory of evolution, best illustrates the conservative reaction that continues to the present.

Roberts's early work is marked by speculation regarding origins and creation. Like many Church leaders who preceded him, Roberts believed that all

Latter-day Saints should take full advantage of secular learning in order to best understand the workings of the divine; according to Roberts, science should be a support and supplement to theology. Later in life, the conservative reaction to Roberts's belief in the theory of evolution is illustrative of the changing intellectual climate. In his major theological treatise, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, Roberts tries to combine all extant knowledge, including the theory of evolution, into a coherent whole. In April of 1930, Mormon Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith publicly opposed Roberts's evolutionary views in favor of a literal reading of scripture. The public confrontation between Smith and Roberts led to a private debate before the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. After much deliberation, the Quorum of the Twelve decided that nothing could be gained by further consideration of the matter. Reaffirming a statement issued by the First Presidency of the Church in 1909, they agreed that God had created man; anything beyond this was mere speculation. Roberts died of diabetes one year after the debate and his masterwork remained unpublished until 1994.

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Mormons and Evolution: A History of B. H. Roberts and
His Attempt to Reconcile Science and Religion

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Tim S. Reid

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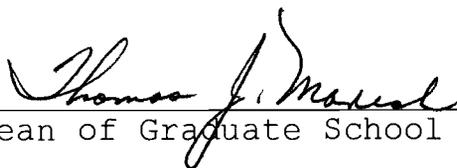
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Tim S. Reid, Author

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Laura who patiently stood by me through all of the hard times and uncertainties as well as my two daughters Jillian and Allison and my son Timothy whose sweet dispositions lit the darkest of days and gave me good reason to continue with this endeavor.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Historical Background.....	1
1.2 The Latter-day Saint Story.....	15
2. DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS.....	33
2.1 Joseph Smith.....	33
2.2 Intellectual Vigor and Views on Secular Learning.....	35
2.3 The Foundations of Evolutionary Arguments.....	39
3. INTERLUDE: 1844-1908.....	57
3.1 A Period of Elaboration.....	57
3.2 Early Theories on the Origin of Man.....	58
3.3 Parley P. Pratt.....	59
3.4 Orson Hyde.....	63
3.5 Brigham Young.....	67
3.6 The First Formal Reaction to Evolution.....	74
3.7 Period of Purification and Accommodation....	76
3.8 The Aftermath of Purification and Accommodation.....	82
3.9 Joseph B. Keeler.....	84
3.10 James E. Talmage.....	92
3.11 John A. Widtsoe.....	94

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
4. REACTION.....	102
4.1 The First Presidency Statement of 1909.....	102
4.2 Crisis at BYU.....	107
4.3 Widtsoe Again.....	125
4.4 Frederick Pack.....	126
4.5 A Conservative Theology.....	128
4.6 Anthony Ivans.....	132
4.7 Joseph F. Smith.....	135
5. B. H. ROBERTS.....	144
5.1 Roberts's Intellectual Biography.....	144
5.2 Studies of the <i>Book of Mormon</i>	148
5.3 The Story of the <i>TWL</i>	154
5.4 Science and Religion in the <i>TWL</i>	157
5.5 Evolution and Creation in the <i>TWL</i>	173
5.6 The Continuing Story of the <i>TWL</i>	202
5.7 Smith's Eventual Success.....	217
5.8 The Current Situation.....	226
6. CONCLUSION.....	235
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	243

MORMONS AND EVOLUTION: A HISTORY OF B. H. ROBERTS AND HIS ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE SCIENCE AND RELIGION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical Background

When Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859 it attempted to explain adequately the diversity of life without recourse to intelligent or purposeful design. Darwin did admit that a Creator may have once breathed life into the simplest of primordial organisms but this was the extent of any supernatural involvement in the subsequent development of new species.¹ Darwin's naturalistic explanation of the origin of species was seen by many as a threat to religion since it reduced nature to a series of natural laws which seemed to banish God from an active role in his own creation.²

Among the educated, it was not the fact that Darwin's theory seemed to contradict a literal interpretation of the Bible that was disturbing. By 1859, the majority of educated Americans believed that

¹Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 453 & 455.

²R. Jackson Wilson, *Darwin and the American Intellectual* (Chicago, The Dorsey Press, 1989), 4.

the creation account was either a myth or a metaphor. The fossil record had proven that the earth and its creatures were much older than traditional readings of Genesis had suggested. "The religious debate centered . . . on the question of whether any supernatural intelligence ruled over or within creation, giving it purpose and meaning."³ According to several American theologians, Darwin's work did not suggest a higher purpose in nature other than a directionless struggle for existence. The implications inherent in such an interpretation seemed incredibly dangerous to several nineteenth century religious leaders.⁴

Representative was Charles Hodge. Hodge believed nature revealed God's wisdom and power. Since God was the creator of the natural world as well as the author of the Bible, the Bible enabled the naturalist to interpret scientific evidence correctly; the Bible was the guide which helped religious seekers understand and interpret God's natural creation.⁵

Hodge believed nature and the Bible both agreed that creation was purposeful. According to Hodge, Darwin's theory implied the opposite. Because Hodge

³Ibid., 31.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Jonathan Wells, *Charles Hodge's Critique of Darwinism: An Historical-Critical Analysis of Concepts Basic to the 19th Century Debate* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 22-27.

believed the Bible was the basis upon which the truth or falsity of science should be judged, he rejected Darwin's theory since it denied a purpose in nature.

Hodge wrote:

Natural selection is a selection made by natural laws, working without intention and design. . . . In using the expression Natural Selection, Mr. Darwin intends to exclude design, or final causes. All the changes in structure, instinct, or intelligence, in the plants or animals, including man, descended from the primordial germ, or animalcule, have been brought about by unintelligent physical causes. On this point he leaves us in no doubt. . . . It is affirmed that natural selection is the operation of natural laws, analogous to the action of gravitation and of chemical affinities. It is denied that it is a process originally designed, or guided by intelligence, such as the activity which foresees an end and consciously selects and controls the means of its accomplishment.⁶

Hodge also objected to Darwin's theory because it banished God as an active participant in His creation and replaced Him with natural laws. Hodge argued that "banishing . . . God from the world is simply intolerable." A God who abandons his initial creation to chance without further intervention or divine guidance, is "consigned virtually . . . to nonexistence." According to Hodge, Darwinism is thus paramount to atheism.⁷ Hodge's ideas were prevalent among many

⁶Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Company, 1874), 41.

⁷*Ibid.*, 44.

American theologians shortly after the publication of the *Origin*. Hodge was one of the most prominent figures to espouse such doctrines in the United States and his reaction is an excellent example of this particular view.⁸

All religious reactions, however, were not negative. A more favorable religious response to Darwinism is exemplified by the American botanist Asa Gray. Although not a theologian, Gray was deeply religious and his philosophy influenced many American theologians. His version of evolution can be characterized as theistic evolution. Gray argued that there was a divine Creator who guided the evolutionary process. Like Hodge, he held that a purely naturalistic explanation for the diversity of life was not acceptable. Gray believed Darwin's work was greater proof of design. Natural selection was a tool used by the Creator. Advantageous variations were created by God so that evolution could occur along assigned channels of development. The fact that living beings were constantly adapting to different environments through time was further evidence of a dynamic Designer. In his original critique of Darwinism Gray wrote:

The origination of the improvements, and the successive adaptations to meet new conditions or

⁸Wilson, 32.

subserve other ends, are what answer to the supernatural, and therefore remain inexplicable. As to bringing them into use, though wisdom foresees the result, the circumstances and the natural competition will take care of that, in the long run. The old ones will go out of use fast enough, except where an old and simple machine remains still best adapted to a particular purpose or condition. . . . If there's a Divinity that shapes these ends, the whole is intelligible and reasonable; otherwise, not.⁹

Another way Americans dealt with the theological implications inherent in Darwin's theory was to separate scientific truth from religious truth. This solution had been gathering strength since the Scientific Revolution. As early as Copernicus and Galileo, it was realized that science sometimes contradicts a literal reading of the scriptures.¹⁰ The Bible, for example, suggests the earth is the center of the universe and the sun revolves around the earth. When Galileo used his telescopic observations to argue the opposite was true, he suggested the Bible was restricted to spiritual truths; scientific truths were written in the book of nature. This approach was later used by many American theologians in the nineteenth century.¹¹

One of the of these theologians was James Woodrow, the uncle of President Woodrow Wilson and Professor of

⁹Asa Gray, "Review of Darwin's Theory on the Origin of Species," *American Journal of Science and Arts*, 2d ser., 29 (1860): 184.

¹⁰In most works dealing with Latter-day Saint theology the word scripture is not capitalized.

¹¹Wilson, 33

Natural Science in Connection with Divinity at the Presbyterian Seminary of Columbia, South Carolina.¹² In 1884, Woodrow gave a speech in which he declared science and religion were two different truths. According to Woodrow, one could accept the findings of science without adverse affects upon personal faith since the Bible was confined to teaching spiritual truths and scientific truth was found in the study of nature.¹³

According to American intellectual historian R. Jackson Wilson, the most common reaction to Darwinism among American theologians was that of reconciliation.¹⁴ Most of these theologians took their cue from the English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Although Spencer's ideas were independent of Darwin's and often significantly different, his "synthetic philosophy" attempted to incorporate the evolution of life into a general universal process of development. According to Spencer, the universe and everything in it was developing from an undifferentiated state to an ever-increasing state of complexity. For example, the solar system had developed from a homogeneous state of matter to a complex system of planets. Similarly, one-celled

¹²Ibid., 33.

¹³James Woodrow, "Evolution," in *American Philosophical Addresses, 1700-1900*, ed. Joseph L. Blau (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 488-513.

¹⁴Wilson, 34-35.

creatures had evolved into highly complex forms of life. Spencer postulated the existence of an unknowable force or energy which drove the universe towards this increasing complexity.¹⁵ "It was simple enough to think of such an absolute force as God, to deify the evolutionary process, and to make it yield, in the end, to the same sorts of values that had been inherent in pre-Darwinian Christianity."¹⁶ It is not surprising that John Fiske, Spencer's most popular American promoter, praised Spencer for his service to religion in a famous speech given in 1882. Fiske argued that Spencer had successfully reconciled science and religion for the benefit of all mankind.¹⁷

Although there were many differences between Darwin and Spencer, both men embraced evolutionary concepts. The resulting American response was often a general reaction to evolution as opposed to the specific theories of either man. There are many works which explore these initial reactions to evolution in the United States. The most important is James R. Moore's comprehensive *Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms With Darwin in*

¹⁵Herbert Spencer, *Synthetic Philosophy*, 10 vols. (New York: Appleton, 1921).

¹⁶Wilson, 34.

¹⁷John Fiske, *Essays, Historical and Literary*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 2:227-237.

Great Britain and America which describes reactions to evolution in both Britain and the United States.¹⁸ It is especially useful for comparing the different evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer. Peter J. Bowler's *Evolution: The History of an Idea* is another important survey which explores some of the early reactions to evolutionary theory.¹⁹

Several other works focus exclusively on the initial reaction to evolution in America. R. Jackson Wilson's *Darwinism and the American Intellectual Tradition* and Cynthia Eagle Russett's *Darwin in America: The Intellectual Response, 1865-1912* give a general overview of the most notable arguments for and against Darwinism in America following the publication of the *Origin*.²⁰ Although somewhat dated, Windsor Hall Roberts's *The Reaction of American Protestant Churches to the Darwinian Philosophy, 1860-1900*, is still an important overview of the initial reaction to Darwinism in nineteenth-century America.²¹ George E. Webb's *The*

¹⁸James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms With Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁹Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1989).

²⁰See note 2 for the first full citation on Wilson; and Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Darwin in America: The Intellectual Response, 1865-1912* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1976).

²¹Windsor Hall Roberts, *The Reaction of American Protestant Churches to the Darwinian Philosophy, 1860-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Libraries, 1938).

Evolution Controversy in America is one of the best general surveys of the American reaction to evolution.²² It covers the entire spectrum of American reactions to evolution from initial responses to the present day. Unfortunately, like most general surveys, it suffers from a lack of details, especially when dealing with the initial reactions to Darwinism.

In addition to these general studies, there are many works on specific topics. Among the most useful for this dissertation is Jacob Franklin Lester's "John Fiske's Philosophy of Science: The Union of Science and Religion Through the Principle of Evolution" which emphasizes Fiske's unique contributions to evolutionary philosophy.²³ Jonathan Wells's *Charles Hodge's Critique of Darwinism: An Historical-Critical Analysis of Concepts Basic to the 19th Century Debate* focuses most of his attention on the philosophy of Charles Hodge.²⁴ However, he notes there were many reactions to Darwinism among other prominent American theologians which differed markedly from Hodge's philosophy. D. F. Johnson's "The Attitudes of the Princeton Theologians

²²George E. Webb, *The Evolution Controversy in America* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

²³Jacob Franklin Lester, "John Fiske's Philosophy of Science: The Union of Science and Religion Through the Principle of Evolution," Ph.D. dissertation, Oregon State University, 1979.

²⁴Jonathan Wells, *Charles Hodge's Critique of Darwinism: An Historical-Critical Analysis of Concepts Basic to the 19th Century Debate* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

Toward Darwinism and Evolution from 1859-1929" also focuses most of its attention on Hodge; however, competing philosophies, especially theistic evolution, are taken into consideration.²⁵

Although there continued to be those who argued in the same vein as Hodge and Woodrow, it was Spencer's philosophy and Fiske's derivative that carried the day among intellectuals.²⁶ By 1882, "Darwinism and Spencer's extension of it had been successfully domesticated and absorbed into a world view fit for men who were genteel, Victorian, and, loosely speaking, Christian."²⁷

The common Christian, however, still believed in a literal interpretation of Genesis. The more numerous literalists rarely disclosed their views in anti-evolutionist books or tracts.²⁸ "So long as discussions of evolution remained confined mostly to scholarly

²⁵D. F. Johnson, *The Attitudes of the Princeton Theologians Toward Darwinism and Evolution from 1859-1929* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, Inc., 1969). The above is a general list of books on the topic. There is, of course, a more specialized literature dealing with the subject.

²⁶It should be noted that Spencer was uncomfortable with Fiske's interpretation of his philosophy since Spencer's evolutionary force was unknowable. "The reinterpretation of his work . . . to suggest the existence of an immanent presence of God in the world . . . was completely contrary to his ideas." See Paul Lawrence Farber, *The Temptations of Evolutionary Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 54-56. See also, Herbert Spencer, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, ed. David Duncan (New York: D. Appleton, 1908), 1:309.

²⁷Wilson, 35.

²⁸Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 17-18.

circles, Christians who objected to evolution on Biblical grounds saw little reason to speak up."²⁹ However, the liberal interpretation of Christian evolution began to be more vigorously opposed as an increasing number of literalists began to be exposed to evolution in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

It was during this period that the number of American youth attending high schools was on the rise.³⁰ According to the Federal Commission of Education, most high school aged students were attending school by 1920. An increase in the number of state-supported schools was partially responsible for this dramatic rise in school attendance.³¹ It was this expansion of public schools that carried the theory of evolution to an ever-increasing number of Americans. This coincided with increased anti-evolution sentiments in America since "the rapid expansion of secondary education thus gave new immediacy to the danger [of evolution]."³²

The American Fundamentalist movement also helps explain the conservative reaction to Darwinism during

²⁹Ibid., 37.

³⁰Ronald L. Numbers, "Creationism in 20th-Century America," *Science* 218 (1982): 539; and Edward J. Larson, *Trial and Error: The American Controversy Over Creation and Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26.

³¹Larson, 26.

³²Ibid., 27.

the twentieth century. Fundamentalism was primarily a response to post-World War I Modernism which many conservative Christians viewed as a threat to traditional values. Higher Biblical criticism, which was considered to be part of the Modernist movement, seemed to deny the Bible's divinity by treating it as a historical document full of myths and historical fallacies. Evolution most importantly was considered a Modernist threat since it denied a literal reading of the creation account found in Genesis. By subverting the Biblical foundation upon which Christian morality was based, Fundamentalists believed Modernism played a major role in the "perceived collapse of public and private morals."³³ In order to combat modernity and bring about a return to traditional values, Fundamentalists turned to a literal interpretation of the Bible. Fundamentalists argued that Biblical authority was necessarily greater than secular authority since it came directly from the source of all knowledge. Fundamentalists relied upon a literal interpretation of the Bible to combat the perceived menace of modern secular learning.³⁴

In 1922, William Jennings Bryan, soon to become a leading spokesman of the Fundamentalists, heard of an

³³Ibid., 40.

³⁴See William R. Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

attempt to ban the teaching of evolution in Kentucky's public schools. He predicted this movement would sweep the country and conservative Protestants would succeed in driving evolution from the schools. By the end of the decade, more than twenty states had considered laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools. Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee had successfully passed legislation prohibiting the teaching of evolution in state-funded schools while Oklahoma prohibited adopting evolutionary textbooks and Florida officially declared that teaching evolutionary theory in its schools was "improper and subversive." Bryan was a major catalyst behind these events. His immense prestige and loyal following obtained from earlier political activities gave the anti-evolutionists just what they needed: a dynamic leader with a national reputation.³⁵

The American Civil Liberties Union believed the movement led by Bryan curtailed the freedom of thought protected by the Constitution of the United States. Accordingly, the ACLU offered free legal counsel to any teacher from Tennessee who would agree to be tried in order to establish the constitutionality of the law. Taking up the ACLU's offer, John T. Scopes, a high school teacher from Dayton, Tennessee lectured from a

³⁵Numbers, 41.

Darwinian text and was arrested for doing so. In 1925, the ACLU hired Clarence Darrow, one of the country's best known lawyers, to defend Scopes in an attempt to establish the constitutionality of the Tennessee law. Bryan was chosen to assist the prosecution. The prosecution argued that the violation of a valid law was the only relevant issue but the defense argued that the law itself was not valid.

During the climax of the case, Bryan took the stand as an expert witness on the Bible. Under the pressure of Darrow's cross-examination, Bryan exhibited not only ignorance of the Bible but modern science as well. Perhaps his most important admission was that creation must have taken centuries; a "day" in Genesis might represent eons of time. This confession undermined one of the main arguments of the Fundamentalists. Bryan's humiliation on the stand was seen by many liberals as the triumph of science and reason over religious myth and superstition. Ironically, Bryan died only a few days after the trial had ended. Despite the loss of one of their main leaders, the creationist movement, although no longer in the national spotlight, has continued until the present.

It has had an interesting history which has been carefully studied. Edward J. Larson's *Trial and Error: The American Controversy Over Creation and Evolution* discusses the increased exposure of American youth to

evolution in the public schools as well as the growing Fundamentalist movement. According to Larson, these two factors combined to create an atmosphere which made the Scopes trial possible.³⁶ *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* by Ronald L. Numbers primarily focuses on the Fundamentalists who endeavored to combat modernism by attempting to scientifically prove the validity of Genesis.³⁷ Finally, Dorothy Nelkin's *Science Textbook Controversies and the Politics of Equal Time* is an important work which chronicles the continuing story of conservative reactions to evolution. According to Nelkin, conservatives in the 1970s argued that scientific creationism should be taught as an alternative to evolution in California's public schools.³⁸

1.2 The Latter-day Saint Story

Although much has been written describing the history of various reactions to the *Origin of Species* in America, largely ignored has been the reaction to Darwinism among adherents to the Church of Jesus Christ

³⁶See note 28 for the first full citation on Larson.

³⁷See note 25 for the first full citation on Numbers.

³⁸Dorothy Nelkin, *Science Textbook Controversies and the Politics of Equal Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977).

of Latter-day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons.³⁹ For example, James R. Moore's *Post-Darwin Controversies* ignores the Latter-day Saints entirely. Presumably, this is partially because Mormonism, although highly visible, was not numerically large during this period. Additionally, Moore was probably aware of the difficulties that arise among both Latter-day Saints and Protestants when designating Mormonism as a Protestant religion. Unlike Moore, R. Jackson Wilson does not limit his inquiry to Protestant religions in his *Darwinism and the American Intellectual Tradition*. However, Jackson, like Moore, ignores the LDS reaction to Darwinism. Instead he focuses on the reactions of relatively large denominations. The same is true of Webb, Roberts, and Johnson. Ronald L. Numbers devotes less than five pages to the Latter-day Saint reaction to

³⁹On April 6, 1830, approximately 30 believers met in Peter Whitmer's home in Fayette, New York to organize a new church. The name of this church was the Church of Christ. Since members of the church were often referred to as Saints, three years later, members of the Church adapted a resolution renaming the Church as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The term "Mormon" comes from the *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* is believed to be a compilation of ancient records primarily edited by an ancient American prophet named Mormon. Since the *Book of Mormon* was the most distinguishing feature of the new church, non-members began to use the term "Mormon" as the most common designation for followers of the Church's founder, Joseph Smith. Although not the official name of the Church, the term "Mormon" is still used as a name for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members of the Church acknowledge that the designation "Mormon" is more commonly used among non-members than the official name of the Church; however, most members prefer that their Church be called by its official nomenclature and its members be called Latter-day Saints (LDS is also used as a shorthand version.) Having said this, the term "Mormon" will hereafter be used sparingly in deference to their feelings.

evolution in *The Creationists*. This is due largely to the fact that Numbers is interested in the influence of "flood geologists" upon other denominations. Since the influence of the flood geologists was not manifest in LDS circles until the 1930s, the history of Mormon reactions to evolutionary theory before this time receives little attention. This cursory treatment is indicative of the role which LDS Fundamentalists played in the larger movement which Numbers chronicles.

It would seem that Latter-day Saint reactions to evolution would be more prominent in the many books and dissertations discussing Latter-day Saints and science. However, since most of these works are written by Latter-day Saint scholars who tend to emphasize the "fit" between LDS doctrine and scientific theories, biological theories of origins are often downplayed as exceptions to the rule. A relatively unbiased discussion of Mormonism and evolution, however, can be found in Robert T. Wooten's *Saints and Scientists* and Erich Robert Paul's *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology*.⁴⁰ Since these focus on all aspects of Mormonism and science the discussions dealing with Mormonism and evolution are relatively sparse, comprising a single chapter in each work.

⁴⁰Erich Robert Paul, *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), and Richard T. Wooten, *Saints and Scientists* (Mesa, AZ: EduTech Corporation, 1992).

Many general histories of the LDS church also mention Mormonism's reaction to evolutionary theory only in passing. Chief among these are James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard's *Story of the Latter-day Saints*, Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton's *Mormon Experience*, Philip L. Barlow's, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, and Richard Cowan's *The Church in the Twentieth Century*.⁴¹ Thomas G. Alexander's *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* contains perhaps the best summary of Latter-day Saint encounters with evolution.⁴² However, like all the other Mormon histories mentioned above, Alexander's account is brief since he has the larger agenda of attempting to chronicle all of the challenges faced by Latter-day Saints as the Church moved into a new era. In these comprehensive histories, Latter-day Saint encounters with evolution are always a small part of a much larger story. It should be mentioned, however, that despite their lack of detail, the preceding histories are useful

⁴¹James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992); Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Richard Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century: The Impressive Story of the Advancing Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985).

⁴²Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

in putting the history of Latter-day Saint reactions to evolution in a greater historical context.

From this literature review it is evident that the history of LDS reactions to the theory of evolution has yet to be addressed in adequate detail. In an attempt to add detail to the accounts mentioned above, this dissertation will recount the history of Latter-day Saint reactions to evolution as exemplified by the life and works of B. H. Roberts. Roberts's early intellectual pursuits coincide with a period in Latter-day Saint history of relative intellectual freedom.⁴³ However, the encroachment of secular knowledge upon the early isolation of the Saints in Utah resulted in a conservative reaction to secular learning.⁴⁴ The LDS response to Roberts's later work, including his own theory of evolution, illustrates a conservative reaction that continues to the present.

This should be of interest to American intellectual historians since the Latter-day Saint reaction often parallels the reaction of many other religions in the

⁴³Latter-day Saint historian Leonard J. Arrington argues that the Church has passed through different stages of intellectual development throughout its history. The first being a period of elaboration which took place in relative isolation. During this period Church leaders felt free to expound and expand upon LDS doctrines. The resulting sermons tended to be rather speculative in nature. As isolation decreased however, a conservative reaction followed. Speculation declined as Church leaders attempted to anchor their beliefs on the basic principles and doctrine of the Church. See Leonard J. Arrington, "The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-day Saints," *Dialogue: A Journal for Mormon Thought* 4, no. 1 (1969): 13-26.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

Judeo-Christian tradition. In many ways, the Latter-day Saint reaction can be considered a microcosm of larger national trends.⁴⁵ For example, Latter-day Saint reactions to the theory of evolution range from a literal reading of the creation account and an outright rejection of the theory of evolution to a full embracing of this theory with all its implications--the latter group believing God has and always will work through natural laws. However, once again noting the similarities between Mormonism and the greater Judeo-Christian tradition, most Latter-day Saint intellectuals fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes in their attempts to reconcile science with religion.

More important, however, the LDS reaction to evolution should be of interest to intellectual historians not only because of similarities, but because of differences. Like other religions, several Latter-day Saint intellectuals have tried to reconcile scripture and science; however, these reconciliations are often markedly different from their non-LDS counterparts. This is due to the fact that unlike other religions stemming from Judeo-Christian roots, Latter-day Saints have canonized a set of scriptures unique to Mormonism. Along with the Bible, Latter-day Saints accept supplemental scriptures which they believe

⁴⁵These national trends are summarized well by R. Jackson Wilson.

augment and clarify the creation account given in Genesis. Consequent to these supplemental scriptures, LDS reconciliations of creation accounts and the scientific theory of origins differ from other religions that rely more heavily on the traditional Judeo-Christian corpus.

Joining these supplemental scriptures are the writings and sermons of LDS Prophets and Apostles. Latter-day Saints accept the inspired utterances of the Prophets and Apostles in much the same vein as others in the Judeo-Christian tradition accept the Old and New Testament Prophets and Apostles. Intellectual historians primarily focus on the foundations of Latter-day Saint theology, assuming the LDS intellectual tradition was largely the work of its founder, Joseph Smith. Though believing in an open canon, relatively little has been added to the body of LDS scripture since Smith's death in 1844. However, much doctrinal exposition has been provided by his successors and subsequent developments in Latter-day Saint theology are largely based on their efforts. Although not necessarily canonized doctrine, Latter-day Saints believe these sermons and writings are inspired. For many Saints, these inspired utterances also help clarify the Genesis account and help reconcile knowledge gained in the

pursuit of natural knowledge with that gleaned from canonized revelation.⁴⁶

Even though Smith was murdered fifteen years before the publication of the *Origin*, his contributions are significant to this thesis since he laid the doctrinal foundations of the LDS Church--all subsequent theological expositions would be based on his writings.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Smith made no definitive statement concerning the physical process of creation. This left his successors without firm doctrinal foundations upon which to stand regarding the specific issue of evolution. Related doctrines taught by Smith regarding the physical creation could be used to support evolutionary thinking as well as repudiate it.

⁴⁶According to the official position of the Church, any divinely inspired proclamation uttered by a Prophet or Apostle should be considered true doctrine. However, the words of the Apostles and Prophets become official Church doctrine only when they are presented as such by the First Presidency of the Church or are canonized by the common consent of the Church. See "The Living Prophet and Scripture," in *Teachings of the Living Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 17-22; John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1960), 236-239; Harold B. Lee *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 162-163; Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 187; and Steven Edward Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 13-19.

⁴⁷Several journal articles help to explain the theological background upon which this entire story is based. Chief Among these are Keith E. Norman, "Adam's Navel," *Dialogue* 21, no. 2 (1988): 81-97; Benjamin Urrutia, "The Structure of Genesis, Chapter One," *Dialogue* 8, nos. 3 & 4 (1973): 121-153; Anthony Hutchinson, "LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible," *Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (1982): 99-124; James Faulconer, "Hutchinson Challenged," *Dialogue* 16, no. 4 (1983): 4-7; and Anthony Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue* 21, no. 4 (1988): 11-74.

Smith's successors confronted the theory of evolution head-on as their isolation in the intermountain West became increasingly jeopardized by an ever-increasing westward expansion. With the achievement of statehood in 1896 and the subsequent foundation of state schools, Utah Mormons were forced to confront secular learning and its implications for religion. These influences grew stronger as cultural contacts with the outside world increased. During the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, an increasing number of LDS scholars left Utah to receive their academic training in prominent east-coast universities. Some of these scholars returned heavily influenced by higher Biblical criticism and evolutionary theory.⁴⁸

In response to the first symptoms of a conservative reaction to this new influx of secular learning, the First Presidency of the Church issued in 1909 a statement clarifying its position on evolution.⁴⁹ They declared that God had created Adam in "his own image;"

⁴⁸Higher Biblical criticism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁴⁹The First Presidency is composed of the Prophet who is the head of the Church and his two counselors from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They constitute the highest ruling body of the Church and as such are the only ones authorized to alter officially, expand, or clarify Church doctrine.

however, current revelation was unclear as to how God actually accomplished this physical act.⁵⁰

Because this official proclamation was silent regarding the actual physical process of creation, it had little effect in stemming the tide of the conservative religious reaction to secular knowledge. At the same time, this official position encouraged LDS intellectuals who believed in evolutionary theory to teach its principles to Latter-day Saint congregations. In 1911, four new faculty members of the fledgling Brigham Young University--Ralph and William Chamberlin and Henry and Joseph Peterson--spoke frequently and energetically to church audiences and BYU students on the subjects of higher Biblical criticism and the theory of evolution. They argued that this "new" secular learning should be in no way detrimental to religious faith. On the contrary, it should be used as a "handmaiden" to theology. However, the Church Board of Education saw things differently.⁵¹ They warned the offending parties that they would have to change their teachings or face dismissal from the university. The Chamberlins and Ralph Peterson left the university and

⁵⁰"The Origin of Man by the First Presidency of the Church," *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 55-61.

⁵¹Horace H. Cummings, "Report to President Joseph F. Smith and Members of the General Church Board of Education," dated January 21, 1911, found in the manuscript, "History of Brigham Young University," comp. J. Marinus Jensen, N. I. Butt, Elsie Carroll and Bertha Roberts.

accepted teaching positions elsewhere rather than submit to the decision of the Church board while Ralph's brother William complied by removing Biblical criticism and evolution from his lesson plans and stayed on at BYU for another five years.⁵²

It could be argued that the official position of 1909 was neutral; however, the actions taken by the Church Board of Education in 1911 did not reflect this neutrality. President Joseph F. Smith (Joseph Smith's nephew and sixth President of the Church) explained in a church magazine that since there was no way to confirm the truth or falsity of the theory of evolution through either modern science or modern revelation, it was inappropriate to discuss the theory in church-sponsored schools.⁵³

Despite the First Presidency's statement declaring official neutrality, the decision of the Church to limit what could be taught at a Church school had lasting implications. At the turn of the century, a relative open-mindedness toward secular learning existed.⁵⁴

⁵²This story can be found in Leonard and Allen, 484-486; Richard Sherlock, "Campus in Crisis: BYU, 1911," *Sunstone* 4 (January-February 1979): 11-16; Gary James Bergera and Ron Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 134-148; Ralph Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1925), 137-160; and Ernest Wilkinson ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 412-433.

⁵³Joseph F. Smith, "Philosophy and the Church Schools," *Juvenile Instructor* 46 no. 4 (1911): 208-209.

However, as some influential leaders of the Church felt increasing concern about secular learning, a conservative stand towards modernism and the theory of evolution was taken. This trend was mirrored within the larger Judeo-Christian community as a whole and has continued throughout subsequent LDS history.⁵⁵

Although the official position of the Church continues to be the same as the position taken by the First Presidency in 1909, a more traditional approach to the creation account is generally held today. This is due, in part, to the influence of highly regarded Apostles and Prophets. For example, one of the most highly esteemed LDS theologians of the present era, Bruce R. McConkie, espoused a fundamentalist point-of-view in his perennially best-selling book, *Mormon Doctrine*. Although *Mormon Doctrine* is not official LDS doctrine, many Latter-day Saints continue to refer to its pages in search of answers to their questions.

The trend from a more liberal to a more conservative position concerning the theory of evolution is exemplified by the reactions to the work of the Mormon intellectual B. H. Roberts. This should not be surprising considering the fact that Roberts's

⁵⁴Sherlock, 14; and Bergera and Priddis, 134-148.

⁵⁵See O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis in Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987); and Harold T. Christensen and Kenneth L. Cannon, "The Fundamentalist Emphasis at Brigham Young University: 1935-1973," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 17, no. 1 (1978): 55.

intellectual development occurred during the period of LDS liberality toward secular learning and this liberality continued to influence his writing well into the period of conservative reaction.

A poor emigrant from England, at age nine Roberts accompanied his fourteen-year-old sister Polly across the plains on foot in 1866. After his arrival in Utah, he developed a distinguished career of Church service that lasted throughout his life. He became a General Authority of the Church when he was called to the First Council of the Seventy in 1887.⁵⁶ Roberts also successfully ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives but was excluded from taking his seat because the House objected to having a polygamist within their midst.⁵⁷ Regardless of such a colorful life, Roberts's most important legacy has been the number of highly influential theological treatises he left behind. Despite his lack of formal learning, Roberts is considered to be one of the greatest Latter-day Saint intellectuals of all time; it has been argued that no

⁵⁶The General Authorities are the General ruling body of the Church consisting of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Council of the Seventy. The Council of the Seventy is second in authority only to the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. Mormon scripture defines the role of a Seventy thus: "The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve . . . in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same in all nations, first unto the Gentiles and then unto the Jews." *Doctrine and Covenants*: Section 107, verse 34. (Hereafter cited as D&C.)

⁵⁷Allen and Leonard, 438-439.

other LDS scholar had mastered more works and published as much scholarly material.⁵⁸

Like the Chamberlins and Petersons, Roberts accepted the theory of evolution as well as some Biblical criticism. In his *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, he even applied the methods of Biblical scrutiny to the *Book of Mormon* which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes to be a pure and inspired translation of ancient records without the corrupting influence of intervening hands or scribal errors that they believe afflict the Bible. The *Studies* exemplify the intellectual climate of Roberts's earlier life. It is in these *Studies* that Roberts uses logical argumentation and archaeological and other evidence to question or supplement many passages found in the *Book of Mormon*. In this critical analysis, Roberts's belief that both science and scripture are revelations of the mind of God is clearly evident.⁵⁹ Roberts believed all Latter-day Saints should take full advantage of secular learning in order to understand the workings of the divine; according to Roberts, science should be a support and supplement to theology.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Arrington, 22; and Arrington and Bitton, 257.

⁵⁹B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

⁶⁰Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 257-258.

Later in life, the conservative reaction to Roberts's belief in the theory of evolution is illustrative of the changing intellectual climate. Like most serious scholars, Roberts was well acquainted with the works of Darwin and Spencer.⁶¹ As a young man, Roberts studied the works of the American Spencerian, John Fiske.⁶² In his sermons and writings, the influence of Spencer and Fiske is evident. For example, Roberts argued that the world was continually progressing.⁶³ Advances in science and continued revelation through latter-day prophets would usher in the millennium when the fullness of the gospel and the fullness of science would be combined.⁶⁴ In his major theological treatise, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, Roberts tries to combine all extant knowledge, including the theory of evolution, into a coherent whole.

The three drafts of the *TWL*, written between 1928 and 1933, reveal a confrontation between Roberts and his

⁶¹B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 20-21, 43, 82, 205, 235, & 239.

⁶²*Ibid.*, clxi.

⁶³The reader may note a similarity here to Spiritualist thought which was once popular in the United States and may have influenced Roberts's ideas. However, there is no indication of any direct link to Spiritualist influences in any of his writings. For a history the Spiritualist movement see Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

⁶⁴See Arrington and Bitton, 257; and Roberts, cxx-cxxi, 115-119, 417, & 442.

conservative opponents.⁶⁵ The *TWL* was originally meant as a manual for instruction to be used throughout the church. However, in 1928, a committee of five Apostles appointed to review the manuscript had some reservations about the work being used as an official course of study. Chief among the reservations was Roberts's views on the origin of life and the origin of man. Through five years of revisions, Roberts refused to change his views since he believed the theory of evolution was necessary to reconcile science and religion and thereby strengthening the faith of the Saints.

In April of 1930, Joseph Fielding Smith, the son of Joseph F. Smith and member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, publicly opposed Roberts's evolutionary views in favor of a more literal reading of scripture. This public confrontation between Smith and Roberts led to a private debate before the Quorum of the Twelve. After much deliberation, the Quorum of the Twelve decided that nothing could be gained by further consideration of the matter. Reaffirming the statement issued by the First Presidency in 1909, they agreed that God had created man; anything beyond this was mere speculation. Roberts died of diabetes one year after the debate and his masterwork remained unpublished until 1994.⁶⁶

⁶⁵See especially "Draft 2 of The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology" (Provo, UT: BYU Studies), Chapter 31, 43-49.

It is interesting to note that Roberts's autobiography ignores the controversy all together.⁶⁷ According to its editor Gary James Bergera, he probably avoided this discussion because it involved ecclesiastical colleagues whom he personally respected despite their differences. Bergera also argues that such an emotional issue was "too painful for the aging and increasingly melancholy Roberts to recall in detail."⁶⁸ Regardless of these arguments, it is clear from Roberts's autobiography that he wished to include only faith-promoting stories which would benefit the Latter-day Saints. Roberts's main biographer, Truman G. Madsen, records Roberts's struggle to publish the *TWL* in *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story*. However, Madsen's discussions of this topic is deficient in supporting detail since Madsen viewed this incident as just one small event in Roberts's eventful life.⁶⁹

⁶⁶This story most recently appears in Gary Hatch, "The Truth, The Way, The Life: The Capstone to B. H. Roberts' Doctrinal Works," *Brigham Young Magazine* (November 1994): 22-29; and James B. Allen, "The Story of the Truth, The Way, The Life," in Roberts, *TWL*, clix-cxcviii. Older renditions appear in Richard Sherlock, "'We Can See No Advantage to a Continuation of the Discussion': The Roberts-Smith-Talmage Affair," *Dialogue* 13, no. 3 (1980): 63-78; and Jeffrey E. Keller, "Discussion Continued: The Sequel to the Roberts-Smith-Talmage Affair," *Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (1982): 79-98.

⁶⁷B. H. Roberts, *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990).

⁶⁸Gary James Bergera, "Editor's Afterward," in *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts*, 254.

⁶⁹Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 338-345.

In order to elaborate upon Madsen's narrative as well as the other general surveys previously mentioned, a vast array of primary sources including several articles from official LDS journals such as the *Juvenile Instructor*, the *Improvement Era*, the *Liahona*, and the *Millennial Star* will be used. Other important primary sources used for this purpose will include Roberts's three drafts of the *TWL*, the Chamberlins' and Petersons' published and unpublished articles, and Joseph Fielding Smith's *Man: His Origin and Destiny*.⁷⁰ Articles from unofficial Latter-day Saint journals including *BYU Studies*, the *Journal of Mormon History*, *Dialogue*, and *Sunstone* will also be used. The resulting story will illustrate the difficulties B. H. Roberts faced in one of his major efforts, and in so doing will illustrate the history of LDS reactions to the theory of evolution. In order to understand Roberts's story, however, much historical background will be examined to set the stage. This historical background and Roberts's story exemplify the history Latter-day Saint reactions to the theory of evolution. Accordingly, it is to the historical background that we now turn.

⁷⁰Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954).

2. DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Joseph Smith

In the summer of 1844, fifteen years before the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was murdered by an angry mob in Carthage, Illinois.¹ Even though Smith had never heard of Darwin, his theological contributions are important to the subsequent history of Mormonism and evolution since he laid the foundations of Latter-day Saint theology. All subsequent arguments, whether pro-evolutionary or creationist, would be built upon his contributions.² Unfortunately, for those Latter-day Saints who would directly confront the religious implications of the *Origin*, Smith left no absolute doctrinal statements concerning the actual physical process of creation. As a result, statements concerning the mode of creation could be interpreted in support of evolutionists or in support of their more conservative counterparts.

¹For a review of the events leading up to this episode, see Allen and Leonard, 3-209; and Arrington and Bitton, 3-82.

²Joseph Smith's followers past and present consider Smith an instrument in God's hands to restore the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Smith's greatest theological contribution was a set of scriptures canonized by the LDS Church. These scriptures include the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. Most of Smith's teachings which are not canonized are also considered to be authoritative.³ This should not be surprising since Smith is generally regarded as the greatest of all Mormon prophets. It has been claimed by believers that Smith has done more for the religious salvation of men than anyone except Jesus Christ.⁴ Even though Smith's successors also hold the prophetic title and fill a similar role, Smith is often referred to as "the Prophet" by many Latter-day Saints. Due to his stature within the LDS community, Smith's doctrinal expositions often carry a singular weight of authority.⁵ In fact, Smith's successors continue to use the canonized scriptures assembled by Smith as their main support for doctrinal expositions, clarifications and official church positions. Smith's other contributions also

³Smith pointed out that he was entitled to his own opinions while not acting in his role as a prophet. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). In order to avoid confusion, however, this chapter will include only those utterances made by Smith which are generally considered to be authoritative.

⁴D&C 135:3, written by then Apostle and future Prophet, John Taylor.

⁵This does not imply that succeeding prophets are viewed as less important. These prophets continue to make official proclamations concerning contemporary issues. However, it would be rare to find a prophet in any age of LDS history departing from the theological foundations laid by Joseph Smith.

often are cited as support for theological positions or doctrinal expositions. The fact that almost all subsequent Mormon doctrinal elucidations are built upon Smith's theological foundations are grounds for exploring not only how Mormonism's set of canonized scripture has contributed to the subsequent history of Mormonism and evolution but also how Smith's teachings have influenced this history as well.

2.2 Intellectual Vigor and Views on Secular Learning

Although Smith was not well-educated, he encouraged intellectual inquiry among members of the Church.⁶ The intellectual vigor that existed within the early Church has been attested to by many historians.⁷ Smith encouraged the "creative thought of others who continued to experiment with even newer 'truths.'"⁸ In a public sermon, Smith rebuked some of his more dogmatic followers whom he believed discouraged the creative thought of others.⁹ He claimed this was "too much like

⁶Smith had the equivalent of a third grade education. Leonard J. Arrington, *The Arrington Lecture Series* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1996), 5.

⁷For example, see James B. Allen's response to Bitton in *Dialogue*, 134-140, and Arrington "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 17-18.

⁸Arrington, *Lecture Series*, 7.

⁹Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 17-18.

the Methodists, and not the Latter-day Saints." According to Smith, "Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church." Smith wanted "the liberty of thinking and believing as I please" to be extended to all members of the church.¹⁰ Many of the faithful considered early Mormonism to be not only spiritually uplifting but intellectually satisfying as well.¹¹

Smith also held secular learning in high regard. This is reflected in the *Book of Mormon* and the *Doctrine and Covenants* first published by the Church in the spring of 1830 and the fall of 1835 respectively. As far as canonized scriptures are concerned, it is in the *Doctrine and Covenants* that the early LDS attitude toward secular learning is well articulated. A few examples from the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Book of Mormon* will suffice. It is in the *Doctrine and Covenants* that we read the words:

study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people. . . . And, verily I say unto you, that it is my will that you should . . . obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion. . . . Teach ye diligently

¹⁰See Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 18; B. H. Roberts, ed., *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971) 5:340; and the "History of Joseph Smith," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 20 (1858): 774.

¹¹Arrington, *Lecture Series*, 7.

and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms--That ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you, and the mission with which I have commissioned you. . . . And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.¹²

This attitude toward secular learning is reinforced by the fact that the *Book of Mormon* teaches that "to be learned is good if [one] hearkens unto the counsels of God."¹³

Smith's views on secular learning and education can be summarized in his inaugural address given on 3 February 1841 after he was elected mayor of the newly founded city of Nauvoo, Illinois, a predominantly Mormon settlement.¹⁴ "As the presiding officer of the law-making department of the municipal government" Smith wished to communicate "matters of paramount importance"

¹²D&C 90:15, 93:53 and 88:78-80 & 118.

¹³2 Nephi 9:29.

¹⁴For a discussion of events leading up to the foundation of Nauvoo, see Allen and Leonard, 113-157; and Arrington and Bitton, 44-69.

such as the propagation of learning and the utilization of science for the welfare of the citizens of Nauvoo. As mayor, Smith argued that secular learning and applied science were necessary for the success of the city.

As part of Smith's initial program, a university would be inaugurated for the benefit of the Saints. According to Smith, the importance of a university could not "be too forcibly impressed" upon them. Smith believed that "all matters in relation to mental culture" should be taught. He specifically wanted full collegiate courses "in the arts, sciences, and learned professions." Classes on natural philosophy, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy, chemistry, botany, and mineralogy would be included in the curriculum. According to Smith, "the wheels of education should never be clogged, or retrograde, but roll progressively from the Alpha to the Omega of a most perfect, liberal, and thorough course of university attainments."¹⁵

Canonized scripture and the teachings of the Prophet make it clear that Latter-day Saints were encouraged to pursue all avenues of secular knowledge including the sciences. The *Doctrine and Covenants* and Smith's inaugural address advised the Saints to study geology and mineralogy (the study "of things . . . in

¹⁵Roberts, *History of the Church*, 4:288-289.

the earth, and under the earth") as well as the natural sciences of biology and botany.

2.3 The Foundations of Evolutionary Arguments

Having discussed Smith's views on secular learning and science in general we now turn to specific scriptural passages and authoritative statements that have been used as foundations for subsequent expositions of Mormonism and evolutionary theory. Unlike the authoritative statements concerning secular knowledge and science noted above, Smith's doctrinal foundations that help elucidate possible reconciliations or repudiations of Mormonism and Darwinism are less than clear.

The canonized scriptures of Mormonism are the most authoritative voice on this subject. The LDS scriptural canon contains three different creation narratives. The first is the familiar Judeo-Christian account that appears in the Old Testament. The other two creation narratives appear in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Although they generally follow the same narrative as the creation account in Genesis, several important differences relevant to our subject are apparent.

Similarities and differences between the creation accounts are partially explained by the LDS approach to

the Bible. Appearing at the end of the *Pearl of Great Price* are the "Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" written by Joseph Smith in response inquiries into the nature of LDS doctrines and beliefs. The Articles of Faith cover some basic doctrines that every faithful member of the LDS Church should learn as fundamental.¹⁶ In the eighth article of faith, Smith wrote: "we believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly."¹⁷ The *Book of Mormon* explains that the doctrine found in the Bible was originally "just and true . . . and containeth the fullness of the gospel of the Lord." However, parts of these original truths were lost through ensuing translations until "many plain and precious things [were] taken away from the book."¹⁸

Smith echoed these sentiments in his own sermons. He proclaimed that he believed "the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers." However, "ignorant translators, careless transcribers or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."¹⁹ Because of these errors, "an exceedingly

¹⁶Ibid., 4:535-54; and Allen and Leonard, 166.

¹⁷Joseph Smith, "The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," in the *Pearl of Great Price*, 60-61.

¹⁸1 Nephi 13:24 & 28

¹⁹Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 327; and 10-11, 25, 310 & 290.

great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them."²⁰ Mormons believe their additional scriptures help remove these stumbling blocks by restoring the doctrine of the Bible to its pristine condition.²¹ Mormons believe the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price* complement and explain the teachings of the Bible. According to the *Book of Mormon*, "These last records . . . shall establish the truth of the first."²² This means the creation narratives contained in the *Pearl of Great Price* are meant to supplement and clarify the Genesis account of creation. These supplementary creation accounts contain added insights into the act of creation without contradicting the other narratives.

The first alternative creation account from the *Pearl of Great Price* is from Smith's revision of the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis which is called the "Book of Moses." LDS faithful believe the creation account in Moses adds important insights to the original Genesis narration. In the first chapter, Moses was shown the entire earth and all its inhabitants in a vision. Moses then asked why God had made these creatures and how was it done. God answered Moses by

²⁰1 Nephi 13:29

²¹Smith, *Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 10-11.

²²1 Nephi 13:24-40. See also, Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 101 & 231.

telling him the important question is why these things were created and not how they were created. He gives Moses an abbreviated version of the creation that is relevant insofar as illuminates the most important question as to why they were created--as an important part of the plan "to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."²³ Several LDS theologians have noted these verses, arguing that creation accounts are a condensed sketch of what actually occurred. This leaves open the possibility of organic evolution without necessarily contradicting the scriptural accounts of creation.²⁴

The other creation account unique to the Mormon religion also sheds some light on the evolutionary question. This account appears in the *Pearl of Great Price* as part of the "Book of Abraham." Faithful Latter-day Saints believe the "Book of Abraham" is Smith's translation of Abraham's ancient writings while Abraham was in Egypt. The Abrahamic creation account is perhaps the most important doctrinal source for pro-evolutionist writings within the Church. This is largely due to the fact that, in the Abrahamic account, the term "day" is replaced with word "time." These

²³Moses 1-3. In *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology* Paul confirms that this is a popular interpretation of these scriptural passages. See page 172.

²⁴See the discussions of Parley P. Pratt and Brigham Young in Chapter 2.

times seem only to be limited by the period requisite to finish the designated creation tasks. Because these passages are considered to be clarifications of the two Mosaic accounts given in Genesis and the "Book of Moses" which use the term "day," it is believed by many that "day" should be defined as a non-specific period of time.²⁵ It has been pointed out that the word "day" also denotes different periods of time in other passages of scripture.²⁶ This apparently leaves LDS pro-evolutionary theologians with an indefinite period of time for the creation of the earth and its inhabitants through natural selection.²⁷

In addition to the creation account in Abraham, Smith also implied the age of the earth was much older than conservative theologians of the nineteenth century were willing to accept; "the range of views for the earth's age ranged generally from about 4000 years to 6000 years before Christ."²⁸ In a much quoted letter written by one of Smith's closest associates to the Prophet's brother William, W. W. Phelps refers to the

²⁵Thomas R. Valetta, "I Have A Question," *Ensign* (January 1994): 533-534.

²⁶For Example, see Valetta, 534; and Bruce R. McConkie, "Day" in *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 180.

²⁷F. Kent Nielsen and Stephen D. Ricks, "Creation, Creation Accounts," in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:340-343.

²⁸Duane E. Jeffrey, "Seers, Savants and Evolution: The Uncomfortable Interface," *Dialogue* 8, nos. 3 & 4 (1973): 47.

many theological contributions made by his deceased friend. Concerning Smith's views on the age of the earth Phelps writes:

Well, now, Brother William, when the house of Israel begins to come into the glorious mysteries of the kingdom, and find that Jesus Christ, whose goings forth, as the prophets said, have been from of old, from eternity: and that eternity, agreeably to the records found in the catacombs of Egypt [the Book of Abraham], has been going on in this system, (not this world) almost two thousand five hundred and fifty five millions of years: and to know at the same time, that deists, geologists and others are trying to prove that the matter must have existed hundreds of thousands of years;--it almost tempts the flesh to fly to God, or muster faith like Enoch to be translated . .

.²⁹

This passage has been used by many pro-evolutionists within the Church in conjunction with the creation account in the "Book of Abraham." A combination of the terminology used in the "Book of Abraham" and Smith's second-hand comment suggests to them that the earth is old enough to support organic evolution.

From our examination thus far, it may seem that Latter-day Saints possess solid doctrinal foundations which can be used in support of theistic evolution. However, a close examination of Phelps's statement

²⁹Quoted in Jeffrey, 48. It should be noted here that except for officially edited statements by Joseph Smith, many statements from early contemporaries of Smith purport first person authority but should be considered with some reserve. Memory and stenographic issues may bear on their exact representation of Smith's thoughts.

indicates this is not necessarily so; Smith's statements concerning the creation were almost always enigmatic and this passage is representative of his remarks. While pro-evolutionists within the Church interpret this passage to support their arguments, claiming Smith taught the physical creation occurred over immense periods of geological time, their opponents suggest a different interpretation. According to Duane E. Jeffrey: "Some have used it to indicate that the planet earth is 2.55 billion years old; others, taking careful note of the phrase in parentheses, insist that it has no such meaning, that it refers to a much larger physical system and has no bearing on the age of the earth."³⁰ The enigmatic nature of Smith's statement and the resulting differences of interpretation are indicative of the fact that no firm doctrinal statements concerning the method and mode of creation existed at the time of Smith's death.

Further exploration of LDS scripture suggests any claims to solid doctrinal foundations behind arguments bolstering theistic evolution are tentative. Several passages in the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price* tend to support a more conservative view of creation. For example, the creation accounts found in the *Pearl of Great Price* as

³⁰Jeffrey, 48.

well as "Genesis" all declare that Adam was the first man created in the image of God. In light of this statement, the possibility of genealogical ancestors which preceded the advent of Adam becomes a more difficult and tenuous position to uphold.

Adam and Eve, moreover, are warned they will die if they partake of the forbidden fruit in the Genesis account.³¹ The "Book of Moses" complements Genesis by emphasizing the fact that death first entered the world when Adam "fell," while the *Book of Mormon* declares that this death was "the physical death of the body."³² In light of these passages, it becomes even more difficult to maintain the position that Adam possessed evolutionary ancestors or that the progenitors of modern species lived and died before Adam fell. Other passages found in LDS scripture also support this conclusion.³³

An important passage in the *Book of Mormon* also suggests the possibility of creation through evolution is tentative at best. In the "Second Book of Nephi" we find the following declaration:

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in

³¹Genesis 2:17 & 3:3.

³²Moses 4:25 & Alma 42:9.

³³See Alma 12:24-25; Helaman 14:15-16; and D&C 29:42.

which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.³⁴

This verse suggests the biological creation existed perpetually in the state in which it was created until the fall of Adam. In other words, there seemed to be no possibility of organic change. This interpretation of the passage reaffirms that there was no death previous to the fall of Adam.

One other passage relevant to our doctrinal analysis also appears in the *Doctrine and Covenants* which states, "And the first man of all men have I called Adam, which is many."³⁵ Obviously, this passage can be interpreted by Latter-day Saint biologists as suggesting that mankind is not a descendant of a single set of parents--most biologists accept this as fact due to recent genetic research.³⁶ However, Smith interpreted this passage for posterity. He established that "the name means many, because he is the father of all."³⁷ Most other General Authorities have agreed with Smith due to the reasonableness of his interpretation, not to

³⁴2 Nephi 2:22-23.

³⁵Moses 1:34

³⁶Recently geneticists have been considering the possibility of a genetic "Eve"; an ancient ancestor who may have contributed much of the genetic material found in modern human beings. However, biologists are quick to point out that this does not mean that this Eve was the first female on earth. Many other human individuals preceded her and contributed genetic material to offspring contemporary with that of genetic Eve.

³⁷Smith, *Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 167.

mention the weight of authority that is associated with his name. However, it should be noted that some Latter-day Saints recognize this statement should not be considered official doctrine since it is not contained in the canonized scripture or in a First Presidency message explicating or proclaiming gospel truths.

Several important ideas which were relevant to the reception of the theory of evolution were "in the air" during the formative stage of Latter-day Saint doctrinal development. Some of these ideas were reflected in the *Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price* and certain declarations made by the Prophet. For example, a popular belief among eighteenth and nineteenth century natural theologians that both nature and scripture are revelations of God is taught in the *Book of Mormon* as well as the *Pearl of Great Price*. William Paley, the most popular natural theologian of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, focused on creation as part of divine revelation. According to Paley, the existence of the created established the existence of a creator; his classic example of the existence of a watch establishing the reality watchmaker is well-known. In short, "Paley believed that the world was so full of design there must be a designer in the same way as a watch found on a path

indicated the existence of a watchmaker."³⁸ Paley's *Natural Theology* was one of the most influential works of its time.³⁹ Most learned men--including Darwin during his Cambridge days--were impressed with his arguments for design. Its compelling argument helped to prove Christianity through the evidences provided by nature.⁴⁰ Paley's natural theology was immensely popular in the United States when Joseph Smith was translating the *Book of Mormon* in the late 1820s. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Smith was aware of Paley's work at this time, it is interesting to note the similarities between natural theology and some *Book of Mormon* passages.

In the *Book of Mormon*, a prophet named Alma confronts an "anti-Christ" named Korihor. Korihor believes he can confound Alma with his own cunning. He begins by asking Alma to prove the existence of a God. In reply, Alma asks Korihor for evidence to the contrary and claims "that ye have none, save it be your word only." Alma perceives that Korihor chooses to deny the

³⁸Janet Browne, *Charles Darwin: Voyaging* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 129; and Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 78.

³⁹William Paley, *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1875). The first edition was published in 1802.

⁴⁰Browne, 78.

existence of God not because of the lack of evidence but because Korihor is "possessed with a lying spirit;" Alma goes on to explain that the evidence, as presented to all, proves the existence of a Supreme Being. In further defiance Korihor then asks for a sign that will prove God's existence; if he receives this sign "then [he] will be convinced of the truth of [Alma's] words." Angered by Korihor's audacity, Alma declares:

Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when you have testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator.⁴¹

The arguments of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century natural theologians and Alma's answer to Korihor are remarkably similar. The *Book of Mormon* is arguing the proof for a supreme being can be established by a combination of scriptural and natural revelation. Similarly the *Pearl of Great Price* proclaims, "All things are created and made to bear record of [God]."⁴² In other words, nature reveals the existence of a supreme being; the perfect working

⁴¹Alma 30:44.

⁴²Moses 6:63.

balance of all of nature's complex parts proves the reality of God in much the same way that the working balance of the parts of a watch tend to prove the existence of a watchmaker.

Smith held other important beliefs in common with Paley. For instance, he argued that, in order for harmony to exist, all things created must inhabit a specific station "beyond which they cannot pass." God created a world where all of his creations inhabit a specific niche. This is evidence of God's existence. Smith concludes this passage by explaining no creature can be created except it be after its own kind.⁴³ This resonated with other natural theologians who believed God's creations inhabit a specific niche which will be inherited by offspring with similar characteristics which will assure continued success in a particular habitat. God's goodness is demonstrated by the fact that each creature is perfectly adapted to its environment. The belief that all of God's creatures were created to inhabit specific environmental niches and that the offspring of these creatures inherit the characteristics which helped their parents survive has been termed "special creation." Judging from the preceding passages, it seems reasonable to include Smith as a special creationist.

⁴³Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 197-198. Also see D&C 93.

Even though natural theology and the idea of progressive change were not mutually exclusive, they were not easily reconciled. A compromise between the two can be seen in the work of Asa Gray cited earlier.⁴⁴ Gray believed God guided the evolutionary process. Divine intervention insured that each individual species would evolve to fit its environmental niche perfectly. In other words, God created each species to fit a particular environment; however, his mode of creation was evolutionary.⁴⁵ Even though Smith never affirmed such views, his followers would find similar ideas to be acceptable reconciliations of science and religion.

Other ideas which were more compatible with the theory of evolution can also be found in LDS scriptures as well as Smith's teachings. The most important being the prominent eighteenth-century belief in progress. Although certainly not a new idea, the belief in the possible improvement of lifestyles and increased affluence due to technological and scientific progress increased in popularity during the nineteenth century.⁴⁶

⁴⁴See Chapter 1.

⁴⁵Gray, 153-184.

⁴⁶The belief that science would lead to the physical improvement of mankind's circumstances begins with Sir Francis Bacon's posthumous *New Atlantis* (1627). The political and religious radicals of the English Revolution believed in Bacon's vision. These radicals believed that Bacon's program for the improvement would create the physical conditions needed to help usher in the Millennium. See Margaret C. Jacob, *The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988); and Charle Webster, *The Great Instauration:*

Smith also believed in progress. However, Smith emphasized an individual progression. According to the *Doctrine and Covenants*, even Jesus Christ "received not of the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fullness; and thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fullness at first."⁴⁷ Smith believed that God created all spirits--including Christ's--before their advent upon the earth; due to this spiritual act of procreation, all men and women are the literal sons and daughters of God.⁴⁸ Man is meant to develop until he becomes like his Father. In the *Doctrine and Covenants* we read, "He that receiveth light and continueth in God, receiveth more light, and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day." Those who keep the commandments will "receive grace for grace" until they finally receive "his fullness" which consists of the "glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses. Then shall they be Gods, because they have all power."⁴⁹

Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660 (London: Duckworth Publishing Company, 1975). For a discussion of how a belief in progress influenced the reception of Darwin's theory see John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1959); and Michael Ruse, *Monad to Man: The Concept of Evolution in Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁴⁷D&C 93:12-14.

⁴⁸Deuteronomy 14:1, Psalms 82:6, Hosea 1:10, Acts 17:29, Romans 8:16, D&C 76:24; Abraham 3:18-23, Moses 3:1-5

Several LDS theologians have used these statements to argue that Smith taught a form of evolution similar to Herbert Spencer's before the appearance of either the *Origin* or Spencer's own *First Principles*.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the conclusion arrived at by these scholars is highly questionable since progression and evolution are not necessarily the same thing. An acorn growing into an oak or a caterpillar developing into butterfly is obviously the type of progression referred to by Smith; it is natural development or growth that occurs during the normal life-span of a creature belonging to a particular species.⁵¹ Evolution, however, goes beyond a mere progression; true evolution occurs when an oak or a butterfly develops until it has become a new species. A closer look at Latter-day Saint scripture seems to indicate this kind of progression is much more difficult to justify than some LDS evolutionists have suggested. All three creation accounts agree that God commanded every creature to "multiply after its own kind" while the "Book of Moses"

⁴⁹D&C 50:24; 93:20; Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 5:2; and D&C 132:20. Latter-day Saints believe that these statements concur with Jesus's invitational command given in the Bible to be perfect just as God is perfect. See Matthew 5:48.

⁵⁰Especially John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist: A Contribution to Mormon Philosophy* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 103-114.

⁵¹As was noted in Chapter 1, this was similar to Wallace's Spiritualism which was very popular in the United States at this time.

asserts that every creature must "remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it."⁵² LDS evolutionists who have noted the difficulties contained in these passages often interpret the word "kind" to mean morphological class. If this definition is accepted then animals could remain in their own morphological "sphere." Creatures may evolve into new types or species while remaining within their specific kind.

It is clear from the preceding passages, that, at the time of Smith's death, no clear doctrinal foundations were in place which could settle the coming creationist-evolutionist debate. If the "Book of Moses" is any indication, it would seem these additional scriptural resources were more concerned with the purpose of creation than the actual process--the actual process not being relevant to religious salvation. As a result, Smith left his followers with a number of enigmatic statements relating to the creation. Some of these statements more easily lent themselves to an evolutionary interpretation of the creation and have been emphasized by evolutionists within the Church; others more easily lent themselves to traditional interpretations of the creation and have been used by Latter-day Saints who prefer a more literal interpretation of the creation. A combination of

⁵²Moses 3:9

scientific evidence and theological arguments based on individual interpretations of scriptures contained in the LDS canon as well as important historical events delineate the subsequent history of LDS reactions to evolution that will be examined in the following chapters.

3. INTERLUDE: 1844-1908

3.1 A Period of Elaboration

Renowned LDS historian, Leonard J. Arrington, has labeled the period from the death of Joseph Smith in 1844 to the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1867 as the elaboration stage of Mormon history.¹ During this stage, prominent LDS theologians built upon what Joseph Smith had left behind. This stage is marked by relative freedom of thought among early leaders of the Utah Church especially concerning matters of origins. During this period, Brigham Young led the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as its prophet and president. Though Young's propensity to correct leaders of the Church when he felt they were in error was widely known, it did not lead to intellectually sterility during this era; Young's actions were, on the contrary, a symptom of the general intellectual vigor that characterized the period. Young's attempts to correct leaders of the Church were attempts to anchor the developing Latter-day Saint theology to foundations laid by Joseph Smith. Although Brigham Young gave vigorous leadership, he also gave

¹Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 18.

other Church leaders a relatively long tether from which to work.²

It is also during this stage that Latter-day Saints first encountered the theory of evolution though such encounters were relatively benign. Isolated in the inter-mountain West, modernism was not yet seen as a threat to Mormonism since it had yet to infringe on the Latter-day Saint hegemony in matters of philosophy. However, as outside influences grew increasingly stronger especially after 1867, LDS responses to the theory of evolution became more common in Latter-day Saint literature. As LDS isolation became jeopardized by westward expansion, Utah Mormons began to confront the theory of evolution and all its implications. Towards the end of the century, writings dealing with the theory of evolution began to appear with ever increasing regularity.

3.2 Early Theories on the Origin of Man

As previously noted, Smith left no absolute statement clarifying the physical act of creation.³ He

²Most Church historians recognize this period as one of relative intellectual vigor. Intellectual exploration was encouraged as Church doctrine continued to be defined. Paul's *Science, Religion and Mormon Cosmology* contains an excellent description of the intellectual atmosphere that prevailed during this period.

³See Chapter 2.

also left no clear statements regarding the literalness of certain scriptural passages bearing on the subject of origins.⁴ As a result, early leaders of the Utah Church felt free to interpret the creation accounts as they wished. Due to relative isolation from the rest of the world, the Church was often the highest authority concerning philosophical and spiritual matters. One result of this hegemony was the fact that the theory of evolution was relatively insignificant when compared to theories of origins put forth by the leaders of the Church. Although differing in many respects, any one of these theories could be adopted as an acceptable possibility of the actual process of creation.

3.3 Parley P. Pratt

One of the first to interpret the creation scriptures after the death of Joseph Smith was Parley P. Pratt. A well known leader of the early LDS church, Pratt served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1835 until his death in 1857. He was also

⁴Smith often insisted that certain scriptural passages should be read metaphorically. See D&C 77 and *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 276. However, Smith preferred to take the scriptures literally whenever possible. See Smith, *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 264 & 364-365.

a personal friend of Joseph Smith's and well acquainted with his philosophy.

In his autobiography, Pratt explains that his opportunities for a formal education were "more limited than most of the youths of my country, on account of my time being mostly required in physical exertion to assist in sustaining the family of my father."⁵ However, due of his love for reading and his dedication to self-education many Latter-day Saints consider him to be one of the greatest LDS intellectuals of all time.⁶

In his *Key to the Science of Theology* published in 1855, Pratt discussed the creation accounts given by Moses. Pratt argued that when "Paradise was lost by sin" the heavens were "veiled from view" and man was no longer worthy to retain the knowledge of his true origins. Even though the process of creation was later revealed to Moses, his followers were not prepared to hear the true account. Moses "was forced . . . to veil the past in mystery." According to Pratt, the children of Israel were true children in respect to their intellectual development. Metaphorically speaking, Moses was constrained to give the children of Israel

⁵Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), 2-3.

⁶Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 22.

intellectual milk because they could not yet digest the more difficult meat of the creation.⁷

Moses's account of the creation given to the children of Israel is equated by Pratt to the stories parents tell their own children concerning the act of physical procreation. According to Pratt, parents still conceal "the mysteries of procreation" from their children when they feel they are too immature to handle the truth. In these situations, parents often relate some "childish tale of newborn life" such as baby spontaneously springing forth from underneath a cabbage leaf. According to Pratt, the creation account given by Moses to the children of Israel served a similar purpose. It gave them an account of the creation that they were intellectually prepared to hear. Instead of the truth, they were told that a man was "moulded from the earth, as a brick" and that "woman [was] manufactured from a rib!"⁸

Pratt's belief that the creation account in Genesis was an intellectually satisfying myth appropriated by the children of Israel was certainly not unique to this period. According to Jonathan Wells, many scientists and theologians had already rejected a literal interpretation of Genesis by accepting the modern

⁷Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), 30. Originally published in 1855.

⁸Ibid.

geological time scale. Among intellectuals, there was not much opposition to Darwinism during the nineteenth century based on the fact that it challenged the Genesis account of creation. Historians who see such an opposition "are to some extent reading the Biblical fundamentalism of twentieth-century creationist movements back into the earlier controversy."⁹ Pratt's belief that the Genesis account was just a myth would later receive support from several well-educated Latter-day Saints who would accept some precepts of higher Biblical criticism in the late-nineteenth century.

Basing his theory on Smith's teachings concerning the eternal existence of matter and the plurality of worlds, Pratt also argued that life on earth could not be created *ex nihilo*; accordingly, it must have been transplanted from other worlds already in existence.¹⁰ He writes:

A Royal Planter now descends from yonder world of older date and bearing in his hand the choice seeds of the older paradise, plants them in the virgin soil of our newborn earth. They grow and flourish there and, bearing seed, replant themselves, and thus clothe the naked earth with scenes of beauty and the air with fragrant incense. Ripening fruits and herbs at length abound. Then lo! from yonder world is transferred

⁹Wells, 3-4.

¹⁰Smith had taught of multiple worlds, creations, and organization of existing matter rather than creation *ex nihilo*. See D&C 8836-38; Moses 1:33, D&C 76: 22-24 and *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 350-351 & 301-302.

every species of animal life. Male and female they come . . . and a voice is heard again, "Be fruitful and multiply."¹¹

Pratt extends this theory to the origins of man. According to Pratt, the physical bodies of Adam and Eve were transplanted from pre-existing worlds once this world had been properly prepared.¹²

Considering Pratt's closeness to Smith, it should not be surprising that they held similar views concerning some aspects of the creation. For example, both Smith and Pratt's beliefs generally paralleled those beliefs of the natural theologians of their day. According to Pratt, the natural world was proof of God's existence. All animals were designed "in an infinite variety of utility and adaptation." The fact that each creation was perfectly adapted to its environment was proof of the "wisdom" of the "designing and creating power." Simply put, design in nature must prove the existence of a designer.¹³

3.4 Orson Hyde

Pratt's Apostolic colleague, Orson Hyde, had his own theory concerning the origins of life. For Hyde the

¹¹Pratt, 29.

¹²Ibid., 30.

¹³Ibid., 27-28.

true account of creation was a question of semantics. In an address given to the Saints at a General Conference of the Church on 5 October 1854, Hyde took it upon himself to interpret the traditional account of creation.

He began by pointing out that Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth. He then rhetorically asked, "What does the term replenish mean?" Hyde explained that "This word is derived from the Latin; "re" and "Plenus;" "re" denotes repetition, iteration; and "plenus" signifies full, complete; then the meaning of the word replenish is, to refill, recomplete."¹⁴

Hyde then continued with an apt metaphor for his pioneer audience by comparing the earth to a dry goods store. According to Hyde, the traditional interpretation of the Genesis account resembles the creation of a new store which had yet to be stocked. The store is empty and void until its owner fills its shelves with the proper materials.

Hyde maintained that this traditional interpretation disregards the true meaning of the word "replenish." When taking this word into account, the metaphor changes. Instead of a new store stocked with

¹⁴Orson Hyde, "The Marriage Relation," in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: Published by F. D. Richards, 1855), 79.

original goods for the first time, it is an old store which had been stocked with goods in the past. The owner in Hyde's metaphor replenishes his store with new goods when his stocks are diminished. He explained, "If I were to go into a merchant's store, and find he had got a new stock of goods, I should say--'You have replenished your stock, that is, filled up your establishment, for it looks as it did before.'"¹⁵

Hyde then compares this to the creation account in Genesis. According to Hyde, "The world was peopled before the days of Adam. . . . When God said, Go forth and replenish the earth; it was to replenish the inhabitants of the human species, and make it as it was before."

He also compares the creation narrative to the story of Noah. He argues that the world was peopled before the advent of Adam in much the same way as the world was peopled before the deluge. According to Hyde, it has been said that Adam and Noah became the respective fathers of new worlds, but "it was the same old world still, and will continue to be, though it may pass through many changes."¹⁶

At first glance, it would seem as if Hyde were espousing a "catastrophist" philosophy. This especially

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 79-80.

seems probable considering the fact that catastrophist philosophy was popular during the formative years of Hyde's life and continued as a possible alternative to uniformitarianism at the time he delivered his speech. According to the catastrophists, a series of cataclysms could be used to explain the punctuated fossil record in which several unique periods of life seemed to begin abruptly only to end suddenly and without warning. The abrupt disappearance of each epoch in the fossil record was evidence that they were destroyed by some catastrophic event. Catastrophists also believed that several geological epochs existed before the creation of Adam. The deluge recorded by Moses was thought to be the most recent of all the intervening cataclysms as well as evidence of their historical occurrence.

The fact that Hyde's theory bears some resemblance to catastrophism may indicate that he had been influenced by its precepts. However, Hyde purposefully chose not use scientific arguments in support of his theory. While the geological evidence for pre-Adamic epochs was well established by the 1850s, the evidence for pre-Adamites themselves was still inconclusive. Despite a lack of human fossils, some scientists believed that man was a long-time resident of the earth. These scientists explained away the fossil record by citing its inherent imperfections. Archaeological finds in the 1840s also began to challenge the traditional

belief that man was of recent origin. However, when Hyde delivered his sermon, the evidence for pre-Adamites was far from conclusive. Many scientists, including the eminent geologist Charles Lyell, continued to believe that man was a recent addition to the earth. Not surprisingly, Hyde's arguments were based wholly on semantics without any appeals to scientific authority. It was not until the 1850s that enough evidence had been gathered to convince most scientists--including Lyell--of the truly ancient origin of man.¹⁷

It should also be noted that the relative openness of this period is evinced by Brigham Young's response to Hyde's speculations. After Hyde preached that the world was peopled before the advent of Adam, Young stood and praised Hyde for his "splendid address" from which "I do not wish to eradicate any items."¹⁸

3.5 Brigham Young

Young's approval was important since "Young was the most prominent person in pioneer Mormon [history]."

¹⁷In Bowler, 123 & 231, he points out that the Engis skull was discovered over a decade before Hyde's sermon; however, its true age was not discovered until well after Hyde had hypothesized the existence of pre-Adamite men. The Neanderthal skull was discovered two years after Hyde's pre-Adamite sermon.

¹⁸Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 2:88 & 90.

Among his many accomplishments, Young was the leading colonizer of the Utah territory, its first governor, the founder of many Latter-day Saint industries and enterprises, and, most important, the President of the Church from 1844 until his death in 1877.¹⁹

Young obtained such a high position of prominence within the LDS Church even with a highly limited education.²⁰ His mother was primarily responsible for her son's education since Young had virtually no formal schooling as a boy. His mother taught him the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic; "He read the Bible daily, kept informed of current events by reading the newspaper, and listened carefully to visiting preachers and other educated persons."²¹

It is clear from his sermons and discourses that Young possessed a superior intellect as well as a firm

¹⁹ The latest and best biographies of Young include Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Newell G. Bringhurst, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little Brown, 1986); Eugene England, *Brother Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); and Francis M. Gibbons, *Brigham Young: Modern Moses, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

²⁰The early Church was primarily an agrarian phenomenon. Most of the early converts were farmers who were taught only what was needed in order to succeed in their particular vocation. However, as the Church grew in numbers, many converts were well-educated members of society. By the time of Joseph Smith's death, Church membership generally reflected the many different educational levels in American society. The leadership of the Church was similarly diverse. Many leaders were relatively uneducated like Smith and Young. However, the number of well-educated Church leaders has continued to increase since its beginnings in rural New York. See Arrington and Bitton, 79.

²¹Arrington, *Lecture Series*, 13.

grasp of timely and important issues. This is partially due to the fact that Young followed the counsel found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* to study all things spiritual as well as temporal.²²

Young believed that all Latter-day Saints should follow this admonition since he believed that both revelation and science were given to man for his general benefit. In an address given to the Saints in 1871, Young claimed:

our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. . . . Our religion embraces all truth and every fact in existence, no matter whether in heaven, earth, or hell. A fact is a fact, all truth issues forth from the Fountain of truth, and the sciences are facts as far as men have proved them.²³

According to Young, true science and true religion are both revelations of God that add to man's knowledge. Facts obtained from science and facts acquired from revelation are equally genuine and should be accepted as part of the Latter-day Saint gospel.²⁴ Since God works through natural laws, Latter-day Saints were expected to learn more about geology, chemistry and other sciences

²²See D&C 90:15, 93:53 and 88:78-80 & 118. These passages are also quoted in Chapter 2.

²³Young, 115.

²⁴Ibid.

in order to gain a better understanding of the divine.²⁵ Young believed it was in this respect Latter-day Saints differed from much of the Christian world.²⁶

Speaking more specifically of Genesis and geology, Brigham Young maintained that "certain facts exist in nature which those called Christians discard or throw away" because they conflict with Genesis. Chief among these are the facts of geology.²⁷ According to Young, the geologists tell us

that this earth has been in existence for thousands and millions of years. They think, and they have good reason for their faith, that their researches and their investigations enable them to demonstrate that this earth has been in existence as long as they assert it has.²⁸

According to Young, many "religious teachers" advanced ideas that contradict geology in their attempts to justify the Genesis account of creation. Young argued that these theologians were wrong. Geology is a

²⁵Arrington, *Lecture Series*, 20.

²⁶Young's assertion that Latter-day Saints differed from much of the Christian world due to the belief that science and religion should not conflict was problematic. As was previously noted, Charles Hodge as well as many other Protestant divines believed that science and religion should be in harmony since God was the creator of the natural world as well as the author of the Scriptures. See Wells, 22-27.

²⁷As was already noted, this is not entirely true. While there were theologians who continued to believe that earth was created in six literal days, most educated clergyman of the nineteenth century accepted the geological evidence as proof of a much older earth.

²⁸Young, 115-117.

"true science" and its leading principles are eternal facts given to man from God as revelation. As a result, Young accepted the contemporary geological belief that the earth was created over immense periods of time and censured those who refuse to believe in the facts of geology. He asserted that members of other denominations who rejected scientific truth and adhered to the traditional account of Genesis were not ready for the greater truth which has been revealed through science.²⁹

From the foregoing discussion, Young would seem the obvious candidate to be the first Latter-day Saint leader to be open to the theory of evolution. However, this was not so. In a 1876 letter written to one of his sons, Young showed an antagonism toward Darwin and his theory of origins.³⁰ Obviously, this is not because Young possessed any sort of antagonism towards scientific theories that seemed to contradict certain passages of scripture; but more likely because Young had developed his own theory of origins that was difficult to reconcile with Darwin's theory of evolution. This theory is perhaps the most speculative theory to emerge from this period.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Brigham Young, *"My Dear Son": Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons*, ed. Dean Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 199. This letter was written after much of the scientific community had already accepted Darwinism.

Unfortunately, Young's theory is highly problematic. According to LDS scholar Philip Barlow, even Latter-day Saints have not been able to understand Young's theory sufficiently. Barlow writes, "On occasion my colleagues at Brigham Young University have tried to figure out what Brigham Young might have actually said and what it might have meant, but the attempts have always failed."³¹ What is clear from Young's writings on the subject, however, is that he believed, as did Pratt, that Adam and Eve were transplanted from a pre-existing world as fully developed human beings. Young was primarily interested in the appearance of man and as a result, the creation of other forms of life was left virtually unexplored.

The importance of his theory, however, lies not in these details but in the fact that, during this relatively broad-minded period, Latter-day Saints were able to experiment with and accept alternative interpretations to the creation accounts found in Genesis, Moses, and Abraham. It is especially interesting to note that Parley P. Pratt's brother Orson, who was also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, was censured by Young for interpreting the Genesis account too literally.³²

³¹Barlow, 19.

More important however, the interpretations of Young, Hyde, and Pratt helped postpone the conservative reaction to evolutionary thinking. This is due, in part, to the fact that their interpretations possessed a certain authority due to their positions as, respectively, Prophet and Apostles. This meant that their interpretations offered acceptable alternatives to the authority of a literal reading of Genesis or the authority of science.

Isolation was another effective buffer to modernist theories. During the period of elaboration, there was no indication that the controversy over evolution had penetrated the confines of the inter-mountain West. Although the Saints were never truly isolated as Young's knowledge of geology suggests, there is nothing to indicate that his theory was a reaction to Darwin; like the theories of Hyde and Pratt, Young's theory was based on the teachings of Joseph Smith as well as his own personal musings and theological arguments. Evolutionary theory had not yet penetrated the inter-mountain West to the extent that it was considered a threat. As long as the Latter-day Saints remained in relative isolation, the authority of the Prophet and Apostles was not seriously challenged by the authority of science. During the elaboration period, scientific

³²Gary J. Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict Within the Quorums, 1853-1868," *Dialogue* 13, no. 2 (1980): 7-49.

authority claimed by the new secular learning paled in comparison with the authority of Church leaders. As a result, the new theory was regarded as a mere curiosity when the first formal Latter-day Saint acknowledgment of evolution appeared in 1861.

3.6 The First Formal Reaction to Evolution

Evolution, or the "subject that has of late been warmly discussed by the leading ethnologists and zoologists of the day," was first addressed in an editorial which appeared in the Latter-day Saint periodical *Millennial Star* two years after the publication of the *Origin*.³³ This first Latter-day Saint exposition on Darwinism was a window on the times.

It betrayed the intellectual hegemony of the leaders of the church since the author, Apostle George Q. Cannon, insisted on his own personal reading of Young's speculative interpretation concerning the origin of man as being the more likely possibility regarding origins because of the superiority of prophetic authority over that of science. He writes:

While men are weaving theories of their own, and in their halls of learning are disputing with each

³³George Q. Cannon, "Origin of Man," *The Latter Day Saints' Millennial Star* 41, no. 23 (1861), 651.

other on the origin of man, the Saints are guided, like those of old, in their councils and their judgments, by the light of revelation--the dictates of Heaven--the voice of God.

In contrast, "uninspired men" struggle in the dark to create "assumptive theories" that attempt to make sense of the scientific evidence.³⁴ The fact that Cannon does not identify other theologians' attempts to deal with evolutionary theory is also indicative of the fact that he believes their theories pale in comparison to those of the Prophet.

Despite his insistence on Young's theory in regards to the origin of man, Cannon remains neutral concerning the creation of "lower" species. He summarizes the current debates which bear upon the question and concludes by stating that "it is not our intention to discuss here the merits or demerits, in particular, of the foregoing theories as to the origin of the various species of vegetable and animal forms of life." He decides that the possibility of evolution among the lower species "remains to be seen." The author's uncommitted position is an indirect acknowledgment of the possibility of evolution as a partial engine of creation.³⁵ This should not be surprising considering the fact that the author's source of authority did not much concern himself with the origin of other species;

³⁴Ibid., 653.

³⁵Ibid., 651-652.

Young almost exclusively concerned himself with the origins of man.

The fact that Cannon leaves open the possibility of the creation of animals and plants through evolutionary processes accords well with intellectual openness which characterized this period. It also emphasizes the fact that evolution was not yet seen as a threat. On the contrary, evolution was seen as just another possibility for the creation of lower life forms. As long as no interpretation of the creation account was considered to be official Church doctrine, Latter-day Saints were free to consider all the possibilities that did not unequivocally conflict with scripture held sacred by them.

The language used also reveals the tenor of times. The author's unpolemical tone and his matter-of-fact reporting of the current controversies suggest that the theory of evolution was not yet seen as a significant danger; instead, the language suggests that the theory of evolution was just another possible interpretation for the creation of plants and animals.

3.7 Period of Purification and Accommodation

Not long after this first relatively benign reaction, many Latter-day Saints began to feel

increasingly threatened by the religious implications implicit in evolutionary theory. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1867, theological authority increasingly began to be challenged by scientific authority as modernism permeated the intermountain West. George Q. Cannon articulated the fears of many Saints when he wrote that "there will be such a flood of so called 'civilization' brought in here [when the railroad is completed] that every vestige of us, our church and institutions, shall be completely obliterated."³⁶

In order to combat this outside threat perceived by Cannon and others, a period of doctrinal purification and consolidation began shortly after the completion of the railroad. Attempts to establish official LDS positions and to clarify Church doctrines were implemented. During this period, several centrally-directed organizations as well as officially sponsored Church magazines were created in order to insure that the Church members would be unified in doctrine.³⁷

Unifying devices included the "Woman's Exponent," which was founded in 1870 as an independent magazine for women, and the "Contributor" commenced in 1879 as an independent magazine for young men. A central Sunday School organization

³⁶George Q. Cannon, "The Challenges of the Next Decade," in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:290; and Arrington and Bitton, 174.

³⁷Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 20.

likewise was established at this time to teach the gospel to young people, and a magazine was inaugurated for their use called "The Juvenile Instructor."³⁸

Most important, an educational program aimed at countering the inroads made by secular learning was instituted. Brigham Young Academy--later to become Brigham Young University--as well as Brigham Young College in Logan (Utah) and the Latter-day Saint College in Salt Lake City were founded while the University of Deseret was "revitalized" and recast as the University of Utah. These schools were all established to educate the Latter-day Saints in a way which would promote faith and combat the potentially irreligious effects of secular learning.³⁹

The stage of purification was a "movement of indoctrination for purposes of protecting the Mormon way of life" which "involved a certain surrendering of free thought" that characterized the stage of elaboration.⁴⁰ It is during the stage of purification that speculations regarding the creation generally decreased. The stage of purification was a period of getting back to basics; a period of anchoring Church doctrine securely on a conservative interpretation of the LDS canon.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Also, a spirit of accommodation characterized the second half of the nineteenth century as Utah endeavored to become a state in the 1890s. Latter-day Saint historian Thomas G. Alexander argues that in order to achieve statehood the Latter-day Saints were forced to comply "with a series of laws, court tests, and political activities designed to break the back of the Mormon community and reshape it in the image of the remainder of the United States." In other words, "They insisted that the Latter-day Saints conform to the norms of Victorian America. . ." ⁴¹ During this period, the LDS Church made several concessions to the Protestant majority in order to achieve statehood without compromising its most fundamental doctrines and beliefs. ⁴²

Not only did the Church align itself with the rest of the nation by prohibiting subsequent plural marriages, it aligned itself more closely to the Protestant majority by diminishing the focus on some of its more radical speculations. ⁴³ In order to "survive as an ecclesiastical institution with its own unique theology and religious practices" adjustments were made and theology became less radical. ⁴⁴ In short, Latter-day

⁴¹Alexander, 4.

⁴²Arrington and Bitton, 261.

⁴³White, xi.

Saints created "a new paradigm that would save the essential characteristics of their religious tradition . . . and allow them to live in peace with other Americans."⁴⁵ During this period, the speculative creation accounts of early Latter-day Saint leaders described previously began to give way to creation accounts that more closely resembled the traditional accounts espoused by conservative Protestants.

There appears to be no evidence indicating that the Church officially chose to take a more conservative approach to the creation. However, it seems likely that many Church leaders were aware of the fact that the majority of their fellow Christians still believed in a more conservative view of the creation account. The liberal interpretation of the creation held by many educated Protestants was usually viewed as suspect by those in the conservative majority. Since the writings and sermons of early Church leaders such as Orson Hyde and Brigham Young were not official doctrine of the Church, it was possible to espouse a more conservative theology. A relatively conservative approach to the creation account made it possible for the Church to align itself more closely to the Protestant majority without changing Church doctrine.

⁴⁴Arrington and Bitton, 261.

⁴⁵Alexander, 14.

Another editorial concerning evolution written by George Q. Cannon one year after the completion of the transcontinental railroad was a reflection of the changing intellectual climate. As was noted earlier, Cannon had previously allowed that God might have created life through evolution--the only exception being the creation of man. By contrast, Cannon's latest editorial was markedly different. His new editorial was an obvious polemic against evolution. He characterized evolution as a very strange theory which could not account for the diversity of life. Cannon's editorial clearly indicated a new emphasis on the traditional account of the creation. According to Cannon, the theory of evolution should seem utterly "ridiculous" to those who knew the truth revealed by scripture.⁴⁶ This change in attitude was an attempt to help anchor Latter-day Saint beliefs to more traditional theological foundations during this period.

In June of 1882, Cannon's fellow Apostle, Orson Whitney echoed Cannon's anti-evolution sentiments in another Church periodical. Interestingly enough, he is the first Latter-day Saint author to use scientific as well as religious arguments in an attempt to strengthen his point. For example, Whitney begins with a

⁴⁶George Q. Cannon, "Man and His Varieties: Theories on the Origin of Man," *The Juvenile Instructor* (15 August 1868): 124-125.

scriptural argument. According to Whitney, scriptural accounts of the creation all agree that species had been fixed in the beginning and each must propagate after its own kind. Then turning to a Baconian criterion of truth, he argued that "There is no instance on record where a baboon ever evolved into a human being." He did concede the fact that hybrids may appear; however, he is quick to point out that these hybrids are sterile and are "without the power to propagate themselves."⁴⁷ The fact that Whitney uses these dated but familiar arguments against evolution indicates that secular knowledge had indeed permeated the Latter-day Saint stronghold in the inter-mountain West.

3.8 The Aftermath of Purification and Accommodation

The state of affairs at the turn of the century indicated a time of transition. The authority of the Apostles and Prophets remained the source of Church doctrine and policy. However, scientific authority could no longer be ignored since Mormon scholars were beginning to leave the inter-mountain West to pursue studies at major eastern universities where they were exposed to persuasive arguments of Biblical criticism

⁴⁷Orson Whitney, "Man's Origin and Destiny," *The Contributor* 3 (June 1882): 268-270.

and the theory of evolution. In the Church, the period of speculation concerning origins was also waning as a result of purification and accomodation. Speculation was being replaced by a more literal reading of scripture. In fact, as was also indicated previously, a definite turn towards a more conservative interpretation of scripture was becoming increasingly apparent; however, the possibility that God could have created the world through evolution was still a viable alternative that could be pursued by leaders of the Church as well as other intellectuals. Thomas G. Alexander writes that by the turn of the century, Church members were of two distinct minds concerning the matter of creation.

On the one hand, the persistence of the Baconian [not to mention the Joseph Smith and Brigham Young] ideal of the congruence of divine revelation and scientific discovery underpinned the work of a group of progressive theologians who tried to reconcile scientific thought and church doctrine. On the other hand, several conservative theologians condemned as heretical the attempt at reconciliation as long as long as it involved a rejection of the supremacy of selective scriptural literalism. In their view, certain scripture denied the possibility of death and thus of fossil remains older than the presumed time of Adam's transgression.⁴⁸

This period of transition is exemplified by the respective works of Joseph B. Keeler, James E. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe (the latter two being members of the

⁴⁸Alexander, 272.

Twelve Apostles). Keeler, a Latter-day Saint teacher and intellectual, was a strict creationist. His strongest argument against evolution--like that of many other creationists--was that it denied the existence of a divine being. Keeler believed if evolution were true then the diversity of life could be explained without recourse to God. According to Keeler, this led ultimately to atheism.⁴⁹ As was noted earlier, the belief that Darwinism was tantamount to atheism was a common reaction among Protestant theologians as exemplified by Charles Hodge. Despite this similarity between Keeler and Hodge, Keeler makes no mention of Hodge in his writings.⁵⁰

3.9 Joseph B. Keeler

Like Whitney before him, Keeler used scientific arguments to back up his views. However, Keeler used only those arguments which supported his theories. As a result, many of these arguments were strange or out-of-date. This is due to the fact that Keeler was not interested in reconciling science and religion. He merely intended to use science as a rhetorical device

⁴⁹Joseph B. Keeler, *Foundation Stones of the Earth and Other Essays* (Enquirer Co. Steam Print: Provo, UT: 1891), 29.

⁵⁰Perhaps this is because Hodge and Keeler arrived at the same conclusion through different arguments.

that would give his readers the impression that his arguments were supported by modern scientific thought. In other words, in order to make his arguments more convincing, Keeler was clothing them in the robes of scientific authority.

Keeler begins with an argument that was once used to refute evolutionary thinking well before the *Origin* was published. He argued that if evolution actually occurred then the fossil record should show "an uninterrupted growth" from the simplest to the most complex forms of life. However, as Keeler points out, this is not the case. He writes that

there are many breaks, both in the development of strata and fossil remains. Owing to this condition of things the rocks have been grouped into systems according to a similarity of life exhibited by them, and the unconformity of strata to one another--each epoch is distinct by itself.⁵¹

Keeler interpreted the fossil record to mean that species remained constant; when these species disappeared, they were replaced by forms that were quite distinct from those which preceded them. "New types or classes seemed to appear fully formed, with no sign of an evolutionary trend by which they could have emerged from an earlier type."⁵²

⁵¹Keeler, 9-10.

The fossil record which Keeler attempts to exploit did pose a major problem to Darwinism at one time.⁵³ However, most scientists in the late nineteenth century had come to the conclusion that breaks in the fossil record were indicative of geological processes as opposed to breaks in the evolutionary chain as Keeler had suggested. Geological subsidence and uplift insured that each individual stratum was nothing more than a snapshot of relatively small periods of geologic time which could not record the larger trends of slow evolutionary processes.

Keeler was using an argument that was no longer considered valid by serious scientists. However, his use of this argument was part of his rhetorical approach. He appealed to scientific arguments which supported his views even when they were out of date in order to give his arguments an air of scientific authority.

Keeler's exploitation of the fossil record may be typical of earlier anti-evolution arguments but his explanation of the fossil record was unique to Mormonism and is reminiscent of the speculative era that preceded his own. Like most Latter-day Saints, Keeler attempted to substantiate his arguments by relying upon statements

⁵²Bowler, 199.

⁵³Peter J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 23.

made by Joseph Smith. According to Keeler, Smith had advanced the doctrine that "This earth was organized or formed out of other planets which were broken up and remodeled and made into the one on which we live."⁵⁴

Keeler then used his rhetoric to make it appear as if scientific evidence vindicated Smith. Keeler quoted several contemporary scientists who believed that the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter was the remains of some former planet which had been destroyed by a collision with some other celestial body. On the basis of the evidence, Keeler assumed the universe was filled with fragments of former worlds such as these. According to Keeler, it is these fragments of past worlds which were used to create our earth; this explains the discontinuities of the fossil record. Keeler believed that each geological strata was a remnant of some former, distinct world. Keeler explains:

For true it is, the great rock masses forming the earth's crust are seemingly laid down without reference to conformability of strata; and each series shows a distinct class of animal and of vegetable life entombed therein; as if these

⁵⁴Keeler, 10. Smith believed that matter is eternal. Nothing could be created ex nihilo. All of God's creations were formed from preexistent matter. Some have argued that Smith anticipated the first law of thermodynamics. However, Smith's argument was purely theological. He believed that man's soul was eternal. In order to be eternal it must have always existed. "If the soul of man had a beginning it will surely have an end." According to Smith, the universe was also organized out of matter that had always existed. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 181 & 350-352.

different rocks had been formed by agencies other than those of this world; as if on other planets were seas teeming with peculiar life, and plains abounding in beasts, birds, insects, forests, and flowers--all warmed and fructified by another sun than ours.⁵⁵

Keeler's other arguments exhibit a more conservative approach to the creation scriptures that more closely approximate contemporary Protestant reactions to Darwinism. For example, Keeler argues that the old-earth hypothesis necessary for evolution to create the diversity of life is a scientific fallacy. He uses the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Abraham to argue his point. According to Keeler, all three doctrinal sources agree that there were seven "periods . . . during which the earth was formed and prepared for the abode of man, and other life."⁵⁶ Keeler then uses the New Testament and the Book of Abraham to determine the length of each period. According to Keeler, the Apostle Peter noted that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."⁵⁷ He then turns to the Book of Abraham as a confirmation of Peter's words. According to Keeler's interpretation, the Book of Abraham also suggests that one of God's days equals a thousand years

⁵⁵Keeler, 12.

⁵⁶Ibid., 13

⁵⁷2 Peter 3:8

of earth-time.⁵⁸ Keeler confidently concludes by stating, "These passages of Scripture are submitted with no further comment than this: That . . . they prove that this earth's temporal existence began some thirteen thousand years ago."⁵⁹

Keeler also insisted upon an empirical standard for scientific proof of evolutionary theory. He argued that:

Evolutionists claim an unbroken zoological series during a period at least of twenty millions of years. To say that the varied fauna and flora sealed off in fossiliferous rocks, have had a temporal existence on this globe for "eons and eons of time," is to say that which cannot easily be proved.⁶⁰

He concluded this section by reemphasizing his belief that scripture is more authoritative than science concerning the age of the earth since there is no hard evidence that unequivocally proves science to be correct in such matters.⁶¹ Ironically, Keeler failed to use this same empirical standard when he insisted that science had vindicated Smith's teaching that the earth was created from pre-existent matter. As we have seen, the

⁵⁸Abraham 3:4

⁵⁹Keeler, 13.

⁶⁰Ibid., 14

⁶¹Ibid.

evidence he used to substantiate this assumption was much less convincing than the evidence which biologists used to authenticate the theory of evolution.

Keeler next turns his attention to mankind. He uses scripture and science in an attempt to prove the recent advent of man upon the face of the earth. He begins with "evidence" from geology and paleontology. Keeler claims that no conclusive scientific evidence has been found for the existence of man in none but the most recent geological deposits. Once again Keeler's evidence is out of date. It is true that there was no conclusive evidence for the pre-Pleistocene existence of man in the early nineteenth century; however, by the end of the nineteenth century, most scientists agreed that there was ample evidence for the existence of man in more ancient geological deposits. Despite this evidence, Keeler argued that these finds did not scientifically validate the ancient existence of man mainly because the older arguments accorded well with the rest of his theory. If the earth is only a few thousand years old and man was not created until the sixth day of creation then the earliest evidence for the existence of man should be found only in the most recent geological deposits.⁶²

⁶²Ibid.

He then quoted the *Doctrine in Covenants* in an attempt to back up his "scientific" evidence with scriptural authority. Keeler notes that Section 77 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* declares "that the earth is to have a 'temporal existence' for seven thousand years."⁶³ According to Keeler, "the teachings of geology roughly agree with this statement. And Joseph Smith's testimony is strikingly verified."⁶⁴

Keeler also relied on the authority of other Prophets and Apostles. After explaining away the fossil record, Keeler then agreed with Brigham Young and Parley P. Pratt's hypothesis that the current variety of life was somehow transplanted from already existing planets.

In Keeler's work we see speculation reminiscent of an early period. We also see a conservative reaction to science reflected in his work as well as a closer alignment to mainstream Protestant theological arguments opposing the theory of evolution. The appeal to the authority of the leaders of the Church is still prevalent. However, it is balanced by an rhetorical appeal to scientific authority which best supports his arguments. The fact that Keeler believed it was necessary to clothe his arguments in the robes of science is yet another indication of the inroads that

⁶³D&C 77:6.

⁶⁴Ibid., 15.

modernism was making into the diminishing isolation inter-mountain West.

3.10 James E. Talmage

The life and work of the Mormon Apostle, James E. Talmage, illustrates to what extent modernism had penetrated the Mormon stronghold. Talmage belonged to the new generation of Mormon scholars and theologians. He obtained his early schooling in England where he was an Oxford diocesan prize scholar in 1874. In Utah, he studied at Brigham Young Academy. Later, he left to pursue studies in chemistry and geology at Lehigh University and the Johns Hopkins University. In 1884, he returned to Utah to teach geology and chemistry at his former *alma mater*. In 1896, Talmage earned a doctorate from Illinois' Wesleyan University for nonresident work. Among other scientific societies, he was a member of both Britain's and America's Geological Societies as well as belonging to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.⁶⁵

While teaching at Brigham Young Academy, Talmage felt that it was his responsibility to lecture on the

⁶⁵Andrew Jensen, "James Edward Talmage," in the *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jensen Mem. Assoc., 1901-1936), 3:787-789.

"harmony between geology and the Bible."⁶⁶ According to Thomas G. Alexander:

By 1884 he had concluded that the much-discussed conflict between science and religion did not exist, but that in some cases religionists manufactured it. After listening to a discourse by a Protestant minister on Darwinism, Talmage thought that the misinformation the cleric presented "bred the disgust with which most scientific people regard them--because they will dabble with matters from which their ignorance should keep them at a safe distance."⁶⁷

In an 1890 address delivered before the Utah County Teachers' Association, Talmage asks his audience, "Is evolution true?" and answers, "Aye! true evolution is true." He believed that all creatures had the ability to improve within their own respective spheres. According to Talmage, natural selection can bring about great changes in the development of a species. Numerous varieties of individual species have been created and the history of the earth as revealed by geology bears the record of these changes.⁶⁸

Despite his qualified endorsement that evolution was true, Talmage had several theological reservations concerning the theory. For example, he refused to

⁶⁶James E. Talmage, "Personal Journal," January 21, 1883; and Alexander, 273.

⁶⁷Alexander, 273.

⁶⁸James E. Talmage, *The Theory of Evolution* (Provo, UT: Utah County Teacher's Association, 1890), 3 & 10.

believe that life could spring forth out of lifeless matter.⁶⁹ He also believed God was the guiding force behind evolution and he especially took exception to the belief that an ape can evolve into a man. According to Talmage this is "far more wild than the alchemist's dream of transmuting base lead into royal gold." Species could evolve within their own sphere but no species "can be transmuted into another." Dogs will always be dogs no matter how much they progress or change.⁷⁰

3.11 John A. Widtsoe

Talmage's contemporary, John A Widtsoe, was perhaps the greatest defender of the theory evolution before 1911. Like Talmage, Widtsoe was educated in the East where he attended Harvard University. Later, he studied in Germany at the University of Goettingen. Early in the twentieth century, Widtsoe published a series of articles designed to reconcile his religious beliefs with the science he had learned as a doctoral student while attending Harvard. These articles first appeared under the title "Joseph Smith as Scientist" in the LDS

⁶⁹Ibid., 7-10.

⁷⁰Ibid., 15-16.

periodical the *Improvement Era*. In 1908, they were republished in book form and used as an instruction manual throughout the Church.⁷¹

A central theme of this work was an attempt to reconcile evolution with Mormon theology. Like Brigham Young, Widtsoe interpreted Joseph Smith's declarations on secular learning to mean that all knowledge should be considered revelation from God. According to Widtsoe, "God speaks in various ways to men. The stars, the clouds, the mountains, the grass and the soil, are all, to him who reads aright, forms of divine revelation."⁷² It should not be surprising that in *Joseph Smith as Scientist*, Widtsoe gave scientific authority as much weight as scriptural authority. Since they were both revelations of truth and could be used to understand the creation account.

Widtsoe begins by arguing that "The new revelation, given by God . . . is written in the rocks." Unlike Keeler, Widtsoe believed that the science of geology had proved that the world was "millions of years old." He accepted Lord Kelvin's estimate of 100,000,000 for the age of the earth since he believed contemporary science proved this estimate best.⁷³ Widtsoe also claimed to be

⁷¹Alexander, 274.

⁷²Widtsoe, 50.

⁷³Ibid., 50-53.

a uniformitarian in the sense that he believed "the mighty forces which act today" have been at work for millions of years.⁷⁴ According to Widtsoe, the geological strata of the earth are a history of the erosion and volcanic uplift which continue to the present.⁷⁵

More important however, the fossil record was a window on the creation. Widtsoe believed the creation story could be discovered through geology. Interestingly, his story of creation follows the geological record more closely than the record revealed in scripture. "In the beginning," Widtsoe wrote, "it appears that water covered the whole earth." This was the great age of the fishes when all life was contained in the oceans. Land eventually appeared giving rise to land animals and plants. According to the fossil record amphibians and low orders of plants came first which cleared the air of noxious gasses. Then followed the age of the giant reptiles or dinosaurs "a step higher than the amphibians, but a step lower than the class of

⁷⁴Widtsoe was unaware that Kelvin's estimate for the age of the earth was incompatible with true uniformitarianism. Kelvin's estimate was much too low for gradual geological changes to produce the geological forms we now observe. Kelvin also believed that the earth had been gradually cooling from a molten state. This implied that certain geological processes such as volcanism necessarily decreased in power and intensity as the earth cooled over time. This is at odds with true uniformitarianism which maintains that the same processes which are now shaping the face of the earth had shaped the earth in the past. These processes did not increase or decrease in intensity.

⁷⁵Widtsoe, 50-51.

Mammals to which man belongs." Following the age of reptiles is the contemporary age of the mammals. Widtsoe concludes this section by reiterating:

it is, of course readily understood that such mighty changes as those just described, and the succession of different kinds of animal life, could not have taken place in a few years. Vast periods of time must of necessity have been required for the initiation, rise, domination and final extinction of each class of animals. A year is too small a unit of measurement in geological time; a thousand years or, better, a million years, would more nearly answer the requirements.⁷⁶

Widtsoe then turns to the scriptures to help justify the enormous periods of time needed for such a creative task. In the Abrahamic account discussed in Chapter Two, the term "day" is replaced with the word "time." Widtsoe noted that these "times" seem only limited by the period requisite to finish the designated creation tasks. Widtsoe also pointed out that an examination of the original Hebrew word translated as "day" in Genesis also "more frequently refers to periods of time of indefinite duration."⁷⁷ This left Widtsoe with an indefinite period of time for the creation of the earth and its inhabitants through evolution. Widtsoe used the Abrahamic account in support of his

⁷⁶Ibid., 50-52.

⁷⁷Ibid., 54-60.

belief that God works through natural laws such as the law of evolution.⁷⁸

According to Widtsoe, evolution was the greatest "known fundamental law of the universe." However, "it must be confessed, frankly, that only the faintest outline of it is possessed by the world of science."⁷⁹ Like many contemporary scientists, Widtsoe had doubts about evolution through natural selection.⁸⁰ According to Widtsoe, "The true scientific position of the Darwinian hypothesis is yet to be determined."⁸¹ Accordingly, Widtsoe's particular version of evolution was "change in the direction of increasing complexity [which] did not presuppose natural selection."⁸²

Widtsoe believed that Herbert Spencer's philosophy outlined in his *First Principles* was the closest approximation of the truth.⁸³ According to Widtsoe's reading of Spencer:

nothing stands still, but either progresses (evolution), or retrogrades (dissolution). Now it has been found under normal conditions all things undergo a process of evolution; that is, become

⁷⁸Ibid., 50 & 103.

⁷⁹Ibid., 104-105.

⁸⁰Bowler, *Evolution*, 246-281.

⁸¹Widtsoe, 109.

⁸²Alexander, 275.

⁸³Widtsoe, 103-105.

more complex, or advance. This, in its essence, is the law of evolution, about which so much has been said during the last fifty years. Undoubtedly, this law is correct, and in harmony with the known facts of the universe. It certainly throws a flood of light upon the phenomena of nature; though of itself, it tells little of the force behind it, in obedience to which it operates.⁸⁴

Widtsoe, once again building upon the foundations laid by Smith, believed that there could be no limit to the changes undergone through evolution. He believed there was no discernible limit to the advancement of plants and animals and man could advance towards godhood.

Like Talmage, however, Widtsoe believed that "one life form could not pass into another;" life must remain in the respective sphere in which it was created. According to Widtsoe, "This would preclude any notion that by endless development a plant may become an animal, or that one of the lower classes of animals may become a high animal, or a man." In other words, "there is no jumping from order to order." However, "The limits to these orders are yet to be found."⁸⁵

Alexander argues that Widtsoe chose his terminology carefully in order to leave "considerable latitude for the acceptance of some sort of change." The use of the ambiguous term "order" was no accident.⁸⁶ Widtsoe's

⁸⁴Ibid., 105.

⁸⁵Ibid., 109 & 113.

audience could interpret "orders" to mean anything from species to morphological kind. If the former definition is accepted then animals could remain within their own morphological "spheres" while evolving into new types or species. In other words, Widtsoe's work leaves open the possibility for true evolution to occur as long as it is overseen by the all-wise Creator.

Not surprisingly, Widtsoe's work met with some opposition. As modernism reared its threatening head many Latter-day Saints began to oppose any reconciliation of religion with geology or biology, believing that it was impossible to reconcile evolution with their interpretation of scripture. Conversely, there were many, including Widtsoe and Talmage, who sought revelation in science as well as religion.

Thomas G. Alexander sums up the situation that existed at the turn of the century well when he writes:

On the one hand, the persistence of the Baconian ideal [or the, as some did argue, the ideal of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young] of the congruence of divine revelation and scientific discovery underpinned the work of a group of progressive theologians who tried to reconcile scientific thought and church doctrine. On the other hand, several conservative theologians condemned as heretical the attempt at reconciliation as long as it involved a rejection of the supremacy of selective scriptural literalism. In their view certain scriptures denied the possibility of death and thus of fossil remains older than the presumed time of Adam's transgression.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Alexander, 275.

These two factions were bound to come into conflict. It was only a matter of time. Despite measures taken by the First Presidency, the inevitable occurred at the heart of the LDS educational system early in the twentieth century. This historical event has had repercussions that have lasted to this day. It is to this confrontation that we now turn.

⁸⁷Ibid., 272.

4. REACTION

The first official reaction to evolutionary thinking came in 1909. The writings of Widtsoe, Talmage, and Keeler had stirred up enough interest in the subject among the faithful that an official statement by the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was warranted. In theory, the statement of 1909 was an authoritative position of the Church designed to preclude further controversy. In effect however, the document further polarized two opposing camps since each group read into the statement a confirmation of its own opinions. Two years later, when modernism invaded the heart of the Latter-day Saint educational system the matter was far from settled. While declaring official neutrality on such positions in 1909, the actions taken by the Church belied this neutrality. In effect, a conservative interpretation of scripture was endorsed leading to a fundamentalist emphasis among leaders and theologians of the LDS Church.

4.1 The First President Statement of 1909

In 1909, the First Presidency decided the fledgling controversy warranted a statement announcing an official

Church position concerning evolution. The First Presidency "believed that a statement of the position held by the Church upon this subject will be timely and productive of good."¹ These same Church leaders picked Orson F. Whitney whose anti-evolutionist views had already been voiced approximately 15 years earlier to pen the first draft.² From September 27 to October 15, members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, including John A. Widtsoe and James E. Talmage, met to discuss and revise Whitney's original draft.³ The final document was approved by the Quorum of the Twelve on October 20, 1909. The official statement signed by the First Presidency--including Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund--was published in the November issue of the Church's *Improvement Era*.⁴

Whitney's influence is clearly evident in most of the document. In his earlier article which appeared in *The Contributor*, Whitney dealt almost exclusively with the origin of man. The First Presidency message of 1909 emphasized the same subject. "All but part of the next to last paragraph deals with man, and the gist of the article is that Adam was the first man and that he was created in the image of God and was, thus, not something

¹Smith, Winder, and Lund, 75-61.

²See Chapter Three.

³Alexander, 276.

⁴See Smith, Winder, and Lund.

other than we are today."⁵ Like Whitney's earlier piece, the tone of the entire article is clearly anti-evolutionary. The First Presidency declared:

It is held by some that Adam was not the first man upon this earth, and that the original human being was a development from lower orders of the animal creation. These, however, are theories of men. The word of the Lord declares that Adam was "the first man of all men" (Moses 1:34), and we are therefore in duty bound to regard him as the primal parent of our race.⁶

According to evolutionists within the Church, this apparently strong statement was negated six months later when then President of the Church, Joseph F. Smith, wrote a follow-up article granting concessions to the evolutionists by clarifying the November statement. According to Smith, members of Church were asking "In just what manner did the mortal bodies of Adam and Eve come into existence on this earth?" Smith tells his readers that all we can be sure of is what has been revealed in the scriptures and the scriptures remain silent upon the actual process of creation. This leaves open the possibility that "the mortal bodies of man evolved in natural processes to present perfection, through the direction and power of God."⁷ According to

⁵Alexander, 276.

⁶Smith, Winder, & Lund, 80.

⁷This is similar to other Christian positions.

Smith, the 1909 statement declaring evolution as a theory of man and Adam as the first man upon the earth did not negate the theory of evolution as a possible explanation for the creation of his body. In fact, Smith acknowledged that science is a possible avenue to truth equal to some of the more speculative theories of early leaders of the Church. According to Smith, many different interpretations of the scriptures are acceptable including an evolutionary interpretation "until the Lord shall see fit to give more light on the subject."⁸

Evolutionists also noted Widtsoe's influence on the 1909 statement. Concerning animals, the First Presidency declares that each animal will remain in its respective "order or sphere." According to Alexander, the use of Widtsoe's terminology rather than the use of the more restrictive term "species" leaves open the possibility of evolution within general "types" which could be broadly defined such as vertebrate or reptile.⁹

Between the overtly anti-evolutionist tone of the first presidency message and the concessions made to modern science by the President of the Church, it was unclear as to just where the Church actually stood concerning the theory of evolution. On the one hand,

⁸Joseph F. Smith "Priesthood Quorums' Table," *Improvement Era* 14 (April 1910): 570.

⁹Alexander, 276.

evolutionists claimed that the Church's official position, when all was said and done, was officially neutral--According to Smith, God could have created the diversity of life through evolution. On the other hand, their more conservative counterparts emphasized the clearly anti-evolutionist sentiment that pervaded the statement of 1909.

The ambiguity of the final compromise is epitomized in a First Presidency message which appeared at the close of 1910. The First Presidency's position was summed-up in the following fashion:

Diversity of opinion does not necessitate intolerance of spirit, nor should it embitter or set rational beings against each other. The Christ taught kindness, patience, and charity. . . . Our religion is not hostile to real science. That which is demonstrated, we accept with joy; but vain philosophy, human theory and mere speculations of men, we do not accept nor do we adopt anything contrary to divine revelation or to good common sense. But everything that tends to right conduct, that harmonizes with sound morality and increases faith in Deity, finds favor with us no matter where it may be found.¹⁰

Evolutionists could read this statement as an acknowledgment of the Church's neutrality concerning evolution while conservatives could easily read it as an anti-evolutionist statement.

¹⁰Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, "Words in Season From the First Presidency," *Deseret Evening News* (17 December 1910): 3.

In effect, the statement of 1909 did little to prevent further disagreements concerning the origins of life. Instead of unifying opinion through compromise, the statements made by the Church perhaps did nothing but polarize opposing sentiment even further due to the fact that each camp could claim official Church sanction for their respective positions.

4.2 Crisis at BYU

Emboldened by Smith's acknowledgment that evolution could be the answer to the mystery of creation, some Latter-day Saint intellectuals began to preach the reconciliation of Mormonism and biological science. Earlier, as the period of LDS isolation was coming to an end, several Latter-day Saints left their homes in order to pursue studies at prominent universities in the East. Many of these Latter-day Saints returned home highly influenced by modernism--the two most threatening pillars of modernism being evolution and higher Biblical criticism.

These pillars are often linked together. Higher Biblical criticism began in earnest in the nineteenth century as German scholars underwent a literary and historical analysis of the Bible. To the consternation of many theologians, this scholarship often undermined a

literal interpretation of scripture. One of the most damaging works of higher Biblical criticism was David Fredrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*. According to Strauss, the Gospels were not historical fact but attempts to create the myth of a savior-god who would bring hope to the oppressed.¹¹

Most theologians, however, were unwilling to accept Strauss's extreme criticism and began to adopt less inflammatory conclusions. Many divines, for example, accepted the Bible as a pedagogical device. According to these theologians, many Biblical tales, especially those from the Old Testament, should not be read literally since they were solely meant to teach spiritual truths. It was argued that many Old Testament stories were no more historically accurate than Aesop's fables. In the late nineteenth century, this interpretation of the Bible began to be taught in several divinity schools and seminaries throughout the United States. Many colleges and universities also began to teach that the Old Testament was a collection of mythopoeic legends propagated by the ancient Hebrews in an attempt to explain the world in which they lived. The creation account was a prime example. Science seemed to prove the creation account in Genesis was a

¹¹James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 146-147.

myth created to explain the world in terms the Hebrews could understand.¹²

It is easy to see how evolution and higher criticism were often grouped together as the two most destructive pillars of modernism. Like higher criticism, the theory of evolution attacked a literal interpretation of scripture by suggesting the creation account in Genesis was a myth. By undermining the authority of the Bible it seemed evolution and higher criticism were attempting to destroy the traditional foundation upon which Christianity was built. A common response to higher Biblical criticism and the theory of evolution was often a strict literalism. However, modernism and religion were often successfully reconciled in the minds of many Americans, including most Latter-day Saints who left Utah to study in the East. As they returned home, they were often eager to share what they had learned in the hopes of strengthening the faith of their fellow Saints.

In 1908, four of Latter-day Saint scholars received their chance to share the knowledge they had obtained. The President of fledgling Brigham Young University, George H. Brimhall, had made it his goal to raise scholarship at the university to a respectable level. As a result, he hired two sets of brothers, Joseph and

¹²Ibid., 147-150.

Henry Peterson and Ralph and William Chamberlin, as part of a nucleus of professors who Brimhall hoped would raise the academic standards at BYU. The Petersons had recently completed doctoral degrees at the University of Chicago while Ralph Chamberlin had just completed the same degree at Cornell. His brother William, who was a Harvard Ph.D., an expert in ancient languages, and taught philosophy at Brigham Young College in Logan, was recruited as well.

These newly acquired professors had made it their goal to raise the academic standards at BYU to the level of a major university. William Chamberlin wrote that among the new faculty "enthusiasm was rife." They believed that science and religion were both part of one eternal truth. Accordingly, "it was confidently hoped that early and adequate expression was to be given [at BYU] to an ideal of education which had been cherished in the Church from its beginning, an ideal involving a harmonious presentation of knowledge in all fields within an institution devoted primarily to religious education."¹³

On February 12, 1909, Ralph Chamberlin delivered the first of many lectures and addresses that would lead to a confrontation which would ultimately entrench the

¹³Ralph Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret New Press, 1925), 137.

anti-evolutionist position as dominant within the Church. In an address designed to pay tribute to Darwin's and Lincoln's greatness on the centennial of their birthday, Chamberlin let his feelings for Darwin and the theory of evolution be known. In great enthusiasm Chamberlin wrote:

The debt of mankind to Darwin is thus not alone to what he did directly for the science of Geology, although that alone would suffice to give him lasting fame, nor what he did for Botany, which by itself would place him in the foremost rank, nor what he did for zoology and related subjects, where his work marks the beginning of the modern era,-but it is because the breadth and comprehensiveness of what he did has lifted the whole world to higher levels of culture and opportunity.¹⁴

According to Chamberlin, there came about "a tremendous renewal in all the biological sciences" due to Darwin's work. "Psychology, Ethics, and Cosmology were also stirred to their foundations."¹⁵ According to Chamberlin, the *Origin* was a watershed in the development of intellectual history. He argued that "No other work ever published produced such an overwhelming change in methods of men's thoughts or has been so

¹⁴Ralph V. Chamberlin, "Charles Darwin," an address delivered before the student body at Brigham Young University, February 12, 1909, BYU Archives, 1-2.

¹⁵Ibid., 12.

productive in the hands of others in increasing our knowledge and general understanding of the universe."¹⁶

Chamberlin believed wholeheartedly in Darwin's theory of evolution including its least desirable implications such as the brutality of nature implied by natural selection and the descent of man from lower primates. It is also clear that Chamberlin was a devout Mormon. Like his brother and the Petersons, he believed that there should be no animosity between religion and biology. He argued, as many did before him, that if science ever contradicted religion it was because science and religion belonged to two different realms.¹⁷ He wrote: "The problem over which Darwin pondered . . . belongs to Science. It is does not touch the question by whom, which belongs to theology." However, Chamberlin believed that since science and religion were different parts of one eternal truth they could be reconciled.¹⁸ He used a shield as his analogy:

Those who saw but one side might conclude the shield to be black; but the other side of the shield might be white, and those who had this side alone presented to them might justly contend for the whiteness. Both would be in possession of the truth, but not of the whole truth, which would

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷See Wilson, 31-32.

¹⁸Ibid., 9.

consist of a combination of the truth possessed by the two.¹⁹

Chamberlin also argued that the theory of evolution was compatible with scripture. In an article published in BYU's student newspaper, *White And Blue* Chamberlin wrote that the early Hebrew notion of the universe "was consistent with an evolutionary-progressive philosophy of history."²⁰ According to Chamberlin, "it is only when we perceive the constant growth, the constant evolution, in the Bible and recognize in it the progressive unfolding of the Divine Will in the Hebrew race that it has the highest meaning for and can teach and stimulate us."²¹ Chamberlin explained the seeming incompatibility between scripture and science on the interpretation of scripture given by natural theologians. In his 1909 commemoration of Darwin he wrote:

The botanist Linnaeus in the eighteenth century first set afloat the . . . view according to which every particular kind of living thing had been especially molded in the hands of the creator; and because of his great influence and the attractiveness [sic] with which he surrounded his work, his views for a considerable time were almost universally accepted and of course in the hands of clergymen soon took on a religious garb

¹⁹Ralph Chamberlin, "Evolution and Theological Belief: Aspects of Their Relationship Historically Considered," *Supplement to The White and the Blue* 14 (January 1911): 1.

²⁰Sherlock, 11.

²¹Ralph Chamberlin, "The Early Hebrew Conception of the Universe," *White and Blue* 13 (December 1909): 85.

that has clouded the minds of so many good people even to this day.²²

However, "Abler theologians soon recognized that their position as rational theists was strengthened rather than weakened by the great conception" of the theory of evolution.²³ According to Chamberlin, Joseph Smith taught that God works through natural laws; natural selection was the laws through which God created every living thing upon the face of this earth.²⁴

After the success of this initial address, the Chamberlins and the Petersons "took every opportunity to lecture on evolution and the Bible" to BYU students as well as to the community at large.²⁵ Largely due to their efforts, evolution became a hot topic on campus as well as in the Provo area. The *Provo Daily Herald* reported that an address delivered by Chamberlin (it does not specify which Chamberlin) to members of the community "was unquestionably the best ever given in the city."²⁶ According to the *Herald*, "the speaker made a most splendid argument in proof of the claims of the

²²Chamberlin, "Charles Darwin," 11.

²³Ibid., 12.

²⁴Ibid., 10.

²⁵Sherlock, 13.

²⁶"Professor Chamberlin Delivers Masterly Address" *The Provo Daily Herald* (18 February 1909).

great demonstrations of evolution. Evolution is a theory no more, but a firmly established fact."²⁷

Ralph's brother William also argued that evolution and Latter-day Saint theology were compatible. It was William's objective as a BYU professor to show how "the theory of evolution of organic forms contributes to a belief in the purposive character of all causality in nature, and is able to inspire a loving trust in God and a healthful belief in man's dignity."²⁸

William Chamberlin followed Joseph Smith's lead when he argued that it was God's nature to work through orderly processes or laws; it should not be surprising that God created all living creatures through the orderly process of evolution. According to Chamberlin, the fact "that something more than haphazard forces are at work" in the creative process indicates that an intelligent force must be behind it. The fact that evolution creates order out of chaos is proof "that nature is not a self-running affair."²⁹ Like Asa Gray before him, Chamberlin used evolution as a buttress for his natural theology.³⁰

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸W. H. Chamberlin, "The Theory of Evolution an Aid to Faith in God and Belief in the Resurrection," *Supplement to The White and Blue* 14 (February 1911): 1.

²⁹William Chamberlin, "W. H. Chamberlin Offers Views on Evolution," *Deseret News* (11 March 1911): 20.

The Peterson brothers also lectured on evolution and the Bible to church groups, college students, and the townspeople of Provo.³¹ A student reported in a series of lectures on the Bible that Joseph Peterson had taught that the Bible contained many fables and legends. It was probable that the account in Genesis was a fable created by the ancient Hebrews to explain the world in which they lived.³² Ralph Peterson also used this argument in one of his articles. He believed that the creation story was an ancient fable originally created by peoples who needed to explain their world. This tradition was being supplanted by a more enlightened explanation of the creation as revealed by modern biology in much the same way as the medieval tradition of the earth being the center of the universe was supplanted by a more scientific and enlightened account of the physical universe.³³

The President of the University, George Brimhall, encouraged the open discussion of such topics. However, in a letter to President Joseph F. Smith, Brimhall

³⁰Richard Sherlock also discusses Chamberlin's philosophy in "A Turbulent Spectrum: Mormon Reactions to the Darwinist Legacy," *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 54-58.

³¹Sherlock, "Campus Crisis," 12.

³²Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 187-188; and Sherlock, 13.

³³Ralph Chamberlin, "Evolution and Theological Belief," 1-4.

voiced some reservations. Concerning the Chamberlins and Petersons Brimhall writes:

While I believe they are from their point of view perfectly right, still I think they are a little over zealous in their desire to bring people to their point of view. As they look at it, their teachings are in perfect harmony with the principles of the Gospel, but there are certainly many who cannot perceive that harmony, and, therefore, it seems to me that a little waiting with their working will be in keeping with greater wisdom on their part.³⁴

Brimhall's First Counselor in the University Presidency, Edwin Hinckely, was sympathetic to evolutionary views. He had taught a class entitled "Geological Biology" in which the topic had been discussed as a viable interpretation of the creation. Brimhall's other councilor was Joseph Keeler. Due to his anti-evolutionary views, Keeler was opposed to teaching evolution in the Church schools. Similarly, the Church Superintendent of Education, Horace C. Cummings believed that evolution would destroy the faith of Latter-day Saints and should not be taught in Church schools.³⁵

In the Fall of 1910 Cummings reported to the Church Board of Education that several complaints concerning the teachings of the Petersons and the Chamberlins had

³⁴George H. Brimhall to Joseph F. Smith 3 December 1910, Brimhall Presidential Papers as quoted in Sherlock, 14.

³⁵Sherlock, "Campus Crisis," 13.

been lodged. According to Cummings, certain Latter-day Saint parents would not allow their children to attend BYU. "Many parents of students there have also visited me and expressed great fear for the faith of their children."³⁶ When these complaints continued, Cummings began an investigation of the situation. According to Cummings, he spent "about nine days in Provo meeting with Brimhall, faculty, students, and members of the community in an attempt to assess the current situation. His report appeared on 21 January 1911 and was addressed to President Joseph F. Smith and the members of the General Church Board of Education.

With due respect to Cummings, he reported the positive as well as negative effects the new learning seemed to have on the students. He notes that there were many at BYU who had successfully reconciled LDS theology with modernism in their own minds and have "gained much" from the experience. Class attendance and participation also received a boost from the new stimulating ideas now being discussed. Cummings notes, "I discovered no spirit of contention or bitterness--their differences seemed to be good natured." He also points out that most of the students had accepted the new learning without any overt loss of faith.³⁷

³⁶Horace Cummings, quoted in Sherlock, 12-13.

³⁷Ibid.

Cummings, however, does find it disturbing that "The theory of evolution is treated as demonstrated law and their application of it to gospel truths gives rise to many curious and conflicting explanations and interpretations of scripture." He also claims that "confining [the Creator's] operations to natural laws" unnecessarily limits his divine powers and destroys the feeling of awe and wonder for his divine acts and miracles. Cummings writes that it is indeed a pity that "the science of our day . . . robs those events of their wonder, if not their divinity." He also notes:

There seems to be a struggle still going on between their new views and their old ones, and at times, their words are full of light and at other times and on the same subjects they would be full of darkness. The struggle that both teachers and pupils describe to me as having taken place in their own hearts when the new thought was being presented to them, was very fierce, and often robbed them of appetite and sleep. "An unusual effect of getting added light on the gospel," I urged; but they replied it was like the sorrow of a little child when first told there is no Santa Claus. "Our early teachings have been very satisfying and useful but untrue, and as the child's real parents are better than a Santa Claus, so will the real new Bible and gospel be better than the old one."

Cummings states that "Faith now seems to be regarded with pity as superstition and is not a characteristic of the intellectually trained."³⁸

³⁸Ibid.

Cummings acknowledged that the responsibility for this state affairs rested upon "no more than four or five men." He was obviously referring to the Petersons and the Chamberlins. The best candidate for a possible fifth man was William Thurston Brown who delivered a lecture which "dealt at length upon Darwin and his work for the advancement of science." Brown often compared Darwin with Karl Marx, claiming that Marx taught a form of economic evolution "tracing labor through its various stages, of slavery, serfdom, and wages" to the final overthrow of capitalism and the subsequent rise of communism.³⁹

Cummings warned the offending parties that they must not press their views with such enthusiasm. However, their devotion to the new learning and the fact that a "coterie" of professors existed in Provo who reinforced each other's views insured that the offending parties would vigorously defend these views. Cummings wrote that "their zeal overcomes all counsel and they seem even more determined to, if not defiant, in pushing their beliefs upon the students." Cummings concludes by hoping "that a wise and effectual way may be decided upon to bring into harmony the theological teachings in our church schools and prevent the dissemination of doubt and false doctrine" and recommends that those who

³⁹*The White and Blue* 14 (February 1909): 119.

refuse to change their attitudes to be "distributed and given other lines of work to do where their theories would not be continually called into activity."⁴⁰

Soon after receiving Cumming's report, the Board of Education met and appointed five Apostles to a committee which would decide the fate of the Petersons and the Chamberlins. Brimhall and Cummings served on this committee with Heber J. Grant, Charles W. Penrose, Francis M. Lyman, George F. Richards, and Hyrum M. Smith. After reviewing the facts and meeting with the Petersons and Chamberlins it was decided that the services of these professors would no longer be needed unless they conformed to desires of the Board of Education.⁴¹

In early March 80 percent of students petitioned President Brimhall on behalf of the Petersons and Ralph Chamberlin. They denied the accusation that the teachings of these professors was destroying their faith. According to Richard Sherlock, the students

argued for academic freedom and defended the teaching of evolution in Church schools. It is not the purpose of the church, they said, to pass judgment on scientific questions, but to give theological guidance. The strictly scientific question of evolution should be left open to free discussion and investigation.

⁴⁰Horace Cummings, 12-13.

⁴¹Bergera and Priddis, 136-148; Sherlock, 14.

But the decision had already been made and the petition fell on deaf ears. The Chamberlins and Ralph Peterson left the university and accepted teaching positions elsewhere rather than submit to the decision of the church board while Ralph's brother William complied by removing Biblical criticism and evolution from his lesson plans and stayed on at BYU for another five years.⁴²

In response to the exposure the Church received due to articles which appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Provo Herald*, and the Church's own *Deseret News*, President Joseph F. Smith issued two statements explaining the church's position.⁴³ He explained that the three offending professors were fired because they "advanced certain theories on evolution as applied to the origin of man, and certain opinions on 'higher criticism,' as conclusive and demonstrative truths." When the committee met with the Petersons and Ralph Chamberlin, these professors "frankly admitted that they held to and taught the theories of evolution held in text books, and also theories relating to the Bible known as 'higher criticism,' which they appeared to view as conclusive and demonstrative." It was agreed by all

⁴²Ibid., 148; 15.

⁴³For a comprehensive review of the media coverage of this event see the *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 February 1911, 23 February 1911, 12 March 1911, 16 March 1911; the *Deseret News*, 21 February 1911, 11 March 1911, 17 March 1911; and the *Provo Herald*, 17 March 1911.

that parts of their theories conflicted with certain passages of scripture. Chamberlin and the Petersons believed that when scripture and science conflicted on certain points, scripture must give way to science. According to Smith, the implication was the possible fallibility of revelation. "The Church, on the contrary, holds to the definite authority of divine revelation which must be the standard." According to Smith, science should conform to scripture since scientific doctrines continually change while the truths contained in the scriptures are eternal. Accordingly, theories that do not fully conform to scripture should not be taught in the Church schools.⁴⁴

Smith, however, maintained at least the semblance of the neutrality which he had demonstrated earlier by declaring that both higher criticism and evolution possibly contained "many truths" and "have their place and use." Smith then maintains that "the religion of the Latter-day Saints is not hostile to any truth, nor to scientific search for the truth." However, a "smattering of knowledge in this line only tends to upset . . . simple faith in the gospel." As a result, it is "a waste of time and means, and detrimental to faith and religion to enter too extensively into the undemonstrated theories of men on philosophies relating

⁴⁴Joseph F. Smith, "Theory and Divine Revelation," *Improvement Era* (14 April 1911): 548-551.

to the origin of life, or the methods adopted by an all-wise Creator in peopling the earth with the bodies of men, birds and beasts."⁴⁵

In an article which appeared in the *Juvenile Instructor* that same month, Smith explained that "The Church itself has no philosophy about the *modus operandi* employed by the Lord in His creation of the world." He explains that "In reaching the conclusion that evolution would be best left out of discussions in our Church schools we are deciding a question of propriety and are not undertaking to say how much of evolution is true, or how much is false." Since it is impossible to know how much of evolution may be true or false through either science or revelation it is not advisable to dwell at length upon the matter "until we receive more light upon the subject."⁴⁶

The official proclamation of 1909 coupled with Smith's explanation of this proclamation and Smith's commentaries which appeared in 1911 were still interpreted as neutral by the more dogmatic believers in evolution. They interpreted the explanations Smith made as an indication that evolution was a possible explanation for the creation. They believed the actions taken by the Church Board of Education were purely a

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Smith, "Philosophy and the Church Schools," 208-209.

result of incomplete knowledge. In order for evolution to be accepted by the Church and receive its official sanction, a reconciliation between science and scripture needed to be accomplished. One of the most deep-seated beliefs among Latter-day Saints was

the conviction that truth was indivisible. Mormonism, so the argument ran, encompasses all truth. There is not one set of truths in religion and another set of truths in science. All truths are part of one whole, one set of truths that do not conflict.⁴⁷

This belief led some Church authorities to attempt to reconcile science and religion. Men like John A. Widtsoe and Frederick Pack felt the need to account for the mass of evidence that seemed to conflict with a traditional reading of the creation account.⁴⁸

4.3 Widtsoe Again

In 1915, Widtsoe published *A Rational Theology* as an extension of the arguments which appeared in *Joseph Smith as Scientist*. His basic premise was that true science and true religion should harmonize; the teachings of the Church must be in "complete harmony

⁴⁷Sherlock, "The Darwinist Legacy," 38.

⁴⁸Ibid.

with all knowledge." Widtsoe equated Spencer and Fiske's idea of progression with that of Smith's. According to Spencer and Fiske, the world and all its creatures were progressing towards an ever-increasing complexity. According to Smith, man could eternally progress until he had reached a Godly perfection.⁴⁹ "As man acquired knowledge, he acquired power and thus moved to a more advanced state. This acquisition of power, Widtsoe argued, allowed the endless development of man."⁵⁰

4.4 Frederick Pack

University of Utah professor Frederick Pack "mounted one of the strongest attacks on biblical literalism and anti-evolutionary sentiment in *Science*

⁴⁹Joseph Smith said, "You have got to learn to be Gods. . . namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power." This and related scriptures is the basis for the Latter-day Saint belief that man, who is the literal offspring of God in the spirit, can grow to be like God just as all progeny grow to resemble their parents. However, this does not necessarily mean that man becomes God's equal since God exalts mankind through the atonement of Christ. In other words, exaltation is gift that is given and can never be earned by man. God's glory is increased as man becomes exalted. See Joseph Smith, "The King Follett Discourse," in *The Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 346-347.

⁵⁰John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology as Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: General Priesthood Committee, 1915), iii, 3, 10, 20-22; and Alexander, 278.

and *Belief in God*."⁵¹ Like Widtsoe and Talmage, Pack was educated in the East. He received a Ph.D. in Geology from Columbia University in 1906 and had been Talmage's assistant at the University of Utah until Talmage resigned to become an Apostle. Pack was appointed his successor and taught geology at the University of Utah during most of his remaining career.⁵²

In *Science and Belief in God*, Pack argued that true science and true religion should not be in conflict. According to Pack, it is not unreasonable to believe that God created all living beings through evolution. Sounding much like Parley P. Pratt, Pack argued that the creation accounts in Genesis, Moses, and Abraham were probably myths since it was impossible for God to reveal his method of creation in terms of modern knowledge to the ancient Hebrews since they were intellectually unprepared and incapable of understanding such knowledge. "Deity cannot make complete explanations until the human mind has developed to the stage where it is capable of grasping the full truth."⁵³

Pack believed that evolution was just as true as Mormonism and the two could not be in conflict. Pack

⁵¹Alexander, 284.

⁵²*LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4:218-219.

⁵³Frederick J. Pack, *Science and Belief in God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1924), 8-9, 11-13, 178, 182, 206-7, 221; and Alexander, 284-285.

believed that everything in nature was mutable, including species. Change was an indisputable characteristic of the natural world. Pack argued, "The essence of evolution is the essence of continual change . . . evolution is essentially a series of changes brought about by the laws of nature." Organic change is supported by an "almost unlimited array of evidence in favor of the doctrine of organic evolution."⁵⁴

4.5 A Conservative Theology

Despite Widtsoe and Pack's further attempts to reconcile science and religion, the damage had already been done. The actions taken by the Church Board of Education belied the possible neutrality of Joseph F. Smith's words. The dismissal of the Petersons and Ralph Chamberlin combined with the proclamation that the teaching of evolution should be avoided in Church schools sent the opposite message. Accordingly it seemed the unofficial position of the Church was anti-evolutionist.

Even Widtsoe's *Rational Theology* and Pack's *Science and Belief in God* made concessions to the conservative inclination that followed in the wake of the BYU campus

⁵⁴Pack, 79, 85 & 91; and Sherlock, "The Darwinist Legacy," 47.

crisis of 1911. Concerning the actual process of creation Widtsoe was understandably vague. He refused to specify evolution through natural selection as the process by which God had created the organic world. He argued that a true account of this creation would probably be well beyond man's ability to comprehend. According to Widtsoe, all we know is that the earth was created over "long periods of time" through natural laws governed by God. Widtsoe also argued that the exact method for the creation of man is also unknown although he implied that the Genesis account should be taken figuratively.⁵⁵

Like Widtsoe, Pack could only commit to a theory of evolution that was compatible with Joseph Smith's doctrine of eternal progression. Although natural selection was a vehicle through which species changed, left to itself, it was not an adequate explanation of a purposeful progression that he believed to exist. Pack argued that God had created each species originally; the development that occurred within each of these species was along certain paths or "well directed lines" already designated by the creator. Natural selection implied a random development without any plan or purpose and was thus the true enemy of religion.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Widtsoe, *Rational Theology*, 45-46.

⁵⁶Pack, 108-125.

As is evidenced by the concessions Pack and Widtsoe made to their more conservative contemporaries, a definite turn towards a more conservative interpretation of the scriptures was taking place. This conservatism is best confirmed by the change of opinion regarding the theory of evolution among BYU students. In 1911, 80 percent of the student body signed a petition supporting the teaching of evolution at BYU. In his official report, Cummings had also noted that many of the BYU students with whom he spoke had successfully reconciled science and religion and had benefited from the experience. However, a survey taken 24 years later indicated that the number of students who believed in evolution had dropped substantially to 36 percent.⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that "Items showing up with particularly large percentage shifts in the direction of conservatism [include] non-belief in the evolution of man."⁵⁸

This is partially due to the fact that modernism had inundated the Latter-Saint stronghold within the inter-mountain West as indicated by its emergence at the heart of the LDS educational system. A typical reaction among some religious groups to modernist threats was religious retrenchment. In this sense, Latter-day

⁵⁷Harold T. Christensen and Kenneth L. Cannon, 56.

⁵⁸Ibid.

Saints were no different. They saw important fundamental theological views being threatened by the religious implications of Darwinism, especially their belief in a personal God and the dignity and divine origin of man. Deistic evolution took a personal God out of the picture since evolution did not require "the immediate interposition of Deity." Pack as well as his fellow Deists believed that it was more noble for God to create a world that did not require constant supervision or attention. The builder of a machine that needed little supervision or repair was the greatest builder of all.⁵⁹ It was also argued that the theory of evolution destroyed the dignity of man by implying that man had descended from the animals as opposed to being a special creation of God. Accordingly, traditionalists believed that retrenchment was necessary in order to reestablish basic theological principles such as the dignity and divine origin of man and a personal God who was active in the affairs of his children. In the attempt to retrench, scriptural authority was used as a authority superior to science. A literal reading of the scriptures was preferred by conservatives since they believed this was the strongest refutation of the claims made by science. According to William R. Hutchinson,

⁵⁹This is an old argument that goes back to the Clarke-Leibniz debates of the early eighteenth century. See Samuel Clarke and Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz, *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. Henry Gavin Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956).

this kind of reaction is "entirely predictable." As modernism continued to threaten, conservatives looked to their greatest source of authority to use for the purpose of a direct rebuttal.⁶⁰

4.6 Anthony Ivans

In 1917, Anthony Ivans of the Council of the Twelve published an article in the *Improvement Era* entitled "A Study of Evolution." Ivans notes that he had been noticing a loss of faith among several members of the Church due to learned men "teaching doctrines which were destructive of faith in God." As the title of this essay indicates, Ivans believed the theory of evolution is chief among these destructive influences. Ivans wrote:

The doctrine taught in [high school biology text] books takes you into the realm of doubt, teaches that this earth and all things which are upon it are the result of chance, it leaves you bewildered regarding the past, uncertain of the present, and without hope in the future. The truth, as revealed from heaven, teaches the plan of an infinitely wise Creator, designed for the accomplishment of a divine purpose.⁶¹

⁶⁰Hutchinson, 185. For other excellent discussions of the Protestant reaction to Modernism see Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Guided Age* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900*, ed. Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Books, 1967).

Ivans claimed that a literal interpretation of scripture is the doctrine of the Church and that it could not be otherwise since there is no evidence "where a thing has come up from an inferior to a superior condition." He acknowledged that man has created different breeds through artificial selection but is quick to point out that new species have never been created in the process. He also argued that an artificially created breed "immediately reverts from what [it is] to an inferior condition, just as the Lord decreed it should."⁶²

Ivans' main goals were seemingly to reestablish the dignity of man as well as acknowledge a personal God who continually directs the affairs of all his creations. He belittled the possibility that man's ancestors "hung from the branches of the forest trees by their tails" and that "man had gradually evolved . . . from the lowest type of created life to what he now is, and that as his past had been a continued process of change so is his future to be." He countered with the authority of the scriptures. Reaffirming that man was a special creation of God, created in his own physical as well as spiritual image.

⁶¹Anthony Ivans, "A Study of Evolution," *Improvement Era* 21 (December 1917): 161-162.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 164.

Ivans also attempted to reestablish the existence of a personal God. He argued that man has evolved not physically but culturally and will continually progress thanks to the divine guidance of a Supreme Being. It is only through God's constant intervention that continual advances will take place in the future. Ivans also belittled the idea that life may have spontaneously generated and gradually changed under some impersonal law until the "inferior forms" of vegetables and animals advanced to the level of mankind. Once again Ivans used a literal interpretation of the creation account to counter the evolutionary argument when he declared that God personally created all extant life forms in their present condition; in contrast to the theory of evolution "we have the doctrine taught by the Church that the earth, and all that is upon it, were created by God's fiat, or decree."⁶³

He concludes by exhorting his readers to not be fooled by the "delusions" of modern biology. "In your study of philosophy, do not . . . allow yourselves, because of the words of men of cunning device and flattering words . . . to be deluded and led away" from eternal or in Ivans' case, Biblical truth.⁶⁴

⁶³Ibid., 163-166.

⁶⁴Ibid., 166.

4.7 Joseph F. Smith

In a 1918 General Conference of the Church President Joseph F. Smith offered his personal opinions concerning evolution. These were much different than portrayed in his more neutral statements. They reveal a position that is similar to Ivans's.

He began by admitting that "I also belong to the same class of individuals to which brother Ivans belongs." He immediately followed this statement with an affirmation of Ivans's belief in the literal reading of scripture. He stated that the authority of science leaves much to be desired when compared to scriptural authority. He declared that he had "great confidence in the word of the Lord" and as a result, he accepted "without reservation" the creation scriptures. He continued by arguing that a man can learn more and get nearer to the truth by reading these scriptures than he can by listening to the uninspired teachings of man.⁶⁵

Despite the declarations of official neutrality made earlier by Smith on behalf of the Church, it is clear how Smith felt personally about the theory of evolution from the following remarks:

Life is not spontaneous upon this earth. . . .
This idea that everything commenced from a small

⁶⁵Joseph F. Smith, Jr., "The Word of the Lord Superior to the Theories of Men," *Liahona: The Elders' Journal* 15, no. 41 (1918): 641.

beginning, from the scum upon the surface of the sea, and has gradually developed until all forms of life, the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the plants upon the face of the earth, have all sprung from that one source, is a falsehood absolutely. There is no truth in it. . . . How foolish, how narrow, how contemptible it is for men professing scientific knowledge and wisdom, to declare that all life upon this earth is spontaneous. . . . Moreover, to declare that the life here has developed from the same single, simple source. It is true that life comes from the same source, but that is not the scum of the sea, a jellyfish or a pollywog. God, our Father, is the creator of life and He placed life on this earth in varied forms.⁶⁶

According to Smith, the theory of evolution was a "false theory" which was "poisoning" the minds of Latter-day Saint youth and should be fought against.⁶⁷

It is especially interesting and certainly surprising to note that Smith, who had once declared that evolution was a possible explanation for the creation, had now concluded that the teaching of these "foolish doctrines regarding the origin of life" should be disregarded by Latter-day Saints.⁶⁸

It should be noted that this change of heart coincided with a larger cultural crisis within the United States as a whole. Smith was writing his explicit polemic against evolution at a time when the

⁶⁶Ibid., 642.

⁶⁷Ibid., 642 & 644.

⁶⁸Ibid., 643-644.

issues of creation, evolution, and Biblical literalism were dividing the nation. Conservatives and Modernists were battling each other over the pulpit and in the press.

Tremendous expansion of American secondary education was partially responsible for this situation.⁶⁹ In 1890 there were 202,963 pupils attending high school. This was only 3.8 percent of the potential student body. In 1920, 1,851,968 pupils were now attending public schools and representing a much larger percentage of the potential student population. Also during this period, the number of public high schools increased from 2,562 to 14,326.⁷⁰ "It was the expansion of public secondary education that carried evolution to an increasing number of America's youth, and this expansion coincided with the anti-evolution crusade."⁷¹ As long as evolution was an obscure doctrine confined to higher education it had not done much harm.⁷² However, the rapid growth of secondary education exposed more American youth to the "dangers" inherent in evolutionary theory. The general expansion of secondary education to include more youth

⁶⁹Larson, 26; Numbers, "Creationism in 20th-Century America," 539; and Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper, 1964), 72-73.

⁷⁰Quoted in Larson, 26.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 27.

⁷²William Jennings Bryan, *The Bible and its Enemies* (Chicago: Bible Institute, 1921), 34.

produced a marked reaction from those opposed to evolution teachings. "Increased public interest in the content of high-school education stimulated by the growing numbers of secondary-school students" inspired leaders such as William Jennings Bryan to organize religious conservatives in an effort to expunge evolutionary doctrine from America's schools.⁷³

Events in Utah were a reflection of these larger national trends. With the achievement of statehood in 1896, an increasing number of public schools were organized. Evolutionary theory was taught in these schools while religious education was excluded. Between 1896 and 1920, Latter-day Saints attended these schools in ever-increasing numbers. The percentage of Latter-day Saints attending public school approximately reflected the increased percentage of students attending these schools elsewhere in the United States.⁷⁴

As is evidenced by Smith's change-of-heart, Utah was not immune to these larger cultural currents; the isolation of Utah was a thing of the past. As a result, the Fundamentalist movement which emerged in the United States during the early twentieth century had its parallel in Utah. Like many other church leaders throughout the United States, Smith began to oppose the

⁷³Larson, 27.

⁷⁴Leonard and Allen, 428.

teaching of evolution in public schools and committed himself to continued opposition since an increasing number of Utah Mormons were now attending these schools.⁷⁵ According to Smith, the false "scientific theory of man's origin" does not have "any more right to a place in the public schools than the principles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."⁷⁶

Smith's son, Joseph Fielding Smith, was also "troubled over the 'wordly philosophies' and 'theories of men' that were 'creeping in among the Latter-day Saints' and, he believed, injuring their faith."⁷⁷ According to the younger Smith, modernism needed to be addressed in order to strengthen the faith of Latter-day Saint students who were being exposed to evolution and higher criticism in public schools and colleges.⁷⁸ Accordingly, Smith publicly denounced the theory of evolution for the benefit of all Latter-day Saints students in 1920. In this address, the younger Smith began by arguing that "all down through the ages the teachings of science have been changed." For example, man once thought that the earth was flat and in the center of the universe--obviously, this is no longer the

⁷⁵Ibid., 643-644.

⁷⁶Smith, "The Word of the Lord Superior to the Theories of Men," 643.

⁷⁷Allen, clxxx.

⁷⁸Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, xi.

case. Smith then argued that scientists now believe in an equally foolish myth. This is, of course, the theory of evolution. Smith continued by declaring that this theory will soon be proven false like other scientific theories which preceded it.⁷⁹ In this same address, Smith argued that evolution must be false because it contradicted the scriptures. When this kind of "trash" is taken seriously, students are led to believe that there is no God since the diversity of life can be explained through natural causes. According to Smith, students are forced to decide between the authority of the scriptures and the authority of science since "the doctrine that is set forth in the scriptures and the doctrine of the evolutionist cannot be made to agree."⁸⁰ Fortunately, the lure of scientific authority could be successfully overcome if Latter-day Saints were made aware of the fallacies inherent in evolutionary thinking. Smith's sermon was an attempt to educate Latter-day Saints concerning these fallacies so they might have the appropriate tools needed to make the proper decisions.⁸¹

⁷⁹Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Origin and Destiny of Man," *Improvement Era* 13, no. 5 (1920): 375-378.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 386.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 375-393. Since Smith was Roberts's main antagonist, his ideas will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The Scopes trial of 1925 brought about even more "interest in the problem of evolution." By 1925, the First Presidency published another official proclamation restating the Church's official position. Once again it was a compromise that even Widtsoe and Pack could accept. "The statement did not say that the creation had taken place in six literal days or even in six thousand years nor did it reject the idea of evolution. It affirmed that man was created in the image of God, but said nothing of the method of creation."⁸² No matter how theoretically neutral the Church's reaffirmation of its official position was or how convincing Pack and Widtsoe's arguments were, the conservative reaction to modernism continued to increase after 1925.

Ever since the period of speculation that produced the creation accounts of Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, and Brigham Young, several historical factors had continually propelled the unofficial position of the Church to an increasingly conservative interpretation of the creation. The period of purification was the first conservative reaction to encroachment of the modern world which led to the further definition and unification of Church doctrine while curbing some of the more speculative explorations of Church leaders. As Utah vied for statehood, a period of accommodation also

⁸²Alexander 286.

discouraged any speculative accounts of the creation. During this period, Church practices and doctrines became increasingly aligned with the practices and doctrines of mainstream Protestantism.

Throughout the period of purification and accommodation, modernism increasingly advanced upon the isolation of the Saints. After the theory of evolution was first officially recognized in 1861, reactions became increasingly hostile. As the Saints' isolation continued to be compromised, modernism was increasingly seen as a threat to some of the more fundamental doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by a swelling number of members.

When modernism reached the heart of the Church Educational System in 1911, the official position of the Church was relatively neutral but actions taken by the Church sent another message. Despite further attempts to reconcile science and religion, conservative interpretations of creation accounts increased. This trend continued and was amplified by controversy that preceded the Scopes trial of 1925. Despite official reaffirmation of Church neutrality issued during this year, the insistence of certain Church leaders that evolution must not be taught in Utah schools--private or public--combined with their anti-evolutionist polemics insured that the trend towards a more fundamentalist approach to scripture would continue.

The Church's gradual move from a somewhat liberal stance concerning creation accounts towards a more conservative position is best exemplified in the life and works of B. H. Roberts. He is a window on an age. A study of his life and works is illustrative of the conclusions heretofore reached. Accordingly, it is to Roberts's life and works that we now turn.

5. B. H. ROBERTS

The life and works of the LDS theologian, B. H. Roberts, is a window through which we can view the age of transition. Roberts's theological works are clearly reminiscent of the period of liberal speculation. His theological treatises, including his masterwork *The Truth, The Way, The Life* (hereafter referred to as the *TWL*), were often just as speculative as the writings and sermons of Brigham Young, Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt and other theologians who preceded him. In fact, Roberts heavily relied upon these earlier theologians as sources of authority. However, the reaction to his theory of origins indicates the intellectual atmosphere had changed. The fact that the Church rejected Roberts's theory of evolution is illustrative of these changes. By Roberts's day, literal readings of the creation scriptures had become preferable to speculative theories of origins.

5.1 Roberts's Intellectual Biography

"As a young illiterate British immigrant to Utah, [Roberts] was bright, eager to learn, and anxious to

master all the knowledge he could."¹ He saved up enough money selling bear skins to attend the University of Deseret, which later became the University of Utah. He completed a two-year course of study in one year and was asked to be the school's valedictorian. Despite graduating at the head of the class, Roberts considered his education at the University of Deseret to be largely useless due to the "humble" state of the territorial universities at this time. According to Roberts, "this brief attendance at the university entailed . . . [a] very lame and inadequate education."²

His real education came from his voracious appetite for books. As a result of reading everything he could acquire, Roberts's Latter-day Saint contemporaries considered him to be one of the most knowledgeable men in the state of Utah.³ Today, many LDS scholars consider him to be among the greatest philosophers in the history of the Church.⁴ Prominent Latter-day Saint historian, James B. Allen has written:

¹Allen, *clix*.

²Roberts, *Autobiography*, 65, 67-69; and Madsen, 96.

³Although Roberts achieved national notoriety for being elected to and then excluded from the U.S. House of Representatives due to his polygamous marriages, his intellectual influence did not extend past the borders of Utah.

⁴Allen, *clix*; Arrington, "The LDS Intellectual Tradition," 22-23; and Stan Larson, "Intellectuals in Mormon History: An Update," *Dialogue* 26 (Fall 1993): 187-189.

As a scholar, writer, and Church leader, he showed all the characteristics of one who loved the life of the mind, thirsted for both secular and spiritual knowledge, and was willing to discuss all the implications of everything he learned. His personal library, now housed in the LDS Church archives, comprised 1,385 books, a substantial portion of which dealt with some aspect of theology, history (including Christian history and American antiquities), and philosophy."⁵

Judging from all the various marginal notes he wrote in these works, it is clear that Roberts studied his books carefully. Of these Sixty-nine are on science and include works by Darwin, Spencer, and Fiske.⁶

Like many who came before him, Roberts interpreted the teachings of Joseph Smith to mean that science and religion were two different pieces of the same universal truth. Roberts believed that God revealed himself through his works as well as his word. According to LDS intellectual historian James B. Allen, "He believed the quest for knowledge involved both the life of the mind and the life of the spirit--that intellectuality and faith must go hand-in-hand in their search for the truth."⁷ Roberts's main biographer, Truman G. Madsen, claimed Roberts believed the study of the scripture and

⁵Allen, clix.

⁶Brigham H. Madsen, "Introduction," in B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham H. Madsen (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 20.

⁷Allen, clix.

the study of secular knowledge led to increased revelation or "the expansion of truth and light" until all things would eventually be known.⁸

During his lifetime, Roberts was a prolific writer as well as a reader. To this day, he has produced more scholarly works than any other leader of the LDS Church. He has written "over thirty books, three hundred articles, numerous tracts and pamphlets, and over a thousand sermons and discourses (many of which were published in newspapers and magazines)."⁹ His first written indication that he was considering the implications of secular knowledge upon traditional creation accounts appeared in his *New Witness for God* published in 1895. Roberts argued in the *New Witness* that modern geological evidence proved that Earth was much older than 6,000 years. He then interpreted statements made by Joseph Smith as a confirmation of the geological evidence.¹⁰ In a 1908 publication called *The Seventy's Course in Theology*, Roberts reiterates the theories of Parley P. Pratt without recourse to evolution,¹¹ claiming that the ancient Israelites were

⁸Madsen, "Introduction," 20.

⁹Allen, clxi. A list of Roberts's most important works appears in Madsen, *Defender of the Faith*, 441-443.

¹⁰B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1895), 349, 422, & 435.

given a myth explaining the creation since they were intellectually unprepared to hear the truth. Roberts's subsequent thoughts and writings concerning the theory of evolution need not be mentioned here since they are all conveniently summarized in the *TWL*.

5.2 Studies of the *Book of Mormon*

Roberts's willingness to embrace secular knowledge and to reconcile it with scripture is evident in his *Studies of the Book of Mormon*.¹² In the 1880s Roberts began his studies partially as a response to numerous challenges raised by secular scholarship concerning the *Book of Mormon's* authenticity. His first response to these challenges appeared in his *New Witness for God* in 1909. In the *New Witness*, Roberts used secular knowledge to support of the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*. Roberts relied most heavily upon archeological and anthropological evidence. For example, he claimed that the ancient ruins of the Western Hemisphere helped prove the existence of the civilizations described in the *Book of Mormon*. More important, Roberts believed

¹¹B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy's Course in Theology: Second Year, Outline History of the Dispensations of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Skelton Publishing Company, 1908), 38.

¹²The information contained within this section can be found in Madsen, "Introduction;" and Allen, clxv-clxix.

the myths and traditions of the native Americans offered substantial proof of the *Book of Mormon's* authenticity. According to Roberts, the myths and traditions of the Native Americans revealed a knowledge of the creation, the fall, the flood, and the tower of Babel in degenerate but recognizable form.¹³ Roberts also noted that Native Americans told the story of a great god named Quetzalcoal who had visited the peoples of the Western Hemisphere and had established peace throughout the land for several years. Roberts believed this paralleled the story of Christ's visit to the Americas after his death and resurrection as told in the *Book of Mormon*. According to Roberts, the myth of Quetzalcoal was a impure version of the perfectly preserved story found in LDS scripture.¹⁴ Shortly after Roberts's *New Witness* was published, however, several new and more difficult questions were raised concerning some "apparent inconsistencies and anachronisms found in the *Book of Mormon*." Based on Roberts's earlier work, James E. Talmage asked Roberts to respond to these new issues.¹⁵

¹³Roberts's work was written for an LDS audience. As a result, his ideas were virtually ignored by contemporary ethnographers and received little attention outside of Latter-day Saint circles.

¹⁴B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 347-441.

¹⁵Allen, clxvi.

Roberts took his new assignment seriously and used the evidence of science once again as a criterion for establishing truth. At the end of 1921, Roberts had written a 141-page study entitled "*Book of Mormon Difficulties: A Study*." Shortly thereafter, he asked to meet with the General Authorities of the Church in hopes of discussing possible solutions to some of the problems his studies had uncovered.¹⁶ At the beginning of 1922, Roberts was given two days to present his findings. However, it was generally agreed by the leaders of the Church that it was unnecessary to prove the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon* through modern science since belief in the *Book of Mormon* was a matter of faith. Roberts, however, was unsatisfied with their conclusion. According to his beliefs, science and religion should be reconciled since they were both part of one universal truth. He believed it was necessary to "answer the questions that arise from these considerations from American archaeology." Answering these questions would lead to a greater understanding of the truth and help nurture faith by the supporting the evidence of science. He asked Church leaders:

If we cannot [answer these questions], what is to be the effect of it all upon the minds of our youth? What is to be our general standing before

¹⁶Roberts, *Studies*, 46.

the enlightened opinion of mankind? Is silence to be our answer? . . . In the last analysis of things silence would be an acknowledgment of defeat. Silence in an age of free inquiry is impossible. . . . To stand up and say to the modern world we place our revealed truth against all the evidence and deductions of your science, and await the vindication of new evidence yet to be discovered, is heroic; but is it, and will it be convincing? Most humbly, but also most anxiously, I await the further development of knowledge that will make it possible for us to give a reasonable answer to those who question us concerning the matters herein discussed. But, of course, in the meantime there may have occurred to your more enlightened minds a solution to all these problems that will cause all our difficulties to disappear. Most humbly I pray it may be so, and I shall be happy to give that enlightenment welcome.¹⁷

Roberts felt compelled to complete an even more comprehensive manuscript designed to deal with the scientific questions he felt needed to be addressed. This manuscript was entitled "*A Book of Mormon Study*" and comprised 450 pages of text. Still believing that an attempt to reconcile scientific evidence with the *Book of Mormon* was necessary in order to sustain the faith of Latter-day Saints, Roberts once again planned to present his new findings and conclusions to the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve. In the cover letter that accompanied the manuscript to be sent to the General Authorities Roberts claimed that "*A Book of Mormon Study*" gives all the evidence, including all the

¹⁷Roberts, *Studies*, 142-143.

"pros and cons," related to the authenticity of *Book of Mormon*. Scientific evidence which confirmed passages in the *Book of Mormon* as well as scientific evidence that seemed to refute certain passages were given equal time. Roberts's attempts to give possible explanations for the conflicts between secular knowledge and scripture reaffirmed his belief that science and scripture are compatible. As archeologists learn more about the ancient inhabitants of America the two should be more easily reconciled.¹⁸

It is clear Roberts believed that secular knowledge played an important role in establishing the truth. Roberts hoped the final manuscript of 1927 which he called "Studies of the *Book of Mormon*" would be a valuable resource to the leaders of the Church who, according to Roberts, would be increasingly forced to confront the problems invoked by modern science as scholars examined the *Book of Mormon* even more closely.¹⁹

¹⁸B. H. Roberts to President Heber J. Grant, Council, and quorum of the Twelve Apostles, dated 15 March 1923, in Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, 57-58. As a result of his higher criticism, some scholars have argued that Roberts had lost faith in the *Book of Mormon*. See Madsen, "Introduction," 1-34; and Brigham H. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts's Studies of the *Book of Mormon*," *Dialogue* 26 (Fall 1993): 77-86. Others have argued that he truly believed that all scientific arguments against its authenticity would be eventually answered. See John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker After Truth," *Ensign* 16 (March 1986): 56-62; Truman G. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 19 (Summer 1979): 427-445; and Allen, clxvii-clxviii.

¹⁹Allen, clxvii-clxviii.

The First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, however, resisted Roberts's recommendation to incorporate secular knowledge into their doctrinal expositions primarily because portions of this secular knowledge appeared to refute the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon* despite of Roberts's continued insistence that the two would someday be reconciled. Many Church leaders believed a reaffirmation of the greater authority of scripture was all that was needed to prove the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*. After all, divine revelation given by God was greater than any knowledge discovered by man. If God had declared the *Book of Mormon* to be true no other proof was needed. Not only was scientific knowledge not needed to confirm Latter-day Saint beliefs, it could be detrimental to faith, especially if it contradicted scriptural authority. When conflicts between the two sources of authority existed, the greater authority of scripture was preferred to that of science. As was previously noted, a reaffirmation of the greater authority of scripture was a symptom of the conservative reaction to modernism that was taking place among several leaders of the Church at this time.

Roberts's experience with the "Studies" gave him a taste of what was to come. His highly speculative reconciliation of evolution and scriptures that later

appeared in the drafts of the *TWL* would be vehemently opposed by conservatives who insisted on a literal interpretation of scripture. Roberts's later opponents believed the scriptures were superior in authority concerning all matters of truth; anything that was in conflict with a literal reading of scripture was probably false regardless of the number of "scientific experts" who believed otherwise. This insistence on the superior authority of scripture that Roberts confronted while trying to convince the leaders of the Church of the value that his "Studies" could have would reappear as one of the main arguments against Roberts's highly speculative creation theory which appeared in the *TWL*.

5.3 The Story of the *TWL*

According to James B. Allen, "Roberts's disappointments over not getting his brethren to consider his 'Studies of the *Book of Mormon*' was minor compared with his frustration over not getting his last manuscript published." This last manuscript was the *TWL*. Between 1922 and 1927, Roberts served as a mission president of the Eastern States Mission. During this period Roberts began his plans to write another book

that would "condense his lifetime of study into one grand, comprehensive statement of belief."²⁰

When Roberts was released from his mission in 1927, he asked church President Heber J. Grant if he could stay in New York City. A missionary bulletin released to the missionaries serving in the Eastern States Mission intimated Roberts's plans. It explained that Roberts wished to remain in the East in order to have access to its many large libraries where he would do the required research for his next book.²¹

In New York, Roberts began writing his synthetic philosophy which attempted to reconcile all knowledge, especially religious and scientific knowledge, into one unified whole.²² This was intended to be his *Magnum Opus*. He hoped that it would have more impact upon the Saints than anything else he had previously written. Roberts's age and failing health inspired him to work as quickly as possible. He was determined not to leave a lifetime of knowledge unrecorded. Accordingly, Roberts

²⁰Ibid., clxix; Madsen, 315-338; and Sherlock, 63.

²¹Madsen, 337.

²²The use of the word "synthetic" here is not coincidental. Roberts was clearly inspired by the earlier synthetic philosophies of Herbert Spencer and John Fiske. He respected their work and ideas more than any other philosophers as is evidenced in his frequent references to their writing. It was Roberts's intention to create a synthetic philosophy in the style of both Spencer and Fiske for the benefit of the Latter-day Saints.

crystallized and articulated his synthetic philosophy in a matter of months.²³

By 15 June 1927, Roberts sent a letter addressed to President Heber J. Grant in which he noted the swift progress he was making on his project.²⁴ A year later, Roberts had 43 chapters ready for publication and he believed that his timing was excellent. He noticed that many members of the Church were asking about their course of study for 1929 but no official manual had yet been approved. In light of this, Roberts asked that his manuscript be taken into consideration as a possible course of study. He told Church leaders that he could give them the 43 chapters he had ready for publication. Other chapters would be rewritten and ready for publication by October 1928. Roberts's desire to see his work published as a church manual in 1929, inspired him to work even more quickly than before.²⁵

Roberts's haste to complete such a monumental task within such a short period of time unfortunately led to deficiencies in his work. Any attempt to circumscribe all extant knowledge into a complete whole within six months meant that simplicity and brevity were the key. Accordingly, Roberts abbreviated many significant

²³Ibid., 338 & 340; Allen, clxix-clxx.

²⁴Madsen, 339; Allen, clxx.

²⁵Allen, clxxi.

subjects in his attempt to be all-inclusive. As a result, many important topics received only a superficial treatment.²⁶ This is especially true in the case of physics and astronomy which will be dealt with at length later in this chapter.

5.4 Science and Religion in the *TWL*

Taking into consideration Roberts's previous endeavors to reconcile modern science and the *Book of Mormon*, it is not surprising that the *TWL* was an attempt to reconcile all extant knowledge with Mormon doctrine as its organizing principle. Roberts considered science and Latter-day Saint religion as the two greatest sources of truth. By combining science and religion, Roberts hoped to present a integrated picture of all knowledge revealed to man through disparate avenues of divine manifestation. His approach is best summed up in a handwritten note following the title page of his first draft. According to Roberts, "Religion, to be effective, must appeal to the understanding, as well as to the emotions of man."²⁷ It must encompass all

²⁶John W. Welch, "Introduction," in *B. H. Roberts, The Truth, The Way, The Life* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies), xii & xvi.

²⁷B. H. Roberts, "The Truth, The Way, The Life, Draft 1" (Provo, UT: BYU Studies), 7.

scientific as well as spiritual truth. By studying truth, mankind could get closer to God by discovering His nature.

Accordingly, Roberts begins by defining truth. He first notes that many philosophers, including Spencer and Fiske, have unsuccessfully attempted to define it.²⁸ However, Roberts argues that Joseph Smith had the most accurate definition of truth revealed to him. Roberts writes that in 1833

there had another voice spoken upon this subject which claimed for itself a divine authority to speak upon this and kindred questions, and this is what it said of truth: "Truth is the knowledge of things as they are, as they were, and as they are to come" (D&C 93:24). If this is spoken with divine sanction, under inspiration of God, then it ought to be the completest definition of truth extant among men. I hold it to be so. It deals with truth under several aspects; relative truth; absolute truth; and truth in the "becoming" or unfolding.²⁹

According to Roberts, relative truth was contingent upon knowledge. The truth of a child, for example, differs markedly from the truth of an adult. Absolute truth, on the other hand, was the knowledge possessed by an omniscient God. Science was relative truth since man's

²⁸For Spencer's definition of truth see *First Principles*, 141; For Fiske's definition of truth see, John Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy, Based on the Doctrine of Evolution with Criticisms on the Positive Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), 4:102-103.

²⁹Roberts, *TWL*, 19-28.

knowledge differed markedly from the knowledge of God. Man's relative truth more closely approximated God's absolute truth as God revealed things which were previously unknown to man through science and religion. This was Roberts's truth in the "becoming." Roberts wrote that "truth is not a stagnant pool, but a living fountain." Knowledge of the truth will increase as more of God's absolute knowledge is revealed to man.³⁰

Absolute truth has been, and will be, revealed by God through both secular knowledge and scripture. Scientists and theologians are both seekers after God's truth. Historians are seeking after truth "in the musty manuscripts and old libraries of monasteries" while other scholars "are even now pushing back the horizon of recorded knowledge into ages before books were known." Archaeologists "are removing mountains from buried cities to get at the libraries of inscribed clay tablets, the hieroglyphic-covered stone monuments, and engraved plates of bronze and gold." Other scientists are reading the story of the earth's formation in its various strata. They are studying the flora and fauna of bygone ages, seeking to determine life-forms that

³⁰Ibid. Since Roberts made few modifications excepting minor grammatical changes and alterations in punctuation from the first to the final draft of the chapters dealing with the physical sciences, the final published version of the *TWL* is sufficient for an analysis of these chapters.

once abounded in the earth." These scientists are seekers after the truth of all things that have been.³¹

Others are concerned with truth as it now is. He includes in this category the chemists and physicists who "deal with substance and its elements; . . . pursuing substance beyond the realm of the senses, down to the mystic borderline where matter seems to shade off into energy, and energy drifts back into what is recognized as matter." He also mentions the astronomers who make a "study of the heavens" and who "resolve the mist and nebulae into congeries of worlds undreamed of men of former times." Harking back to Paley's theology, Roberts declares that all things now being discovered by the sciences "declare the glory of God" and "show his handiwork."³²

Roberts's conception of the truth clearly included scientific knowledge since it revealed parts of God's truth not included in scripture. However, in Roberts's hierarchy of the truth, revealed knowledge was always more important since it concerned matters relevant to salvation. Having praised science for its contributions to knowledge, Roberts makes it clear that religious truth will always be more important. Those who discover

³¹Ibid., 25.

³²Ibid., 26.

religious truth "by faith and prayer; by appeals to God; by the pursuit of it through holy thinking and righteous living; [and] by faithful vigils of the night and words and deeds of charity through the day" enjoy a knowledge that is far superior to the knowledge of the scientist since it comes directly from the source of all truth.³³ Even more important was the truth revealed to the prophets "with whose services the world may not dispense without sustaining great loss."³⁴ The teachings of the Prophets especially took precedence over the teaching of science since all prophets received their knowledge directly from God. More important however, religious truths were the most significant of all truths since they could lead a person to salvation. Knowing that Jesus was the Savior of all mankind was much more important than knowing the chemical composition of granite or the atomic weight of hydrogen since the former could lead to religious redemption whereas the latter could not.³⁵

³³Latter-day Saints believe that direct revelation from God continues today. According to Latter-day Saints, individuals are entitled to receive personal revelation from God for his own spiritual benefit. Mormons also believe that their Prophets receive revelation for the entire Church. Both avenues of revelation continue to add spiritual truths to those already revealed in the LDS canon.

³⁴Ibid., 26-27.

³⁵Andrew C. Skinner, "The Atonement," in Roberts, *TWL*, cxli.

Roberts concluded this section by arguing that a continued search for both scientific and religious truth was the "world's best hope" for a brighter future since advancements in both kinds of knowledge would lead to the spiritual and temporal advancement of man which would eventually result in millennial conditions upon the face of the earth. Roberts's feelings about the importance of a continual search for knowledge are summed up well when he exclaimed to all seekers of the truth:

"Success to You!" The world's best hope for all time is your continued progress! Seek on, and let each one bring to the service of man that which he shall find of the truth, confident that the world's progress, the advancement of civilization, man's best welfare and God's greatest glory will be in exact proportion to your success. Legends, venerable for their age, you may destroy; myths, though beautiful, you may discredit; creeds, formulated on misconceptions of truth, may crumble at your touch; half truths, dear to some, you may rend from men's beliefs. . . . But in the end, all will be well, nothing will perish but that which is false and evil. Truth alone will ultimately survive and endure.³⁶

After a brief and somewhat elementary review of epistemology, Roberts proceeded to define time, space, matter, and force. Roberts claimed that these definitions were the axioms upon which the rest of his

³⁶Roberts, *TWL*, 27.

arguments would be built.³⁷ In creating these axioms, Roberts was attempting to give his work some semblance of Euclidean rigor. If one accepted these axioms then the propositions which followed should be convincing since they were built upon firm foundations. This approach was used by many of the great system builders. Unfortunately, this style of reasoning did not always work well outside of the exact sciences. Axioms could be used to support speculations that could not be confirmed by mathematical proofs or experiment. As a result, these conclusions remained in the realm of speculation. However, these speculations were more convincing when presented in the scientifically rigorous style of Euclid and Newton. Obviously, this important fact was not lost on Roberts.

These definitions also played another important function which can only be understood in historical context. After Utah became a state in 1896, many Latter-day Saints felt the need to be accepted by the larger community to which they now belonged. "Roberts felt this [need] as much or more than anyone else in the Church." He wanted to be accepted by the intellectual community that existed outside the state of Utah. As a result, he copied the style of other writers who were

³⁷Ibid., 37.

popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in an attempt to cast his ideas in a mold that would be familiar to other intellectuals. He used a method which began with basic definitions upon which the remainder of the work would be built. In copying a style that was familiar to most intellectuals, Roberts was attempting to become a part of a larger intellectual discourse and contribute some of his own ideas to philosophy in general.³⁸

Roberts also claims to use many contemporary sources as the basis of his definitions.³⁹ The use of these scholarly works was another attempt to be taken seriously by the intellectual community at large since he needed to show that he was well-versed in latest scientific knowledge.⁴⁰ Unfortunately for Roberts, his definitions of space, time, and force seemed to indicate that he did not understand the contemporary meanings of these concepts. For example, Roberts "confuses force with energy, which are distinct physical concepts measured in different units."⁴¹ In fact, Roberts

³⁸Welch, xviii.

³⁹These sources include: John Arthur Thompson, ed., *The Outline of Science* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 1:9-62; and George Matthew, "An Analysis of Matter," and "The Properties of Matter," in *The Science History of the Universe*, ed. Francis Rolt-Wheeler (New York: The Current Literature Publishing Company, 1909), 1-48.

⁴⁰Welch, xviii.

definition of force can be considered a suitable definition of energy.⁴²

Roberts's definitions of time and space also suggest that he lacked an accurate understanding of contemporary science. Einstein's theory of relativity proposed several years before Roberts began his work suggested that time and space were inseparable entities and that space-time was curved and limited in its extent. Roberts, however, insisted that this was not the case: space and time were distinct concepts and both were infinite in their extent. Roberts also believed that space could be defined by standard plane Euclidean geometry. More than a decade after the discovery of the theory of relativity, he assumed that this is the only geometry which correctly describes space-time.

Roberts beliefs cannot be attributed to an ignorance of Einstein's work since he intimates that he is familiar with the revolutionary concepts inherent in this work.⁴³ Having eliminated ignorance as a possibility, two other explanations present themselves as likely explanations for Roberts's definitions of

⁴¹William E. Evenson, "Science: The Universe, Creation, and Evolution," in Roberts, *TWL*, cxvi.

⁴²Roberts, *TWL*, 44.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 45.

space and time. Keeping in mind his misunderstanding of both force and energy, Roberts simply may not have understood Einstein's theory despite affirmations to the contrary. It seems even more likely, however, that Roberts understood the modern conception of space and time but refused to accept it because it made his reconciliation of science and Latter-day Saint theology more difficult. For example, Roberts probably understood that it was difficult to conceptualize important LDS doctrines such as worlds without number or the eternity of matter in a universe confined by temporal and spatial limitations. If this is true, this is proof of Roberts's belief that truth through revelation was more important than truth through science.

After discussing the nature of time and space, Roberts concludes his brief foray into physics with a discussion of the first law of thermodynamics. This time he correctly uses his sources when writes that "force" (meaning energy) can neither be created nor destroyed, only changed from one form into another. As a result, the amount of energy in the universe remains constant. Likewise, he believes that the amount of matter in the universe also remains relatively constant. Roberts understands that some matter is lost when it is changed into radiant energy but he quotes Noble Prize

winner Robert Andrews Millikan in saying that somewhere "radiant energy is condensing back into mass [and] that new worlds are thus continually forming as old ones are disappearing."⁴⁴ This was an obvious use of scientific authority to prove the truth of religion since Joseph Smith argued that all matter was eternal and could never be destroyed.

Roberts discussion of physics just barely scratched the surface of contemporary knowledge. As was mentioned previously, this was partially due to the fact that Roberts wrote his entire treatise in matter of months. As a result, Roberts did not have time to discuss all the concepts of modern physics. However inadequate his section may be in its description of physics, it does establish an authoritative tone for the rest of the work while adopting a style familiar to the rest of the philosophical community outside the state of Utah. His discussion of physics also revealed a strategy that Roberts continually used throughout the remainder of his work. When discussing speculative ideas such as recreating matter from radiant energy, Roberts quotes prominent scientific experts in order to give his arguments an air of authority. However, Roberts fails to note that his authority was merely speculating as

⁴⁴Robert Andrews Millikan, *Evolution in Science and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), 17.

opposed to presenting scientific facts. Nevertheless, the use of Millikan as a source was apparently meant to convey the impression that Roberts was grounding his work on scientific authority. The fact that Roberts was selectively using his sources is best exemplified by the fact that most scientists in the early twentieth century believed that matter could not be reconstructed after it was converted into radiant energy.

Roberts's next chapters describe the solar and sidereal systems. Like the preceding chapter on physics, these chapters barely begin to scratch the surface of his subject. In fact these chapters are often reminiscent of a popular encyclopedia article since Roberts is attempting to summarize all of his sources in just a few short pages.⁴⁵ Roberts's haste in producing the *TWL* best accounts for the scarcity of facts in these chapters. He simply did not have enough time to master or incorporate all the information acquired by modern astronomy into his work. However, Roberts still accomplished his main objective in writing this chapter. Roberts had earlier been impressed with Paley's proofs for a divine Creator and wanted to add

⁴⁵All of Roberts's facts in these sections come directly from Simon Newcomb, *Popular Astronomy* (New York: Harper, 1893); Anthony Joseph Gillett and W. J. Rolfe, *First Book in Astronomy, for the Use of Schools and Academies* (New York: Knight, Loomis, 1882); and David Peck Todd, *A New Astronomy* (New York: American Book, 1926).

additional proofs for the existence of God. Accordingly, Roberts is attempting "to demonstrate the greatness of God's creations" through the wonders of astronomy.⁴⁶ Keeping this in mind, it is not surprising that Roberts's descriptions of the solar and sidereal systems often ascend from prosaic to the awe-inspiring. These descriptions often reveal a wonder inspired by the immensity of the universe. Roberts gives the reader the impression that such monumental creations could only be created by God.⁴⁷

In the following chapter Roberts argues that it is not possible for such an immense and majestic universe to be the result of random chance especially when considering the order that exists in the universe. He writes, "The universe coming into existence by chance may be dismissed at once, not only as altogether unlikely but positively unbelievable." Order cannot come from disorder without an organizing force. The fact that an order exists in universe indicates that some higher intelligence must be responsible.⁴⁸

Roberts continues his line of reasoning by arguing that order cannot exist without "a reign of law." Just

⁴⁶Evenson, cxv.

⁴⁷Roberts, *TWL*, 50-60.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 60.

as anarchy exists in a political state without laws to govern the population, order cannot exist in the universe without laws to govern its existence. The fact that a certain amount of order exists in a political state indicates the existence of laws that govern the behavior of the populace. Likewise, "the orderly movements of the heavens" are "evidence of a reign of law in the universe." Roberts quoted the *Doctrine and Covenants* as saying that laws have been given

unto all things, by which they move in their times and seasons; And their course are fixed, even the courses of the heavens and the earth, which comprehend the earth and all the planets. And they give light to each other in their times and in their season, in their minutes, in their hours, in their days, in their weeks, in their months, in their years.⁴⁹

Roberts concludes by arguing that in the political state as well as in the universe, the existence of law implies the existence of a lawmaker. These ideas were not novel. In 1867, the Duke of Argyll had argued that there was a pattern and harmony in the universe that defies all natural explanation and could only be explained by recourse to a divine Lawgiver.⁵⁰ However, Roberts makes no reference to Argyll or his work. In

⁴⁹D&C 88:42-44.

⁵⁰Bowler, *Evolution*, 225.

fact, there is no evidence that Roberts had ever heard of Argyll. However, Roberts introduces the concept as if it were still a relatively common notion among theologians and uses it to reinforce his belief that the natural world is evidence for a divine Creator. It is clear that after decades of refutations suffered at the hands of naturalists, natural theology, or the belief that the natural world provided proof for the existence of God, still held the minds of some religious thinkers including Roberts and maintains supporters today.⁵¹

This leads to the consideration of another important aspect of Roberts's work which characterizes the *TWL* as well as any work which attempts to use science in order to justify faith. Those who have attempted to justify faith through scientific evidence often find that the evidence they use in support of their faith is used by others to challenge it. For example, after Newton published his *Principia* in 1686, many religious believers argued that Newton had discovered the laws through which God governed the universe. They believed that the existence of these laws was evidence for the existence of a Designer. However, there were others who believed that Newton's laws made God unnecessary; the universe ran very well on

⁵¹Roberts, *TWL*, 61-62.

its own without any intervention from God. Those who already believed in God viewed Newton's laws as an incredible validation of their faith while deists or atheists used the same laws to argue that God was unnecessary. Because of his faith, Roberts saw evidence of God's handiwork everywhere he looked. However, without faith guiding one's vision, a person may see the beauty and magnificence of the universe without necessarily deducing the existence of God; without faith, the order of the universe merely proves that there are natural laws which govern it. If published, Roberts' arguments would have supported the faith of those who already believed; however it is unlikely that the scientific evidence would have converted skeptics.

Roberts concludes his discussion of the rule of law by claiming that God always works through the natural laws which he had created. Even miracles are performed under the rule of law. When miracles occur, according to Roberts, they seem miraculous because the observers cannot comprehend the laws by which they were performed. Roberts writes:

So with many things that people now in ignorance call "miracles": the healing of the sick, restoring the blind to sight, making the lame to walk, through the exercise of faith; and the resurrection of the dead--all these instead of being derogation from recognized law, may yet turn out to be simply the application of laws of which we are of yet in ignorance. . . . In other words,

what men in their ignorance call miracles, are doubtless the results of application of higher laws or forces of nature not yet learned by men, and miracles are to be viewed not as happening contrary to the established constitution and course of things, under a universal reign of law, but as part of the not yet understood application of laws to things and conditions that seem to produce effects that are in derogation of the ordinary course of the natural order of things.⁵²

5.5 Evolution and Creation in the *TWL*

Most commentators on Roberts's work have noted its highly speculative nature. One of the most speculative sections of his book deals with the creation. The influence of Latter-day Saint theologians such as Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Hyde, Brigham Young, and Joseph Keeler are combined with the influence of writers such as Herbert Spencer and John Fiske. Catastrophism and a theory of evolution reminiscent of John A. Widtsoe are also added to the mix to form an amalgam that attempts to reconcile science with Latter-day Saint theology.

Roberts's attempt at reconciliation begins with Joseph Smith's assertion that many "plain and precious things" had been removed from the Biblical record. According to Roberts, "the creation of the world, and

⁵²Ibid., 64-67.

the origin and nature of man are among the things of revealed knowledge that have been lost."⁵³ Roberts emphasizes the Christian world's lack of knowledge concerning the creation when he writes:

Those who have built their faiths upon the Old and the New Testaments "are without clear-cut, definite ideas upon this important subject; and nowhere is there authoritative statement pointed to by them in the scriptures, or to be found in their creeds in the interpretation of the scriptures, anything that is satisfactory upon this subject. . . . While both Jewish and Christians may refer to man's origin to God, as his "creator," yet a divided conception is held with reference to the manner of his creation."⁵⁴

Roberts claims it is his intention in the *TWL* to reconstruct the manner of the creation by combining all relevant scientific scholarship with LDS scriptural authority. Once again, Roberts lists many important scientific works as sources in an attempt to give his work the semblance of scientific authority.⁵⁵ Roberts was well aware of science's power to convince. Any

⁵³Roberts, "Draft 1," 335.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 341.

⁵⁵The scientific sources which Roberts lists are: Thompson; Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*; Herbert Spencer, *Synthetic Philosophy* and *First Principles*; Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* and *The Decent of Man* (New York: Hurst, 1874); and Ernst Haeckel, *The Evolution of Man: A Popular Scientific Study*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), *Life and Work*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1905), and *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper, 1900).

attempt to circumscribe all knowledge into one whole without acknowledging the truths of science was impossible since science revealed many facts left unexplored by traditional religion. Accordingly, Roberts claims to rely upon several important scientific treatises. However, as will become readily apparent, Roberts's theory of evolution does not represent any contemporary scientific theory as his sources would seem to indicate. Roberts is merely clothing his ideas in the authority of science in order to make his arguments more convincing.

Beginning with the creation of the earth, Roberts combined the theological argument made by Joseph Smith, which asserts that all matter is co-eternal with God, with modern physics, which states that matter or energy can neither be created nor destroyed, only changed, in an attempt to prove that the earth was formed "from pre-existing world-stuff which 'in the beginning' was formless [and] unorganized."

In the second draft of the *TWL*, Roberts offers "the scientific view" of creation which he believes to refute the Biblical story of creation *ex nihilo*. "This begins with . . . the generally accepted nebulae hypothesis" in which a great cloud of swirling matter condensed to form not only the sun but the orbiting planets as well.⁵⁶

According to Roberts, this hypothesis accords very well with Joseph Smith's statement that the earth was formed out of pre-existing matter. Like Keeler before him, Roberts believed the weight of both scientific and religious authority suggested the earth could not be formed from nothing.⁵⁷

Roberts next discussed the time element involved in the creation. According to Roberts, the Biblical story of creation was interpreted by Christian theologians for many years to mean that the earth was created in six ordinary days six thousand years ago. However, with the advent of modern geology, scientists had begun to note that evidence suggested "that the earth was of much greater antiquity than [sic] this, extending from hundreds of thousands to millions of years since its beginning." Included in the geological evidence which suggested the antiquity of the earth were records of "well defined glacial periods" which existed "scores of thousands of years ago" as well as evidence which confirmed that "submerged portions of present large land areas [were] uplifted by slow process into great desert table lands and mountain ranges." These discoveries, Roberts argued, as well as many others, "have led to

⁵⁶Roberts, "Draft 2," 220. The Nebulae Hypothesis was first articulated by Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749-1827).

⁵⁷Roberts, "Draft 1," 400-401.

attempts at revision of the theological interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis."⁵⁸ Roberts contends that attempts to reformulate the time frame of the creation have been easy for Latter-day Saints since LDS doctrine does not set time limits on the creation of the world. The time element involved in the creation story has been clarified in the book Abraham where the term "day" is replaced with that of "time." These periods may be interpreted as hundred, thousand, or million year periods. According to Roberts, Latter-day Saint scripture "does make it possible to accord to science whatever antiquity its demonstration may require for the duration of the earth."⁵⁹

When Roberts claims that the earth could not be created *ex nihilo* and has been in existence for millions of years as the geological evidence indicates, Roberts was on relatively solid scientific and theological ground. In other words, these two arguments came closer to reconciling early-twentieth century science and Roberts's own interpretation of Latter-day Saint theology than any of the other arguments found in his work. For example, Roberts was right in claiming that matter and energy could neither be created or destroyed,

⁵⁸Ibid., 401-402; and, "Draft 2," 220-223.

⁵⁹Roberts, "Draft 2," 363.

only changed. Modern physics argued that this was so. Conversely, Roberts's insistence that matter was eternal was based on solid theological grounds. Joseph Smith had written:

You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing; and they will answer, "Doesn't the Bible say He *created* the world?" And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the word *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing but; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos--chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and reorganized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end.⁶⁰

Roberts, however, had by no means proven the truth of his thesis. In fact there were still several scientific problems with his argument. For example, contemporary physics held that matter could be converted into energy. However, several physicists noted that much of this energy was lost in the process. This energy was radiated throughout the universe. Even though it continued to exist as energy, no known process could reconvert it back into matter. This suggested

⁶⁰Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 351-352.

that the amount of matter in the universe was decreasing.

In an attempt to deal with this problem, Roberts quoted Nobel Prize winning physicist Robert Andrews Millikan's postulate that there may be some process yet unknown to science which reconverts radiant energy back into matter.⁶¹ Roberts is once again using the speculations of a prominent scientist to add an air of authority to his beliefs. When Roberts quotes a Noble Prize winning physicist as saying that radiant energy might be reconverted to matter, he has added a semblance of scientific authority to his arguments. Again, the use of scientific authority to buttress theological beliefs was a rhetorical device used by Roberts to add weight to his arguments.

In the final analysis, the decision to believe in the reconstitution of the matter was dependent upon faith. For those who believed that Joseph Smith had received divine revelation concerning the eternal nature of matter, Millikan's assertion could be a powerful reinforcement of Smith's doctrine. On the other hand, those who did not believe in Smith's prophetic authority could note that Millikan's assertion was nothing more

⁶¹Roberts, *TWL*, 45-49.

than mere speculation concerning the possible workings of the universe.

Roberts's belief in the antiquity of the earth was more firmly founded upon contemporary science than his repudiation of creation *ex nihilo*. By 1927, reputable scientists agreed that the evidence for the antiquity of the earth was overwhelming. Roberts used much of this evidence in the *TWL*. Roberts could have provided more scientific evidence for the antiquity of the earth but time constraints once again limited him to publishing only that evidence which he believed provided the best evidence for the antiquity of the earth.

Roberts also attempted to use scriptural evidence provided by the *Doctrine and Covenants* to prove the antiquity of the earth. Roberts claimed that the "Book of Abraham's" use of the word "time" instead of the word "day" proved that the scriptures also supported an old earth theory since "time" could be interpreted to mean billions of years. Without an official interpretation of the word "time" however, many of Roberts's more conservative contemporaries were also free to interpret "Abraham" as they saw fit. Accordingly, many of Roberts's conservative peers interpreted the word "time" to mean periods of 1,000 years. This estimate was also based on an interpretation of scripture.⁶² Taking these

facts into consideration, it would seem that Roberts's two most convincing arguments still left much to be desired as far as actually proving the truth of his assertions through a combination of science and revelation.

After attempting to refute the possibility of the earth being created *ex nihilo* and offering proofs which endeavored to establish the antiquity of the earth as fact, Roberts next attempted to refute the possibility of life being created *ex nihilo* and argues for its corresponding antiquity. According to Roberts, Christian theologians have interpreted the Genesis account of the creation of life in much the same way as they have interpreted the creation of the world: that is, by the divine fiat of God, life was created where none had existed before.⁶³ According to Roberts, the belief that God spontaneously created life through special acts of creation was just as preposterous as the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. Roberts claims there is nothing in scripture that warrants such conclusions;

⁶²As was previously mentioned, this interpretation is based on information found in the *New Testament* (2 Peter 3:8) and the *Pearl of Great Price* (Abraham 3:4).

⁶³It should be noted here that Roberts's claim is somewhat over generalized. Although some Protestants and Catholics believed in this type of creation, there were many exceptions. Christian beliefs concerning the creation of life at this time (1927) varied from a traditional interpretation of scripture with God individually fashioning each organism in a special act of creation to a God who worked through laws such as evolution to create each individual species including man. See Wilson, 31-68.

the "revelation-believing world" is far removed from a scriptural understanding of the true act of creation.⁶⁴ The Biblical account of creation "does not require us to believe that the creation of the earth and its heavens were made instantly, as by magic, or by any absolutely new process; nor that the things 'created,' any more than the order, were new and for the first time produced."⁶⁵

Roberts then sets about to give his own personal interpretation of the creation of life according to his reading of LDS theology and modern science. Arguing along the same lines as Parley P. Pratt and Brigham Young, Roberts claimed God had created "multitudinous worlds" which have been "inhabited by myriads of forms of life" and have existed long before our world was formed. Life itself is eternal and is continually transferred to newly created worlds. Roberts asserts, as did Pratt and Young, that the "transportation of a few forms of life, varieties of other worlds, would doubtless be sufficient from which to develop all our earth life-forms." Roberts argues that it is a law of nature that all offspring have parents. He rhetorically asks, "Where was there ever a son without a father and

⁶⁴Roberts, "Draft 1," 342, 347 & 403.

⁶⁵Ibid., 382-383.

where was there ever a father without first being a son?" Accordingly, everything comes into being through natural laws of procreation.⁶⁶

At this point, Roberts once again attempted to invoke the authority of great scientific thinkers with the same intentions as before. Again, by clothing his speculations in the respectable robes of science, Roberts attempts to give an air of authority to his ideas. He knew his theories could benefit from statements which appeared to support his assumptions especially if they came from prominent members of the scientific community. Accordingly, Roberts writes that his theory "is not without the support of scientific names of high standing." According to Roberts:

It is held by Helmholtz and Lord Kelvin . . . "that minute living creatures may have come to earth from elsewhere in the cracks of meteorites or among cosmic dust." . . . The obvious limitation of Lord Kelvin's theory . . . is that it only shifts the problem of the origin of organisms [i.e. living creatures] from the earth to elsewhere. All that need be said in answer to this limitation of Lord Kelvin's theory is, that in an eternal universe, where neither life nor life-forms have any absolute beginning, all life and many forms of life, being equally eternal with the eternal universe, the supposed limitations named by Thompson have no existence.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Roberts, "Draft 2," 225.

⁶⁷Roberts, "Draft 1," 382-385.

Keeping in mind Roberts's rhetorical attempts to give his ideas the appearance of scientific respectability, it should not be surprising that Roberts failed to note that the views of Helmholtz and Kelvin were not the typically accepted views of the day. They were merely speculations made by scientists outside their areas of expertise. If Roberts were to mention this fact, his attempt to use science as a legitimating factor for his ideas would have been much less effective.

Regardless of the state of affairs in the 1920s, earlier theories had attributed primordial life to the introduction of seeds or spores from other worlds. These earlier theories were attempts to explain how life began without recourse to spontaneous generation. In the 1880s, the majority of scientists were convinced that Louis Pasteur had demonstrated that life could not be generated from non-living matter. One consequence of this discovery was that living matter could only arise from pre-existing life. If this were true, some scientists argued, then life may have come from extraterrestrial sources. Critics, however, were quick to point out that this theory did nothing to resolve the mystery of the origin of life; it only put off the

question indefinitely by pushing it back into the farthest reaches of time.⁶⁸

Roberts, however, believed that he could effectively deal with this earlier criticism. According to Roberts, life had existed infinitely. Just as there would be no end to life, there was also no beginning; life always existed and always would. It had existed on infinite worlds and would continue to exist upon worlds without number. This belief helps to explain why Roberts had earlier insisted on a universe without temporal or physical bounds even though he was well aware of the spatial and temporal limitations implied by the theory of relativity.

According to Roberts, Helmholtz and Kelvin's "minute living creatures" were the probable seeds of all that is living upon the earth. Since "it is certain that development of varied forms of life goes on in the vegetable and animal kingdoms of our world," in all likelihood, all creatures, extant and extinct, have evolved from this handful of primordial travelers and will continue to evolve "each to its highest possibilities."⁶⁹

⁶⁸Bowler, *Evolution*, 319.

⁶⁹Roberts, "Draft 1," 382-391.

Roberts believed these travelers represented all the known biological "kinds." Like Widtsoe, Roberts argued that development was necessarily restricted within the confines of these morphological types thus satisfying the scriptural requirement that each creature must multiply after its own kind and in its own sphere. Even with this limitation on evolution, "all the multitudinous forms that have inhabited the earth" and all the forms which now inhabit it, have evolved from the few primordial types that had been transplanted from older worlds.⁷⁰

At this point, the authority of modern science is more legitimately used as partial evidence for Roberts's evolutionary thesis. Roberts argues that the geological strata provides a record "Against the fiat theory of the creation." According to Roberts, the geological strata seem to indicate that "the order and beauty of the world are not the result of one direct creative act, nor even a series of directly creative acts; but is the outcome of a gradual process continued through immense periods of time, from many lower forms and stages of life."⁷¹

At this point it should be noted that even though the specifics of Roberts's evolutionary theory are

⁷⁰Ibid., " 384-385 & 397-398.

⁷¹Ibid., " 401-403.

obviously much different from the theories of Spencer and Fiske, Roberts's general evolutionary thinking bears a remarkable resemblance. Like Spencer and Fiske, Roberts argues that the entire history of the earth is the unfolding of a progressively developing plan.⁷² Roberts argues that Genesis itself gives evidence which suggests a plan of unfolding complexity. It begins with the creation of the simplest forms of life and culminates with the most complex. It seems to be the perfect metaphor for the universe. "Thus from chaos to the production of" the highest forms of life "in an orderly unfolding development from lower to higher forms, the universe is also developing from "simple to constantly increasing complexity."⁷³

Roberts next defines the different kinds of evolution in an attempt to differentiate his particular version from the others. According to Roberts, three kinds of evolution are usually recognized. The first being materialistic evolution which "denies everything but matter in motion in the evolutionary process." The second form is defined as agnostic evolution since it suggests an "unknown" or "unknowable" force as the basis for and the explanation of evolutionary processes.

⁷²Spencer, *First Principles of Philosophy*; and Fiske, *Cosmic Philosophy*.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 388-390.

Roberts freely acknowledges the hand of God in his version of evolution so it is obviously dissimilar to both. The third type of evolution is "theistic." This also acknowledges the divine in the evolutionary process since it assumes that "God or Mind" is behind evolution and is working toward some "unknown end, or event."

At first glance, it would seem that Roberts should fall in with the theistic evolutionists, and in a limited sense he does. However, Roberts notes the difference between his "developmental theism" and theistic evolution. He states that theistic evolution

starts with an [sic] homogeneous substance which is differentiated into gasses and liquids and solids (inorganic evolution), thence into life substance and simple forms of life; thence into more complex life forms, until there is produced by an ever differentiating process all the life forms known: whereas the development theory of this chapter and work recognizes and starts with the eternity of life . . . and the eternity of some life-forms, and the possibility of these forms--perhaps in embryonic status, or their simplest forms (save as to man) are transplanted to newly created worlds there to be developed each to its highest possibilities, by propagation, and yet within and under the great law of Genesis 1, vis., each "after" and within "its kind." Not necessarily rigidly limited to stereotyped individual forms, but developing the kinds from the subdivisions of vegetable and animal kingdoms, into various species through development from primeval forms.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Ibid., 394 & 397-398.

Roberts then noted "the gloomy outcome" inherent in other forms of evolution.⁷⁵ According to Roberts, the eventual heat death of the universe is an unavoidable consequence of forms of evolution which do not presuppose an infinite progression of the universe. While it is true that evolution, as well as all other physical processes, is subject to the second law of thermodynamics which postulates that the universe will wind down until all physical processes are stopped resulting in heat death, Roberts was mistaken when he concluded that heat death is "intrinsically connected to the theory of evolution." William E. Evenson, states that the heat death of the universe "is an effect that should not be laid at the door of evolution; it is part of a much larger issue and not a defect of evolutionary theory."⁷⁶

Roberts next turned to the great exception of his developmental theism: the creation of Adam. Even though he believed, as was indicated earlier, that the true account of creation was, for the most part, lost, the traditional creation account found in Genesis could still shed some light upon the subject. Accordingly,

⁷⁵Roberts attributes this argument to Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), 400-401.

⁷⁶Evenson, cxxv.

Roberts turned his attention to the first two chapters of Genesis.

In order to insure a proper understanding of the creation scriptures, Roberts maintained that the line dividing the first two chapters of Genesis needed to be reconfigured before a successful analysis of scripture could be accomplished. Roberts argued that in order to maintain the "sense and spirit of the creation story," the first chapter of Genesis should end with verse three while the second chapter should begin with verse four. This also had the advantage of harmonizing the Genesis accounts with those of Moses and Abraham. Once the dividing lines between the two chapters had been reconfigured a proper interpretation of the scriptures could be attained.

Roberts claims that two separate and distinct creation accounts emerge as a result of this new configuration of chapters. Roberts rightly claims that contemporary Biblical criticism has come to the same conclusion.⁷⁷ The editor of the *TWL*, John W. Welch, notes that modern textual critics of the Bible continue to divide the two different creation accounts the way that Roberts had done. "These critics usually ascribe

⁷⁷Roberts, "Draft 1," 484.

the different accounts to two different authors or redactors of the text."⁷⁸

Roberts continues by defining the first creation account which had already been considered in Roberts's previous chapters. It included the creation of the earth from pre-existing materials and a description of the creation of new life as different "kinds" were transplanted from older worlds and left to develop through the ages into the many species which are found within the fossil record. Roberts writes:

So far as we have considered [the preceding] story of creation we confined ourselves to the first chapter of Genesis, and that chapter treats creation as a developing unbroken series of events from chaotic material without form and void to the creation of man and woman in the image of God--begotten after their kind. The creation story in Genesis first chapter is complete, and worthily grand; without flaw or blemish, poetical, and sublime.⁷⁹

In the second account of creation "the whole story seems to be reversed." It begins with the creation of man. A garden is then planted "as the beginning of vegetable and tree life." God then places man in the midst of the garden to keep it. "Then comes the

⁷⁸Roberts, *TWL*, 289n.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 483.

creation of the fowls of the air and the beast of the field."⁸⁰

Attempting to explain this discrepancy, Roberts called upon the religious authority of Orson Hyde. Just as Roberts had earlier used Millikan, Helmholtz, and Thompson in an attempt to give his arguments some semblance of scientific authority, Roberts was using Hyde in an attempt to clothe his argument in the robes of Apostolic authority. As was previously noted, Hyde believed the term "replenish" meant to restock what had been previously inhabited. Like Hyde, Roberts noted that Adam and Noah had both been commanded to "replenish" the earth. According to Roberts, God must have given the same commandment to Noah and Adam because of their similar circumstances. While Noah was commanded to multiply and replenish the earth after it had been decimated by the deluge, Adam was commanded to do the same after the earth had been visited by some other unspecified catastrophe. Roberts noted that in both cases, the use of the term "replenish" indicated the earth had been previously inhabited. Roberts then asked his readers:

May it not be that some such condition as this which we have supposed in the case of Noah, really happened in regard to the beginning of things with

⁸⁰Ibid., 484-485.

Adam? And that what is recorded in the second creation story is merely an account of the preparation of the earth for the occupancy of it by Adam; and the account also of his advent upon the earth with Eve his wife? That is to say, previous to the advent of Adam upon the earth, some destructive cataclysm, a universal glacial period or an excessive heat period left the earth empty and desolate, and it became the mission of Adam to "replenish" the earth with inhabitants.⁸¹

The second creation story began with Adam being the "first flesh" of an new dispensation after all was destroyed.⁸²

In order to prove his thesis, Roberts also relied heavily upon scientific evidence. For example, he argued:

That there were pre-Adamite races in the earth; and that man's habitancy of it is of greater antiquity than the period which begins with Adam, is quite generally accepted by the scientific world and for them admits of no doubt.⁸³

The history of the earth that is preserved in the fossil record records

a very long period of time beyond the advent of Adam, to the absolute beginning of the physical existence of the earth, during which time, pre-Adamite races, less developed than he, may have existed. They may have lived and died through

⁸¹Ibid., 491.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

various long ages through which the earth passed, in which we have no information supplied by revelation concerning them, but who have provided all the other fossil and other evidences of man's existence in the Earth, discovered by the researches of science.⁸⁴

Roberts continues by arguing that a traditional reading of Genesis is untenable in light of contemporary scientific evidence. This evidence supports the theory of pre-Adamic life which existed before the second creation spoken of in the second chapter of Genesis.⁸⁵

According to Roberts:

All the fossil discoveries must be considered, not only those from the Pliocene and Pleistocene strata of the earth's crust, but with them must be accounted for the human remains found in the various glacial periods of scores and hundreds of thousands of years ago. . . . The evidences gives greater antiquity to man than the Bible account of creation, and establish, one may feel very safe in saying, evidences for pre-Adamite races in the earth.

Roberts concluded that the first chapter of Genesis described the creation of a pre-Adamic world where embryonic organisms were transplanted from other worlds, subsequently evolving into the myriads of species now extinct and extant. The second chapter of Genesis

⁸⁴Ibid., 498.

⁸⁵Roberts is using as his sources, Richard Swann Lull "The Antiquity of Man," in *The Evolution of Man*, ed. George Alfred Baitzell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922); and Thompson, Vol. 1.

begins approximately 6,000 years ago after a universal cataclysm had decimated the world. Adam was the first living creature to appear after this cataclysm. He was transplanted to this world by divine intervention as a fully developed man. The world was then repopulated with plants and animals. There is no mention of any transplanted primordial seeds evolving into higher forms of life. Judging by Roberts's scientific knowledge, it seems unlikely that he could have accepted that the myriads of creatures now populating the earth had evolved from a few existing embryonic prototypes which appeared after Adam's relatively recent advent. Perhaps this is why Roberts believed all extant species, excepting man, have descended from pre-Adamic species despite the universal cataclysm "that emptied the earth of all its forms of life." Roberts's attempts to explain how the living creatures in this second creation reappeared after being destroyed are somewhat vague. The comparison to the deluge suggests some sort of process vaguely reminiscent of Noah and his ark may have saved the species which were to repopulate the animal and vegetable kingdoms of Adam's dispensation.⁸⁶

It is important to note that Roberts's pre-Adamites were different from Hyde's pre-Adamites. Consistent

⁸⁶Roberts, *TWL*, 293-294 & 324.

with other pre-Adamite theories of his day, Hyde's pre-Adamites were no different from modern man. However, Roberts pre-Adamites were necessarily different since Roberts relied upon contemporary fossil evidence. Roberts notes all the differences in pre-Adamite man and suggests that these differences indicate pre-Adamites represent species which are distinct from modern man. The evolution of pre-Adamite man is also suggested by Roberts when he notes that pre-Adamite fossils show a trend toward increasing complexity just as the fossils of other species indicate a general advance throughout time.

It is interesting to note, however, that Roberts proffers no theory as to why these species existed. Many other Christian evolutionists believed that the pre-Adamites played an important role in the creative process. Since God created everything through evolution, these pre-Adamites were the developmental precursors to the human race. This meant that the pre-Adamites fulfilled an important role in God's unfolding plan.⁸⁷ Roberts, however, deprived the pre-Adamites of this purpose when he severed the genealogical connection that linked pre-Adamites to modern man. Roberts inability to offer any purpose for the existence of the

⁸⁷Moore, 219.

pre-Adamites was an example of the difficulty of truly reconciling science and religion since Latter-day Saint theology suggests that all things have a reason for being.⁸⁸ LDS readers were left to wonder what part, if any, did the pre-Adamites play in God's ultimate plan. Roberts also fell short of his objective when he failed to give scientific evidence for the catastrophe which destroyed these pre-Adamites. Based on his knowledge of geology, Roberts was probably well aware of the fact that no such credible evidence existed at the time. As a result, Roberts was left solely to his own interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis for evidence of such a catastrophe.

From the preceding passages, it is clear that Roberts did not succeed in his attempt to construct a credible reconciliation of science and religion. Not only was Roberts unable to reconcile his pre-Adamite theory with Mormon theology and his catastrophist theory with the geological evidence, he also restricted scientific evidence to that which supported his arguments. Some of this evidence was relatively archaic or highly speculative. As a result, Roberts was often reconciling religion with speculations that only loosely

⁸⁸As was indicated earlier, Roberts did not have this problem with other species since they were the genealogical precursors of all extant species.

claimed scientific authority. Some of the so-called scientific evidence Roberts uses in his reconciliation would not have been recognized as scientific evidence by the scientists of his day. If Roberts would have restricted himself to what was commonly accepted, his reconciliation would have been much more difficult if not impossible. For example, he could not have claimed that Joseph Smith was correct in his assertion that matter was infinite and indestructible since most scientist agreed that matter could not be reconverted once it was changed into radiant energy. Conversely, Roberts also used religious authority in the same way. By using only those arguments which strengthened his theories, Roberts was able to add an air of religious authority to his work as well. In short, Roberts used selective scientific and religious arguments in his attempt to reconcile Latter-day Saint theology and science.

In retrospect it can be noted that Roberts's attempt to reconcile science and religion appears very dated. As a result, his arguments seem even more untenable. Roberts made the mistake of assuming he was using interpretations of facts which were incontestable. A more enlightened philosophy of science reveals that scientists are constantly learning more about the natural world and that interpretations of facts often

change as additional knowledge is added by continued research. The fact that scientific knowledge has changed since Roberts wrote his treatise makes it clear that reconciliations between science and religion have to be considered only as tentative conclusions based on current scientific knowledge. The dangers of reconciling science and religion when scientific knowledge continues to change is exemplified by Roberts's colleague John A. Widtsoe. As was previously mentioned, Widtsoe also tried to reconcile science and Latter-day Saint theology. In *Joseph Smith as Scientist*, Widtsoe confidently declared that science had proven that Joseph Smith was correct in his proclamation that matter which was generally imperceptible to human beings because it was more fine than ordinary matter pervaded the whole of space. Widtsoe assumed that this must be the universal ether scientists used to explain gravitational attraction between celestial bodies. However, ever since the Michelson and Morley experiments and Einstein's theory of relativity, scientists have abandoned ether theory. As a result, Widtsoe's failed reconciliation suggests that it is difficult to reconcile science and religion when science is constantly changing. Roberts's reconciliations also suffer the same defect. For example, his assertion that space and time are infinite is now at odds with the

modern big bang cosmology which suggests that time had a definite beginning and that the universe has a boundary. It should also be noted that any current attempts to reconcile all current scientific knowledge and religion will most likely suffer the same fate since science, by its own acknowledgment, is far from possessing a final comprehensive knowledge of the universe.

Roberts's attempt to reconcile science and religion seems even more likely to fail considering the fact that Latter-day Saint doctrine proclaims that many important religious truths are yet unknown to man.⁸⁹ This means that Roberts was working with only a partial religious truth as well as an incomplete scientific truth. The likelihood of deducing a comprehensive picture of all knowledge from these incomplete and disparate sources seems highly unlikely.

From the preceding analysis, it is clear that Roberts unsuccessful in his main objective. However, it appears that Roberts succeeded in achieving a more important goal. In attempting to reconcile science and religion it was Roberts's intention to strengthen the faith of Latter-day Saints by using scientific authority to add credence to certain religious principles. In order to effectively deal with the religious challenge of science, Roberts endeavored to put science in the

⁸⁹Smith, "The Articles of Faith," 60-61.

service of religion by using it as a support to faith. According to Roberts, it was easier to have faith if the authority of science supported religious truths. Even though Roberts's attempt to reconcile science and religion ultimately failed, Roberts helped to strengthen the faith of the Latter-day Saints when he argued for the possibility that science and religion could be reconciled. The fact that Roberts often used archaic or speculative evidence did not detract from this fact. Even if Millikan was unable to prove his speculations, the fact that his hypothesis remained within the realm of scientific possibilities meant that science and religion could be reconciled. By establishing this possibility, Roberts succeeded in his attempt to strengthen the faith of the Saints. Earlier, Roberts had used secular learning in much the same way. As previously mentioned, his "Studies of the *Book of Mormon*" he used contemporary science in an attempt to provide evidence for the authenticity of the *Book of Mormon*. Although Roberts did not reconcile archeological evidence with the *Book of Mormon* or prove its authenticity, he succeeded in establishing the reconciliation of science and religion as a possibility since some of Roberts's archeological evidence suggested the *Book of Mormon* was true. By establishing the possibility of reconciliation, Roberts lessened the

threat of science and created the possibility of a powerful ally.

From an analysis of his work, it is clear that Roberts belonged to an older society; a society that was still open to speculative accounts of the creation as characterized by the works of Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, and Brigham Young. Unfortunately for Roberts, circumstances had changed; the society in which he lived was now different.⁹⁰ This was a society which had seen modernism threaten the very heart of its institutions. As has been recorded in the previous pages, a conservative reaction to modernism was the result. The subsequent reaction to Roberts's work indicates the extent to which modernism had influenced the thinking of the Latter-day Saints. What was once a relatively free-thinking and theologically speculative religion had become increasingly conservative.

5.6 The Continuing story of the *TWL*

Based on Roberts's track record as a scholar as well as the success of his earlier Church manuals, the General Authorities decided to review Roberts's manuscript for possible publication. However, it was

⁹⁰Sherlock, "The Roberts, Smith, Talmage Affair," 63-64.

decided the manuscript should be carefully reviewed by the Council of the Twelve Apostles.⁹¹ Considering Roberts's controversial work on the *Book of Mormon*, there was "a clear consensus that nothing of this nature should go out as an official Church text until it had been fully approved by the leading authorities."⁹²

The committee appointed to read Roberts's manuscript included General Authorities George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Stephen L. Richards, and Melvin J. Ballard. For two months they met twice a week for two hours to read and discuss Roberts's work.⁹³

The first sign of trouble appeared in a letter written by committee member Joseph Fielding Smith to John A. Widtsoe. He implied that the committee members were beginning to have some doubts as to the appropriateness of Roberts's manuscript. Although it contained much that was good, there were some arguments that caused considerable worry.⁹⁴ It turned out that the chapters which troubled the committee were those dealing with Roberts's speculative views concerning evolution

⁹¹Hatch, 26; and Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxi.

⁹²Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxiv.

⁹³Ibid., clxxv.

⁹⁴Ibid.

and the creation of man.⁹⁵ On April 1, 1929, Joseph Fielding Smith prepared an 11-page document which listed the problems he had with Roberts's theories and presented this to the committee.⁹⁶ According to James B. Allen, Smith "was determined, above all, to protect what he perceived as the traditional truths of the Gospel from any corruption of modernism."⁹⁷ This comment is interesting and highly significant considering the fact that the "traditional" truths of the gospel that Smith was attempting to protect were not really traditional at all. As was seen previously, Roberts's speculations concerning the creation were in the tradition of those who preceded him. It was only within the past few decades that the Latter-day Saints had adopted a more conservative or more traditional view of the creation. Accordingly, Smith was not really attempting to conserve a tradition, he was attempting to establish a new tradition by helping to entrench the conservatism of recent times.

Around this same time, members of the Quorum of the Twelve began attempts to persuade Roberts to change his views or eliminate the offending material.⁹⁸ "Some

⁹⁵Madsen, 344; Sherlock, "The Roberts, Smith, Talmage Affair," 64-65; and Hatch, 26.

⁹⁶Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxvi.

⁹⁷Ibid., clxxvii

members of the Twelve apparently felt that Roberts could alter this part of his work without doing much damage to the rest, which contained many qualities and ideas that they admired."⁹⁹

However, Roberts believed that the "offending" sections were needed in order to strengthen the faith of the Saints by fully reconciling science with religion. It seemed to him the evidence for life existing and evolving upon the face of the earth before the advent of Adam was incontrovertible and must therefore be reconciled with the scriptures. He had painstakingly arrived at his theory and believed that his argument was sound and faith-promoting.¹⁰⁰ In May, Roberts expressed his uncompromising attitude when he wrote in a letter to a friend that he would not change what he had written concerning evolution and the creation of man even though some of his contemporaries did not agree with his conclusions.¹⁰¹

On 10 October 1929, the committee sent their official report to the Council of the Twelve. In it they noted that there were many admirable aspects to Roberts's work; however, according to the committee, his

⁹⁸Ibid., clxxvi.

⁹⁹Hatch, 26.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.; and Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxvi-clxxvii.

¹⁰¹Madsen, 343-344; and Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxvii.

speculative theory concerning the pre-Adamites was out of harmony with the fundamental teachings of the Church.¹⁰²

There is no indication, however, that Roberts's pre-Adamite theory was rejected because of its evolutionary implications.¹⁰³ In fact, an outright denunciation of evolution was probably ruled out by the committee in light of the First Presidency's earlier proclamations declaring official neutrality on such positions. This interpretation seems likely considering the fact that the committee's report failed to mention Roberts's more emphatic statements concerning the evolution of non-human life.

Roberts's pre-Adamites were officially rejected for entirely different reasons. The official explanation for the rejection of the chapter concerning pre-Adamites was that it was too speculative and, as a result, could lead to confusion and controversy among members of the Church. This explanation seems reasonable when considering the fact that the Church had been attempting to stick to the basics in its manuals and other official publications in order to establish greater unity among

¹⁰²Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxviii; and Hatch, 26.

¹⁰³As previously noted, Roberts's discussion of pre-Adamites suggested that they had evolved. Roberts notes the progressive changes that have occurred among the pre-Adamites and suggests that these changes have led to pre-Adamite races who were remarkably similar to modern man.

the members of the Church. According to the committee, Roberts's speculations were a prime example of what the Church hoped to avoid when it instituted such a policy. In regards to the chapter discussing pre-Adamite life, the committee wrote:

The entire chapter deals with the theory of "pre-Adamites." This doctrine is not taught by the Church; it is not sustained in the scriptures. It can only be treated as a hypothesis, and the result will be uncertain, confusing, for after all is said it is speculation leading to endless controversy. We are aware that one of our brethren (Orson Hyde) in an early day advocated this teaching, however we feel that the brethren of the general authorities cannot be too careful, and should not present as doctrine that which is not sustained in the standards of the Church. It appears to us that all that has been revealed is contrary to this teaching.¹⁰⁴

Accordingly, the committee recommended that the manuscript not be published without changes being made. The committee made a list of 27 items--most of them minor--that they found objectionable and sent this list to Roberts. It is clear that Roberts was displeased with the committee's objections. His personal copy of the list of objectionable items was marked with rebuttals and reactions to every point.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Roberts, *TWL*, 297n.

¹⁰⁵Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxviii; and Hatch, 26.

Roberts decided against making any changes that would alter his basic arguments. In a letter written to the Chair of the review committee dated 28 April 1930, Roberts stated that he "had again come to his former conclusion (and more firmly) that it [his insistence on the reality of pre-Adamic life] cannot be changed or given up without destroying the very genius and purpose of my work."¹⁰⁶ According to Gary Hatch, "part of the reason Roberts defended his position so adamantly was that he believed he had adequately reconciled the scriptures with the teachings of science and that this resolution would do much to strengthen the faith of the Latter-day Saints."¹⁰⁷

As a possible result of his frustration, Roberts became increasingly bold in teaching his theories to members of the Church. Joseph Fielding Smith reported to the First Presidency that Roberts had been doing this for months, causing much agitation among the members of the Church. He suggested that Roberts be asked to refrain from any more public speculations.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps in response to Roberts's actions, Joseph Fielding Smith felt it was his duty to make his own

¹⁰⁶B. H. Roberts, "Letter to George Albert Smith," (28 April 1930), quoted in Hatch, 26; and Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxix.

¹⁰⁷Hatch, 27.

¹⁰⁸Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxviii.

doctrinal understanding of the controversial questions better known to members of the Church. On 5 April 1930, he addressed a conference of the Utah Genealogical Society. In his speech, Smith was blunt and to the point.¹⁰⁹ He condemned Roberts's pre-Adamite theory not only because of its speculative nature but also because of its evolutionary implications.¹¹⁰

Smith began by implicating Roberts and his teachings when he wrote:

Even in the Church there are a scattered few who are now advocating and contending that this earth was peopled with a race--perhaps many races--long before the days of Adam. These men desire, of course, to square the teachings in the Bible with the teachings of modern science and philosophy in regard to the age of the earth and life upon it.¹¹¹

Even though Smith does not mention Roberts by name the reference to him and his work seems apparent.

Smith then continues by condemning Roberts's theories, claiming "the doctrine of 'pre-Adamites' is not a doctrine of the Church, and is not advocated or countenanced in the Church." Smith then claimed that

¹⁰⁹Sherlock, 67-68; Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxix; and Hatch, 27.

¹¹⁰Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxviii.

¹¹¹Joseph Fielding Smith, "Faith Leads to a Fullness of Truth and Righteousness," *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21 (October 1930): 147.

the scriptures as well as Joseph Smith taught that Adam was the first man upon the earth. He suggested that this was the official position of the Church when he declared that "This is the doctrine which has been taught by authority in the Church regarding Adam."¹¹²

Turning his attention to evolution, Smith believed the *Book of Mormon* passage declaring that there was no death in the Garden of Eden and that all things remained in the same state before the fall proved that evolution could not have taken place as Roberts had suggested.¹¹³ Smith exclaimed:

I do not care what the scientists say in regard to dinosaurs and other creatures upon the earth millions of years ago that lived and died and fought and struggled for existence. . . . *All life in the sea, the air, on the earth, was without death. Animals were not dying. Things were not changing . . . for mortality had not come.*¹¹⁴

Smith declared that this passage of scripture held more authority than all the teachings of men. Their teachings will perish "but when the Lord speaks that is eternal truth on which we may rely."¹¹⁵

¹¹²Ibid., 148.

¹¹³2 Nephi 2:22-23.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

Smith then stated that it was impossible to know the exact manner of creation. However, "The time will come when we shall be informed all about Adam and the manner of creation for the Lord has promised that when he comes he will make all things known." Smith concludes by declaring that "For my part, I am willing to wait until this time to learn the truth of these things."¹¹⁶

When Smith's speech was published in October 1930, Roberts no longer remained silent. He found it disturbing that Smith's speech had been published, even though unofficially, without the intense examination his work had received. Roberts wrote directly to the First Presidency wanting to know if Smith's statement was backed by the Church or if Smith had been speaking for himself. If Smith were speaking for himself as Roberts had supposed then his interpretation of scripture was not official doctrine as Smith had implied. Roberts believed his own interpretation of the scriptures was equally valid, if not more so since he had the authority of science on his side, and deserved an equal hearing.¹¹⁷

In December of 1921, the First Presidency responded by asking the Council of the Twelve to review both

¹¹⁶Ibid., 149-150.

¹¹⁷Hatch, 27; Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxxii; and Sherlock, "The Roberts, Smith, Talmage Affair," 68.

Roberts's letter and Smith's article. The Council decided it would be best to hear both sides of the story directly from both Roberts and Smith. Accordingly, they arranged to meet with both men on separate occasions.

Roberts came with his second draft of the *TWL* which contained an extended section on the scientific evidence confirming the existence of pre-Adamites and a statement defending his position. Joseph Fielding Smith's address to the Utah Genealogical Society had added a new dimension to the debate since Smith had connected Roberts's pre-Adamite theory with the theory of evolution. As a result, Roberts's defense of the existence of pre-Adamites was also a defense of evolution by association. Roberts new material numbered 50 typed-written pages. He argued from science, the scriptures and the Apostolic authority of Orson Hyde whose ideas "had been endorsed by none other than Brigham Young [and] therefore carried more weight than the 'dictum' of Elder Smith."¹¹⁸ Roberts also attempted to add more weight to his own arguments by quoting contemporary scientific experts on the subject of ancient man and his evolution.¹¹⁹ In all, Roberts added

¹¹⁸Roberts, "Draft 2," 199-201; and Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxxiii.

¹¹⁹The added weight of contemporary scientific authority comes primarily from Arthur Keith, "Supermen--of the Dim Past and Future," in the *New York Times*, Magazine Section (23 November 1930), and "Whence Came the White Race?," in the *New York Times*, Magazine Section (12

14 pages of new evidence. He pointed out that "such statements could be multiplied almost indefinitely." He believed, however, that he had already presented enough evidence to establish the fact that his theories were correct.¹²⁰

Roberts also attempted to deal with Smith's scriptural arguments by offering his own interpretation of these passages. According to Roberts, the passages quoted by Smith refer to the second creation recorded in Genesis. According to Roberts, the difficulties exposed by Smith disappear and all the scientific facts are accounted for when interpreting the passages in question in this fashion. He claimed:

Adam was the *first man of all men upon the earth-- in his dispensation. The first and oldest of all-- of his time or period; and had he not transgressed he would not have fallen, nor would he have died and all things must have remained in the same state in which they were after the earth was prepared for Adam and his race; and they must have remained forever and had no end.*¹²¹

October 1930); James Hopwood Jeans, *The Universe Around Us* (New York: MacMillan, 1929); and H. S. Harrison, "Is Man an Accident? A Startling View," in the *New York Times*, (30 November 1930), 4-5.

¹²⁰Roberts, "Draft 2," 216.

¹²¹B. H. Roberts "Addendum to Chapter 31," in "Draft 2," 251. This addendum was written specifically for Roberts's interview with the Quorum of the Twelve. Because of the specific references to Smith and his arguments, this argument was removed in the final draft.

Roberts then asked, "what fact of scripture referred to by Elder Smith is not accounted for and harmonized by this suggestion and interpretation?"¹²² "The conclusion," writes Roberts, "is that life and death were not new and original things to our planet, and only particular to Adam and his time."¹²³

Smith appeared two weeks later with a written defense of his own which has been characterized by some as "extreme scriptural literalism."¹²⁴ Smith attacked Roberts's claim to scientific authority by declaring that it was of the devil. According to Smith:

The doctrine of organic evolution which pervades the modern day sciences proclaiming the edict that man has evolved from the lower forms of life through the Java skull, the Heidelberg jaw, the Piltdown man, the Neanderthal skull and last but not least the Peiping man who lived millions of years ago is as false as their author who lives in hell.¹²⁵

Smith also pointed out that Roberts's declaration of Brigham Young endorsing Orson Hyde's theory of the pre-Adamites was idle speculation. The sermon in question was about marriage and Hyde's pre-Adamites were

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Roberts, "Draft 2," 226.

¹²⁴Sherlock, "The Smith, Roberts, Talmage Affair," 68.

¹²⁵Original manuscript quoted from Sherlock, "The Smith, Roberts, Talmage Affair," 69.

mentioned only in passing. According to Smith, it was possible that Young was merely endorsing Hyde's lengthier comments on marriage.¹²⁶

After both men had their say, The President of the Quorum of the Twelve, Rudger Clawson, sent a report to the First Presidency with details of each argument. The First Presidency reviewed Clawson's report and other relevant material. In April of 1931 they issued a report in which they declared:

The statement made by Elder Smith that the existence of pre-Adamites is not doctrine of the Church is true. It is just as true that the statement "there were no pre-Adamites upon the earth" is not a doctrine of the church. Neither side of the controversy has been accepted at all. . . . Upon the fundamental doctrines of the Church we are all agreed. Our mission is to bear the message of the restored Gospel to the people of the world. 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.¹²⁷

In other words they had reaffirmed the Church's early official position of neutrality.

This neutral position is best summed-up in a speech given by James E. Talmage on 9 August 1931 in which he

¹²⁶Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxxiv.

¹²⁷Quoted in Sherlock, "The Smith, Roberts, Talmage Affair," 70; Allen, "The Story of the *TWL*," clxxxvii; and Hatch, 28.

attempted to balance scientific and scriptural truths without proffering any unsubstantiated theories concerning the origins of life or man. According to Talmage:

The Creator has made record in the rocks for man to decipher; but he has also spoken directly regarding the main stages of progress by which the earth has been brought to be what it is. The accounts cannot be fundamentally opposed; one cannot contradict the other; though man's interpretation of either may seriously be at fault.¹²⁸

In other words, true science and true religion were both fundamental pieces of an all-encompassing truth. The apparent discrepancies between the two would eventually be reconciled "as our knowledge of pertinent facts is extended." In the absence of pertinent facts, we are left to speculate concerning the origins of life. These speculations may or may not be correct. Concerning evolution and the origins of man, Talmage offers no solutions. According to Talmage, there is not enough evidence from either scripture or science to suggest such a solution. The facts whereby science and religion will be reconciled are yet unknown. One should take solace in the fact that "within the Gospel of Jesus

¹²⁸James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," *The Deseret News* (21 November 1931).

Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man, or yet to be made known."¹²⁹

5.7 Smith's Eventual Success

Despite the stated neutrality of the Church concerning evolution and the origins of man echoed in Talmage's sermon, historical circumstances once again moved against this neutrality. After a long and severe struggle with diabetes, Roberts died on 27 September 1933, leaving Smith without any determined opposition to his position among leaders of the Church. In the absence of Roberts's dogged opposition, Smith was free to pursue his beliefs even further.

In 1954--after the deaths of Roberts, Widtsoe, and Talmage--Smith published an attempt to comprehensively refute the theory of evolution. Twenty-three years earlier, Roberts claimed that Smith was obligated to take into consideration the "stern proven facts" of science if he wanted his explanations to be taken seriously. According to Roberts, Smith's scriptural argument and his insistence on Satan as the author of all things evolutionary was an insufficient explanation in light of all of the evidence accumulated by modern

¹²⁹Ibid.

science to the contrary. In order to be successful, Smith needed to deal with the scientific evidence on its own terms. Smith finally took up Roberts's challenge twenty-three years after it was issued--the result being *Man: His Origin and Destiny* which appeared in 1954. This treatise was Smith's first systematic attempt to refute Roberts's scientific arguments on their own terms.

In his attempt to do so, Smith enlisted the authority of such prominent creationists as George McCready Price and Byron C. Nelson.¹³⁰ Smith used Price's ideas to explain the geology of the earth. Smith wrote, "to think of the terrific force of the flood that would cover the earth we must conclude that the entire face of the earth [that] was ascribed to geologists to a time millions of years ago could have taken place suddenly, and evidently did."¹³¹ It is not Smith's purpose to delve into these arguments in detail but he does quote the flood geologist Sir Henry H. Holworth's work in support of his thesis and refers his

¹³⁰Two decades earlier Smith had corresponded with Price, praising him for his attempts to turn the tide of modernism as well as asking him for help regarding scientific objections raised by Roberts to Smith's creationist theory. Before Price could be much help to Smith, however, the First Presidency had already announced their neutrality concerning such matters. See Numbers, *The Creationists*, 310 & 312.

¹³¹Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, 422.

readers to Holworth's works for further information concerning flood geology.¹³²

Responding to Roberts's earlier challenge to take scientific evidence seriously, Smith used scientific authority in much the same way as Roberts had earlier. Smith quoted flood geologists in an attempt to add an air of scientific authority to his arguments. In maintaining the appearance of proper scientific authority, Smith fails to mention that the geologists he quotes were not taken seriously by other scientists. Flood geologists "have tried to argue for geologic evidence of a worldwide catastrophe or massive change in the earth at the time of the flood of Noah or the advent of Adam and Eve, but they have produced no credible evidence for the kind of event [Smith] postulates."¹³³ Smith cleverly played Roberts's game of clothing his argument in scientific authority which was calculated to convince his readers of the truth of his argument.

In an addition to flood geology, Smith argued that science has proven spontaneous generation is impossible and hence life could not come from inorganic matter:

The dividing chasms separating the inert inorganic elements, the animal world and the human family, have never been bridged and no evidence of worthy

¹³²Ibid., 424-433.

¹³³Evenson, cxxvii.

consideration has ever been produced to uphold contrary theories in all the toilsome fruitless research that has been made. Since the beginning of history . . . no inorganic substance has ever taken upon itself animation and developed into life. Every clod of earth, every stone or other substance belonging to the inorganic elements has remained the same and without some animated influence acting upon it would remain the same ever devoid of life and animated being¹³⁴

Accordingly, Smith believed there was something more to life than chemistry and physics. Smith wrote, "The directive and selective force which we call life appears to be outside of and above the laws of inorganic nature." In other words, there was a vital force in all living beings which came from God. Accordingly, Smith argued that God must be the animator of all that is living since matter is incapable of animating itself.¹³⁵

Smith then argued that evolution from a single source of life is impossible. He uses a Baconian criteria in support of this argument. Since no one has ever seen a species evolve the theory of evolution is based on supposition. According to Smith, evolution "can never be more than a guess. . . ." Many evolutionists acknowledge the weakness of their cause

¹³⁴Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man: His Origin and Destiny*, 133-137 & 167.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 136 & 165. Vitalism was certainly not unique to Smith. It began with the Greeks and continues to the present. There have been many who believed and many who continue to believe that life is more than just chemistry and physics. An unseen "life-force" is often used to explain the reality of life.

and frankly admit that they are under the necessity of postulating, without any evidence to support their claim."¹³⁶

Smith also attacks the fossil reconstructions of early forms of man. He claims these reconstructions should be considered constructions since they are created from a tiny number of bone fragments found in close proximity. Unfortunately, in their unbridled zeal to discover missing links, paleontologists have simply invented man-like creatures from these bones fragments which are most likely the remains of apes, monkeys, and chimpanzees. Smith writes:

There have been numerous . . . "finds" from which "primitive men" have been manufactured, such as the La Quina Lady, the Heidelberg Man, the Moustier Man, the Pekin Man, and others needless to mention. The fact remains that they have been manufactured from a few scattered fragments of bones with no certain evidence that fragments were part of the same skeletal remains. . . . Most of the bones thus discovered have been found in positions many yards apart and there is no proper evidence that they belong to the same individual. Moreover, the bones gathered from isolated points, or deposits, have been taken as a criterion and in

¹³⁶Ibid., 160-161. Although scientists of 1950s would have agreed that no one had actually seen species evolve into entirely new species on the macroscopic level, they would have adamantly disagreed with Smith's assertion that there was no evidence to support the theory of evolution. Ever since Darwin first published the *Origin* in 1859, scientists have accumulated large amounts of evidence which suggests that evolution has occurred. Almost all scientists contemporary with Smith believed that the accumulated evidence was sufficient to demonstrate the genuineness of the theory of evolution.

imagination made to represent an entire race of imaginary people.¹³⁷

Once again Smith used Roberts's tactics to make it seem as if the authority of science supported his conclusions. His main authority was George McCready Price who had argued in his *New Geology* that the Biblical deluge had been so powerful that the remains of many creatures had been washed together into one place. These disparate pieces were later found by paleontologists who assumed that proximity implied that these remains must have belonged to the same creature.¹³⁸ Smith fails to mention that almost all contemporary scientists disagreed with Price and believed these finds were the genuine remains of man's ancient progenitors. Mentioning this would have weakened his arguments by weakening the authority upon which they were based.

It is significant that Smith spends more time refuting the fossil evidence for the pre-Adamite existence of man than he does on any other subject. This is most likely due to the fact that Roberts had used these same fossil discoveries as his main source of

¹³⁷Ibid., 145-157.

¹³⁸George McCready Price, *The New Geology: Textbook for Colleges, Normal Schools, and Training Schools; and for the General Reader* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), 695-697, 700 & 702.

scientific proof for his arguments.¹³⁹ After two decades it appears Smith was still motivated by a desire to refute Roberts's most important evidence.

Continuing to focus his attention on man, Smith argued that the greatest proof that man was created by God was the complexity of his body. After considering its form and functions, Smith argued:

we are forced to the conclusion that all of this came by design and not by "emergency," or chance. This is just too much to believe, and there is no real evidence sustaining it. We might as well say--to use a familiar comparison--that the wheels, joints and springs of a watch came by means of chance, or that the lens in a telescope just happened to grow there. It would be just as inconsistent!¹⁴⁰

As we have seen, these arguments were at least as old as William Paley. As previously mentioned, they could be powerful arguments for the existence of God for those who already believed. However, the same evidence used to support faith could also be used by others to challenge it. Smith's arguments had already been used by evolutionists to support their own position. In the tradition of Darwin's *Decent of Man*, evolutionary biologists attempted to explain the complexity of man through natural selection. These arguments were just as

¹³⁹Roberts, *TWL*, 303-318.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 248.

powerful to those who believed in evolution as Smith's arguments were to those who believed in God.

From the preceding summary of Smith's work it is clear he denied Roberts's evolutionary thinking outright. According to Smith, "There is not and cannot be, any compromise between the gospel of Jesus Christ and the theories of evolution."¹⁴¹ Smith considered the teaching of evolution to be heresy and could not be supported by a literal interpretation of the scriptures. Not surprisingly, Smith believed the theory of evolution should be rejected by all right-thinking Mormons.

Duane E. Jeffrey writes that "For the first time in Mormon history . . . Mormonism had a book that was openly antagonistic to most science." By opting "for schism rather than synthesis," Smith sparked a wave of religious fundamentalism that shows little signs of abatement."¹⁴² Although the President of the Church at the time, David O. McKay, repeatedly disavowed Smith's book as the official position of the Church, many Latter-day Saints seemed to accept it as such.¹⁴³ This phenomenon is partially due to the fact that McKay never publicly denied Smith's interpretation. McKay's procedure was to "quietly assure those who inquired in

¹⁴¹Ibid., 184.

¹⁴²Jeffrey, 66 & 75n.

¹⁴³Paul, 179; and Numbers, 313.

his office that the church had not taken an official position on the issue."¹⁴⁴ A typical example was a letter written to Professor William Lee Stokes dated February 15, 1957. McKay writes, "On the subject of organic evolution the Church has officially taken no position. The book *Man, His Origin and Destiny* was not published by the Church and is not approved by the Church."¹⁴⁵ This private correspondence was not officially published until 1979 when professor Stokes recognized that students and colleagues had similar concerns regarding Smith's work and were confused as to the official position of the Church concerning the matter of organic evolution.¹⁴⁶ Despite McKay's private disavowals, Smith becoming a member of the First Presidency in 1965 and the President of the Church in 1970 gave added weight to the belief that his book was authoritative and represented an official position of the Church.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴David H. Bailey, "Science and Mormonism: Past, Present, Future," *Dialogue* 29, no. 1 (1996): 22.

¹⁴⁵William Lee Stokes, "An Official Position," *Dialogue* 12, no. 4 (1979): 90-92.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷Numbers, 313. As previously noted, only canonized scripture and official published statements of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve are considered "Church doctrine."

5.8 The Current Situation

Smith's views gained even further circulation when they were reproduced by his son-in-law Bruce R. McConkie in "one of the all-time best-sellers in Mormon history," *Mormon Doctrine*.¹⁴⁸ McConkie argued that "There is no harmony between the truths of revealed religion and the theories of organic evolution." Like his father-in-law, he limited the history of life on earth to thousands of years and relied upon flood geology to make sense of the fossil record. According to McConkie, those who believed in the theory of evolution were under the power and influence of Satan.¹⁴⁹

The fact that *Mormon Doctrine* was written by a Church leader with an air of authority meant that it would be taken seriously. The title itself suggested that McConkie was speaking for the Church on matters of official doctrine though his preface clearly states that, "For the work itself, I assume sole and full responsibility."¹⁵⁰ However, the two Apostles asked to review McConkie's work noted over 1,000 doctrinal errors including his insistence on a literal interpretation of

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Second Edition (Salt lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 247-256; and Numbers, 313.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 5.

the creation accounts.¹⁵¹ President of the Church since 1951, David O. McKay also disavowed *Mormon Doctrine* as an official publication of Church doctrine in personal letters as he had earlier done with Smith's work. In a letter written to a member of the BYU faculty, McKay wrote, "The Church has issued no official statement on the subject of the theory of evolution. Neither *Man, His Origin and Destiny* by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, nor *Mormon Doctrine* by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, is an official publication of the Church."¹⁵² McKay even asked McConkie not to publish a second edition, but despite this request from the Prophet, McConkie published an updated edition of *Mormon Doctrine* in 1966 and another in 1979.¹⁵³ Despite McKay's clarification that *Mormon Doctrine* was not an official exposition, McConkie's status as a General Authority, the title of his book, his prolific writing presence, and the fact that there was never an official published opposition to McConkie's work helped to make his beliefs the prominent view among contemporary Latter-day Saints.¹⁵⁴ According to Ronald

¹⁵¹Paul, 179.

¹⁵²David O. McKay, 3 February 1959, (copy in possession of author).

¹⁵³Paul, 179-180.

¹⁵⁴Bailey, 82. It should be noted that General Authorities, like all members of the Church, are free to publish their personal opinions and beliefs. Just as it would be rare to find such a work by a General Authority which did not have a disclaimer of official exposition in the

C. Numbers, McConkie's literalism helped to push Mormons "towards fundamentalism and antievolutionism."¹⁵⁵ By 1973, 81 percent of the students at BYU denied that creation involved evolution.¹⁵⁶

This trend has sociological roots as well. Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie's works were accepted by many members of the Church since they exemplified the beliefs of many of their readers. Sociologists have verified the fact that most members of the Church living within the United States at this time belonged to the conservative middle-class which esteemed traditional values and eschewed modernism. Sociologist Dorothy Nelkin has argued that this class believed that modernism was partially responsible for many of the social ills which plagued the United States in the post-war era since it helped to destroy traditional values by attacking the religion upon which they were based. In the 1970s, many middle-class conservative Americans targeted the teaching of evolution in public schools since it was the most conspicuous facet of modernism. In an attempt to counteract the negative effects of modernism, this group fought for the right to have the Biblical creation story taught alongside the theory of

preface, it would be equally rare for the Church to take a position of official denunciation or support for any such work.

¹⁵⁵Numbers, 308.

¹⁵⁶Christensen and Cannon, 57.

evolution.¹⁵⁷ Latter-day Saint sociologist, O. Kendall White Jr. has noted a similar reaction to modernism which took place among Mormons during the twentieth century.¹⁵⁸ As a result, many Latter-day Saints who belonged to the conservative middle-class participated in the fight for equal time.¹⁵⁹ Today in the United States, many Latter-day Saints still hold fast to similar conservative values. The anti-evolutionary sentiments of McConkie and Smith appeal to these members of the Church since they uphold their conservative beliefs concerning evolution and the creation.¹⁶⁰

After McConkie and Smith had published their respective works, other Church leaders continued to raise concerns over the religious implications of evolutionary theory. Joseph Fielding Smith's successor, Harold B. Lee, listed "so-called" science along with communism as a source of untruth which challenged the faith of Latter-day Saints in two different sermons addressed to members of the LDS Church.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷See Nelkin.

¹⁵⁸White, 1987.

¹⁵⁹Nelkin, 76.

¹⁶⁰Lori Baer, "Attitudes and Beliefs of Utah Mormons," an unpublished paper in the possession of the author.

¹⁶¹Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report* (April 1964): 21-25; and *Conference Report* (October 1968): 59-52.

Lee's successor, Spencer W. Kimball, reaffirmed the Church's neutral position.¹⁶² However, during his administration, McConkie continued to teach his literalist beliefs to members of the Church. In an address delivered to BYU students in 1980, he argued that Darwinism was one of "seven deadly heresies" that led men away from God and should accordingly be avoided.¹⁶³ McConkie's apostolic colleague, Mark E. Peterson, also raised concern about the theory of evolution during Kimball's presidency.¹⁶⁴

Shortly after succeeding Kimball as President of the Church in 1985, Ezra Taft Benson, re-read a speech given 11 years earlier when he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve in which he declared that "Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book (*Book of Mormon*) to expose and combat the falsehoods in socialism, organic evolution, rationalism, humanism, etc."¹⁶⁵ In 1988, this speech was published once again.

¹⁶²Spencer W. Kimball, "The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood," *Ensign* (March 1976): 70-72.

¹⁶³Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies," *BYU 14-Stake Fireside*, (3 June 1980).

¹⁶⁴Mark E. Peterson, "Creator and Savior," *Ensign* 13 (May 1983): 63-65.

¹⁶⁵Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 60. The original speech appears in the *Ensign* 5 (1975): 63-65.

This time Benson had revised the preceding passage to read, "Our families may be corrupted by worldly trends and teachings unless we know how to use the book to expose and combat falsehoods in socialism, rationalism, etc."¹⁶⁶ However, on at least one occasion since this revision, Benson publicly delivered the original unedited speech to members of the Church. It also appeared in its original form in the 1988 edition of *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*.¹⁶⁷

The most powerful statement made by a General Authority regarding evolution since McConkie, however, has come from Apostle Boyd K. Packer. In 1990, Packer wrote:

It is my conviction that to the degree the theory of evolution asserts that man is the product of an evolutionary process, the offspring of animals--it is false! . . . And I am sorry to say, the so-called theistic evolution, the theory that God used an evolutionary process to prepare a physical body for the spirit of man, is equally false.

He concludes by advising his listeners to "rely on the witness of the heavens above . . . when confronted by evidence in the rocks below."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶*Ensign* (January 1988): 3-5.

¹⁶⁷Packet of statements made by presidents of the Church concerning evolution; this unpublished packet was given to Brigham Young University faculty in the early 1990s (copy in possession of author).

Other evidence of a contemporary literalist approach to the scriptures can be found in current study manuals used by the Church's educational system. For example, the present Old Testament manual "takes a highly literalist approach" on the question of creation. It cites the work of prominent flood geologists "in defense of the position that the earth is only a few thousand years old."¹⁶⁹ Concerning evolution, the manual includes several quotes by the General Authorities mentioned previously which appear to rule out any possibility of a reconciliation of evolution with LDS doctrine. This manual also does not mention competing viewpoints such as Roberts's and Widtsoe's.¹⁷⁰

One result of this recent literalism is that "BYU students today are at least as literalist in their beliefs on evolution as they were in 1973."¹⁷¹ B. H. Roberts's was the last General Authority to publicly champion evolution. While most LDS scientists surveyed in Richard T. Wooten's *Saints and Scientists* believe in

¹⁶⁸Boyd K. Packer, "The Law and the Light," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob Through Words of Mormon, To Learn With Joy*, ed. Monte E. Nyman (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1990).

¹⁶⁹Bailey, 84; Bailey's characterization is somewhat unfair since the Old Testament manual does include various old-age theories and concludes by saying that the Church has no official position concerning the age of the earth. However, Bailey is generally correct since the overall impression is one Biblical literalism.

¹⁷⁰*Old Testament: Genesis--2 Samuel Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 28-29, 33-36.

¹⁷¹Bailey, 86n.

evolution, including the evolution of man, the authority of science now pales in comparison to the authority of modern-day Apostles and Prophets.¹⁷² Despite some evidence for changing attitudes among the General Authorities reported by David H. Bailey, he asserts that most Mormons remain generally fundamentalist in regards to the creation and the question of organic evolution.¹⁷³

B. H. Roberts belonged to an age which existed before fundamentalism became the predominant mode. His desire to reconcile science and religion and his willingness to offer bold speculations in order to do so are reminiscent of a time before the specter of modernism caused many General Authorities to adopt a more literal interpretation of scripture. The reaction to Roberts's work is indicative of the change that had taken place within his lifetime. A Church whose leaders had once freely speculated concerning the origins of man had become relatively fundamentalist with regard to the theory of origins. In conclusion, however, it is interesting to note that the statements of 1909 and 1925 remain the only official proclamations concerning

¹⁷²Wooten, 42-45. The scientists in Wooten's survey were mostly Latter-day Saint scientists from Utah. Some were educated at BYU while others were educated in nondenominational institutions. It is interesting to note that most scientists educated at BYU were no more literalist in their approach to the creation than the other scientists in Wooten's survey.

¹⁷³Bailey, 83-85.

evolution issued by the Church. Regardless of Smith and McConkie's works to the contrary, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has taken no official stance concerning the theory of evolution. Contrary to the prevailing belief among many members of the LDS community, as long as neutrality remains official, individual members of the Church are each free to follow their own conscience with regards to the theory of evolution. Those who interpret Joseph Smith's teachings regarding secular knowledge to mean that "revelation does not come only through the prophet of God nor only directly from heaven in visions or dreams [but] may come in the laboratory, out of the test tube, [and] out of the thinking mind and inquiring soul" may still turn to science for help in finding answers in regards to the mode of creation.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴Hugh B. Brown, *The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, ed. Edwin B. Firmage (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 139.

6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has described the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint's reaction to the theory of evolution as exemplified by the life and works of B. H. Roberts. Roberts's life and works illustrate the larger trends which occurred in Latter-day Saint culture from its inception to the present day.

The earliest period of LDS Church history was characterized by an openness to new ideas. For example, Joseph Smith encouraged the examination of new kinds of knowledge. As a result, many historians have noted an intellectual vigor that characterized the early years of the Church. Smith especially encouraged the pursuit of secular knowledge. He believed that this was one avenue towards truth. Spiritual truth could be found in the scriptures while scientific knowledge could be found in the study of nature. These truths were both important since they revealed different facets of the mind of God. Knowledge of scientific and scriptural truth could lead to a greater understanding of God since all truth issued forth from the Divine Creator.

Smith's successor, Brigham Young, agreed. According to Young, science and religion could not conflict since they were different parts of the same reality. Young also accepted a continuation of the intellectual

vigor begun under Smith. This intellectual vigor was distinguished by a propensity for speculation among leaders of the Church during Young's administration. Since Smith left no absolute proclamations concerning the actual physical process of creation, many leaders of the Church freely gave their opinions regarding the different creation accounts and speculated on possible modes of creation. These theories were representative of the early period in Church history which was generally undogmatic and latitudinarian in regards to the creation.

However, historical circumstances eventually led to a more fundamentalist approach. The encroachment of secular learning upon the isolation of the Saints played an important role in this conservative reaction. Church leaders in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries confronted the theory of evolution with all its implications for religion as their isolation in the inter-mountain West became increasingly jeopardized by westward expansion and the foundation of state schools.

One reaction to the threat of secular knowledge was to focus on firm foundations of basic Church doctrines and curb speculation that had characterized earlier periods of Church history. Earlier speculations concerning the creation began to give way to more literal interpretations.

Another important reaction to modernism occurred when several professors at Brigham Young University began to teach evolution as a truth which could be harmonized with Latter-day Saint doctrine. The Church Board of Education decided that it was inappropriate to teach evolution in Church schools since it was impossible to know with any certainty just how much of it was fact and how much was fiction. According to the Church Board of Education, it was best to teach only those things which had been established by science as fact. Although an earlier statement made in 1909 had declared official neutrality concerning the theory of evolution, the Church Board of Education's decision not to teach evolution in the Church schools sent a different message to members of the Church. By disallowing the teaching of evolution at Church schools, it seemed as though the Church had aligned itself with fundamentalist opposition to evolution. Consequently, many members of the Church began to interpret creation scriptures more literally. The earlier speculative approach to the creation seemed to be a thing of the past.

Other historical factors inclined Latter-day Saints to assume a more conservative approach to the creation account as the twentieth century progressed. Several sociological studies agree that, during the post-war era, most members of the Church living in the United

States belonged to the conservative middle-class. Other sociological studies argue that members of this middle-class often blamed modernism for society's ills since they believe it attacked the religious foundations upon which traditional morality was based. Not surprisingly, some Latter-day Saints who belonged to this class were highly influential in California's crusade to have the traditional creation account taught alongside evolution as a possible alternative to what they saw as an atheistic and faith-destroying doctrine. As a result, unofficial but influential Latter-day Saint works such as Joseph Fielding Smith's *Man: His Origin and Destiny* and Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* with their literalistic interpretation of creation accounts were often embraced by members of the Church who were among a conservative middle-class. It is likely that Smith's and McConkie's works helped to reinforce their already conservative beliefs.

This trend from a more liberal to a relatively conservative position concerning the creation accounts is exemplified in the life and works of B. H. Roberts. As we have seen, Roberts's speculations concerning the creation of life in the *TWL* were highly speculative. It is in this regard that Roberts's masterwork was reminiscent of that earlier period in Latter-day Saint history which was marked by its relative openness of thought. This should not be surprising considering the

fact that Roberts lived through this era and did much of his early work during the waning years of this period. Roberts's religious sources also came from this period. In fact, the *TWL* seems to be modeled after those works which helped define this earlier era.¹

Roberts's also believed, as did Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, that science and religion were both part of one universal truth that ultimately came from God. The study of nature was an important part of this truth since it helped reveal the attributes of God. Roberts believed that science and religion could be reconciled since they came from the same source. He also believed that such a reconciliation would promote the faith of Latter-day Saints if he could show that science and religion were compatible. The *TWL* was Roberts's attempt to reconcile contemporary science and Latter-day Saint theology.

The changing intellectual climate is best illustrated by the conservative reaction to Roberts's work. Some leaders of the Church especially took exception to Roberts's pre-Adamite theory since they believed that this theory contradicted a literal interpretation of the scriptures and some official statement by Church leaders. Roberts's pre-Adamite theory claimed men had lived before the advent of Adam.

¹See especially Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* and Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Salt Lake City, Eugene Wagner, 1969).

Roberts also implied these men had evolved from relatively primitive beings to more advanced creatures that resembled contemporary humans. Although Roberts claimed there was no genetic link between his pre-Adamites and modern man, Joseph Fielding Smith attacked Roberts's theory because of its evolutionary implications.

Joseph Fielding Smith's reaction to Roberts's theory is illustrative of conservative retrenchment. Many Latter-day Saints, including Smith, viewed modernism as a threat since it seemed to attack certain fundamental tenets of their religion. Smith particularly disliked the teaching of evolution in Utah's public schools since it exposed young adults to potentially faith-destroying and atheistic theories of science. Consequently, Smith was seriously concerned with Roberts's theory. To Smith, it seemed as if Roberts were attempting to teach evolution as a truth verified by both science and religion. This was even more disconcerting considering the fact that Roberts was a General Authority who intended to publish his work under the auspices of the Church. Hence, Smith challenged the theory of evolution implicit in Roberts's work. Smith argued that creation accounts in the scriptures should be taken more literally. According to Smith, scriptural authority was greater than that of science since it came directly from God. It is

interesting to note, however, that Smith felt it necessary to clothe many of his anti-evolutionary arguments in the robes of science since scientific authority had become a force which he could no longer ignore.

When Roberts's work was first rejected by the Church, it appeared as if the Church had become so conservative on this issue that it was unwilling to accept any speculative theories concerning the creation if they appeared to contradict a literal reading of scripture. In retrospect, however, it seems as if the Church had taken a fortunate path concerning Roberts's work. As previously noted, time has not been kind to Roberts's work. Most of the science Roberts used is now outdated. Roberts's Euclidean conception of space, for example, is just as untenable in a relativistic universe as is his conception of time and the eternal nature of matter in a universe which most scientists believe to have begun at the time of the "big bang."

If Roberts's work would have been accepted as an official Church manual, the Church may have been in a similar position to the Catholic Church after it condemned Galileo. By condemning Galileo, the Catholic Church took a definitive stand on a particular cosmology. Science has since proved this cosmology to be untenable and hence an embarrassment to the Catholic Church. Similarly, portions of Roberts's work would now

have proven to be an embarrassment to the LDS Church if it had been accepted as an official Church manual.

If published as an official manual, Roberts's work may have seemed initially faith-promoting. However, as Roberts's already tentative reconciliation became even more untenable, those Latter-day Saints who might have based their faith on Roberts's work would have found it difficult to maintain that faith in light of changing science. On the other hand, by not taking a positive stand on evolution, The Church may have strengthened the hand of individuals whose ideas created future problems.

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