

DISCUSSION CONTINUED: THE SEQUEL TO THE ROBERTS/SMITH/TALMAGE AFFAIR

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FEW CHAPTERS IN twentieth-century Mormon thought are more thought-provoking than the events following B. H. Roberts' efforts to publish what he considered his greatest work, that synthesis of science and religion, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*. Much of this story, which involved the principal molders of modern church orthodoxy, is now well known through the fine recent study by Richard Sherlock, "'We Can See No Advantage to a Continuation of the Discussion: The Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair.'"¹ Newly uncovered materials, however, offer a new dimension to our understanding of this significant episode. These come in large measure from the papers of the son of one of the principals in the controversy—Sterling Talmage, who was almost in the center of things from the start.

When B. H. Roberts submitted his *magnum opus* in 1929, a publication committee composed of five members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was assigned to read the manuscript and make recommendations. This committee rejected Roberts' work for his speculations on the existence of "pre-Adamites" or races of man-like beings who had lived before the time of Adam.²

At least one member of the Twelve (and, as well, of the reading committee), Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, interpreted the committee's decision as an important affirmation of the superiority of Mormon doctrine (as he understood it) over the theories of men, indeed as a vindication of Smith's general antagonism to science. He chose to publicize this perceived support in a

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speech in the unlikely forum of a Utah Genealogical Society Conference in April, 1930.³ He then had his remarks printed under the title, "Faith Leads to a Fullness of Truth and Righteousness" in the October 1930 issue of *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*.⁴ After a brief introduction on the redemption of the dead, Smith observed,

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 on it. If you hear any one talking this way, you may answer them by saying that the doctrine of "pre-Adamites" is not a doctrine of the Church, and is not advocated nor countenanced by the Church. There is no warrant in the scriptures, not an authentic word, to sustain it.⁵

Although Smith acknowledged that the exact method of creation had not yet been revealed and that there was a danger of placing "false interpretations upon the written word," he nevertheless felt the revelations to be sufficiently clear on Adam, the Earth and "so many other things which fall under the ban of present-day teaching, that we need not be led astray."⁶ One such revelation was 2 Nephi 2:22, which to Smith meant "There was no death in the earth before the fall of Adam."⁷ This premise logically led to his dismissal of fossil evidence of ancient life and death. In sum, Smith concluded, "Whom are you going to believe, the Lord or men? . . . Any doctrine, whether it comes in the name of religion, science, philosophy, or whatever it may be, that is in conflict with the revelations of the Lord that have been accepted by the Church as coming from the Lord will fail."⁸

Smith's mistrust of scientists, whom he perceived as neglecting the Gospel in pursuit of such false doctrines, was not new. "The great difficulty with most scientists," he had written in 1920, "is that they are searching to find out God and all his works through the spirit of man, which knows not the ways of the Lord, which are spiritually discerned."⁹ Later, in 1936, Smith was equally explicit on the subject of *Mormon* scientists:

The more I see of educated men, I mean those who are trained in the doctrines and philosophies of men now taught in the world, the less regard I have for them. Modern theories which are so popular today just do not harmonize with the Gospel as revealed to the Prophets and it would be amusing if it were not a tragedy to see how some of our educated brethren attempt to harmonize the theories of men with the revealed word of the Lord. Thank the Lord there is still some faith left, and some members who still cherish the word of the Lord and accept the Prophets.¹⁰

Already sensitive from the rejection of his masterwork, B. H. Roberts responded sharply to Smith's Genealogical Society address. In a strongly worded letter to President Heber J. Grant and the First Presidency, on December 15, 1930, he questioned the "strictly dogmatical and the pronounced finality of the discourse. Was this," he demanded, an "official declaration of

the Church on the subject treated? Or is it the unofficial and personal declaration of the opinion only of Elder Smith?"

In the latter event then I feel that that fact should have been expressed in the discourse: . . . If Elder Smith is merely putting forth his own opinions, I call in question his competency to utter such dogmatism either as a scholar or as an Apostle. I am sure he is not competent to speak in such a manner from general learning or special research work on the subject, nor as an Apostle.¹¹

The First Presidency responded by inviting the disputants to present their arguments in written form before the entire Council of the Twelve. Ultimately, as Sherlock has related in some detail, the controversy was resolved, at least temporarily, in April 1931, when the First Presidency declared in a statement circulated only among the General Authorities that neither man had proved his case and that the Church should take no stand on the uncertain issues of science.¹² An entry from President Heber J. Grant's journal makes the attitude of the Presidency clear:

After reading the articles by Brothers Roberts and Smith, I feel that sermons such as Othmer Joseph preached and criticisms such as Brother Roberts makes of the sermon are the finest kind of things to be left alone entirely. I think no good can be accomplished by dealing in mysteries, and that is what I feel in my heart of hearts these brethren are both doing.¹³

When the Roberts-Smith controversy first arose, Apostle James Talmage was not appreciably involved. Although he was a trained geologist and regular speaker on the science/religion theme, he had not been part of the reading committee that reviewed Roberts' book and so had little contact with the discussion. This, of course, changed in 1931 when the entire Quorum of the Twelve was required to hear the protest that Roberts made against Smith.

Apostle Talmage's views were already well known, both within the church hierarchy and among the membership at large. Much of his adult life had been devoted to harmonizing science and religion. As early as 1881, as a twenty-year old teacher at the Brigham Young Academy, he had resolved "to do good among the young—probably lecture . . . on the subject of harmony between Geology and the Bible—a subject upon which so many of our people have mistaken ideas."¹⁴ Talmage eventually developed along these lines a popular lecture called "The Birth and Growth of the Earth" in which he presented a thorough review of the fossil finds up to the "advent of man."¹⁵ As a student at Johns Hopkins University three years later, Talmage wrote in his journal that his "belief in a loving God perfectly accords with my reverence for science, and I can see no reason why the evolution of animal bodies cannot be true—as indeed the facts of observation make it difficult to deny—and still the soul of man is of divine origin."¹⁶ He had stopped short of this conclusion in his popular lecture, however, in fact had chosen to avoid any mention of evolution, but he did give the fossil record in proper evolutionary order with an estimate of the respective ages. Implicit in the talk was the theme that listeners should feel less threatened by scientific theories as they become more acquainted with the hard evidence on which they were built.

In 1890 Talmage did specifically address "The Theory of Evolution" in remarks before the Utah Teachers Association. By this time he apparently had reconsidered some of his views as a student. Although demonstrating impressive familiarity with the history of evolutionary thought and the evidence used to justify the theory, most of his address was spent exposing the then widely cited weaknesses of the theory. Scientific experimentation, he reported, had not demonstrated the plausibility of a biogenesis of life from non-life. No examples had yet been demonstrated of the transmutation of one species to another. The fossil record failed to show the "missing links" between broad categories of animals. And, finally, evolution could not explain the uniqueness of the mind of man, his intellect, emotions, sense of the divine, which are far beyond what man would need for mere survival.¹⁷

Despite these reservations about the scientific evidence in support of evolution, Talmage unquestionably continued to subscribe fully to the *methods* of science. Several times over the next few decades he championed the scientific cause in real or perceived disputes with widely accepted notions within Mormonism. Responding on one occasion to an implied charge of scientific dogmatism—relating ultimately to the questions surrounding evolution—he told his audience in the Logan Temple that no one was more willing to give up a false scientific theory than a scientist. And in religion, "Faith is not blind submission, passive obedience with no effort at thought or reason. Faith, if worthy of its name, rests upon truth; and truth is the foundation of science."¹⁸

While Talmage's commitment to scientific inquiry is beyond dispute, he was less clear about where he felt the available evidence was pointing on questions debated that year. His public statements, while staunchly pro-science, were so carefully worded that it has been difficult to establish his views on several central issues. As Sherlock has shown, Talmage unquestionably accepted as established fact the great age of the earth, as well as the existence and death of life forms before the time of Adam.¹⁹ Although these views were not always presented conspicuously in his talks, Talmage was consistent in his affirmation of these ideas. On the question of pre-Adamic men, however, he created uncertainty as to his personal views by avoiding public comment. Although he seems to have rejected (after his college years) the theory that life forms evolved from one another, the logical implication of his comments was that his mind could be changed by further scientific evidence; his objections to evolution did not derive from a particular scriptural interpretation.

Partly because of this ambiguity in the public record, some have concluded that Talmage may have rejected both the theory of evolution *and* the existence of pre-Adamites. As will be seen, materials now available make it clear that, on the contrary, Talmage fully accepted at least the notion of pre-Adamites—in fact was described by his geologist son, Sterling, as having expressed in 1920 a concept of pre-Adamites which "went beyond anything that I had dared to think."²⁰ Talmage thus appears to have been quite confident of the validity of notions demonstrated by his "own" science of geology (narrowly

defined), but less so of ideas derived from related fields—such as biology—with which he was less familiar.

Talmage's views during the 1931 discussions within the Quorum were thus presumably sympathetic to much of the spirit of Roberts' efforts; his personal beliefs were clearly in agreement with Roberts on some of the more sensitive points. Unfortunately, not a great deal is known about the views he expressed during these discussions. What is known, however, is revealing. Talmage was particularly upset by Joseph Fielding Smith's use of George McCready Price as an "anti-scientific" authority in geology. Price was professor of geology at a small parochial college in the midwest and author of many books purporting to vindicate orthodox Christian belief through an exposure of the weaknesses of scientific theory.²¹ After a Quorum meeting in which Smith quoted extensively from Price's *The New Geology*, Talmage decided to prepare himself more fully for a debate on the merits of this type of evidence. He wrote to his eldest son, Sterling, who at forty-one was professor of geology at the New Mexico School of Mines, for an opinion of the book.

The younger Talmage responded by pointing out a number of technical errors in the specific passages quoted by Smith, and then added:

You ask "how Price is held in the opinion of geologists in general." As far as I can tell (and it seems to be the unanimous opinion of those who know his book, at least so far as I have talked with them), he is considered as a theological fanatic, who has gone off on a tangent that most geologists seem to find funny. I never heard his book discussed, . . . without the element of comedy being dragged in.

All of Price's arguments, in principle at least, were advanced and refuted from fifty to a hundred years ago. They are not "New." His ideas certainly are not "Geology." *With these two corrections*, the title remains the best part of the book.²²

Armed with this response, Talmage brought up the subject of Smith's paper in an April 1931 meeting called to bring the issue to a final solution. In this heated meeting, as he later wrote to his son, Talmage used Sterling's evidence to "show up James [sic] McCready Price in all his unenviable colors."²³ Moreover, the senior Talmage wrote, he

. . . was bold enough to point out that according to a tradition in the Church based on good authority as having risen from a declaration made by the Prophet Joseph Smith, a certain pile of stones at Adam-ondi-Ahman, Spring Hill, Mo., is really part of the altar on which Adam offered sacrifices, and that I had personally examined those stones and found them to be fossiliferous, so that if those stones be part of the first altar, Adam built it of stones containing corpses, and therefore death must have prevailed in the earth before Adam's time.²⁴

Finally, Talmage made it clear to his assembled Brethren that all reputable geologists recognized the existence both of death and "pre-Adamites" prior to 6,000 years ago, the presumed date of the Fall of Adam.

This view, of course, was vigorously denied by Smith, and "a serious disruption between and among certain brethren" was in the offing.²⁵ In order to avoid this disruption, the First Presidency sought to settle the dispute quickly, although without committing themselves on one side or the other of such speculative theories. Their conclusion, given by memo dated April 7, 1931, stated that neither party "has produced definite proof in support of his views," and, accordingly, the doctrine of pre-Adamites as well as the doctrine that no pre-Adamites existed were both declared theories which were not official doctrines of the Church.²⁶ This decision by the First Presidency, Talmage wrote that day in his journal, was "a wise one on the premises. This is one of the many things upon which we cannot speak with assurance and dogmatic assertions on either side are likely to do harm rather than good."²⁷

Of equal importance to the decision on pre-Adamites was the First Presidency's further instruction enjoining a continuation of the discussion. While on its face this instruction was designed to place the Church in a neutral position, in practice it did not have this effect. Only one side of the argument had been given any publicity—Joseph Fielding Smith's "Faith Leads to a Fullness of Truth and Righteousness." Many students, Talmage later recounted, "inferred from Elder Smith's address that the Church refuses to recognize the findings of science if there be a word in scriptural record in our interpretation of which we find even a seeming conflict with scientific discoveries or deduction, and that therefore the 'policy' of the Church is in effect opposed to scientific research."²⁸ Nor was Talmage alone in this concern, for he recalled an observation by an unnamed member of the First Presidency very early in the discussions that "sometime, somewhere, something should be said by one or more of us to make plain that the Church does not refuse to recognize the discoveries and demonstrations of science, especially in relation to the subject at issue."²⁹

Sterling Talmage in particular had been upset by the arguments set forth in Smith's Genealogy Society talk, a copy of which had been forwarded to him by his father. Writing to Apostle Talmage in June, just a few weeks after the apparent resolution of the Roberts-Smith confrontation, Sterling recounted how "[f]or several years I have been annoyed and irritated,—those terms are too mild, 'affronted' and 'challenged' would be better—by the type of thing you mention regarding no death on the earth, etc." While he had refrained in the past from branding such doctrine as "ignorant dogmatism," he felt motivated to protest now.³⁰

Rather than involve himself in the already sensitive pre-Adamite debate, Sterling felt he could make his point as well dealing with another aspect of Smith's remarks. In the Genealogy Society address, under the sub-heading "Miracles Not Inconsistent with Reason," Elder Smith had discussed Joshua's command to the sun to stand still.³¹ He explained this miracle by asserting that the Lord had stopped the earth's rotation. The chaotic centrifugal effects science would expect from such a phenomenon, Smith asserted, were avoided by slowing the earth down gradually. To Sterling, this was "so absurd that it will not stand the test of fifth grade arithmetic."³² He prepared what was

to become an "Open Letter to Elder Joseph Fielding Smith," which he forwarded to his father for critique.

Sterling affirmed that there were two basic reasons why Smith's hypothesis was unreasonable. First, he observed, a point on the surface of the earth in Palestine is moving at the rate of almost a thousand miles per hour. To bring that spot to a halt without causing inertial effects would take days or weeks instead of hours. Second, even were the earth to slow down gradually, Sterling maintained, winds would be generated "fully six times as great as in the most violent recorded hurricane." Of course, Sterling conceded, the Lord could have accomplished all of this by fiat, but he felt that neither he nor Smith was willing to accept that explanation because both conceived of a God who operated within a framework of natural law. To the younger Talmage, it seemed more reasonable that the stoppage of the sun was in reality an optical illusion caused by unusual atmospheric conditions which could bend the rays of sunlight over the horizon; he cited recorded examples of similar phenomena.

The implications of all this and the real reason for writing the letter Sterling made quite explicit: *"some of the authorities have made statements that are not worthy of belief."* Smith's hypothesis for Joshua's miracle was one example. The danger in this was that if a young person correctly disbelieves such a statement, "it is only a short step to doubting" all the authorities of the Church. In sum, Smith was out of place in referring to scientists as "Miserable Fools" as he had in the past, and he should not discourse in areas in which he was "not informed."³³

Apostle Talmage received his son's proposed letter enthusiastically. He strongly recommended sending the letter, with a few revisions, and suggested that Sterling give it wider distribution than originally planned:

I think it should be put into final shape and sent to its intended addressee without delay The conditions are peculiar but in my judgment and *in that of certain others* it is well to follow the course intended. I wish I could write in fuller measure of the conditions that have called forth your letter. But you have done—that is, begun and are to carry through—a good work. Finish it up.³⁴

After incorporating the changes suggested by his father, Sterling sent a copy, in late June, both to Elder Smith and to the First Presidency.

Apostle Talmage seems also to have felt that he should play a more active role himself in correcting some lingering misconceptions among the membership. In July, just four months after the April 7 decision and very soon after Sterling's "Open Letter," James chose to make a passing reference to the subject of pre-Adamites in one of his weekly radio addresses—in order, as he wrote Sterling, to "test the sensitiveness of at least some of our people on the subject." The response he received led him to conclude that the time was right to make clear, at least by inference, what was and was not the official position of the Church.³⁵

Talmage undertook this task in a speech in the Tabernacle on August 9th, 1931, entitled "The Earth and Man." In this he affirmed that plants and animals "lived and died, age after age, while the earth was yet unfit for human habitation." Perhaps because of the injunction against further discussion of the issue of pre-Adamites, he did not explicitly include them in his discourse. However, in comments on evolution reminiscent of his earlier talks, he stated that he did not regard "Adam as related to—certainly not as descended from—the Neanderthal, the Cro-Magnon, the Peking or the Pilt-down man."³⁶

Not surprisingly, the controversy that apparently had ended four months earlier was reopened. Should "The Earth and Man" be published? Several meetings of the Quorum were devoted to the talk. The deliberations, Talmage later wrote to John Widtsoe, who was in Europe, "revealed a very strong feeling on the part of a minority of the Brethren against giving public sanction to the views of geologists as set forth in the address." In particular,

The insistence on the part of three of our brethren—really to the effect that all geologists and all geology are wrong in matters relating to the sequence of life on earth—has been surprising. The author of the genealogical society address holds tenaciously to his view that prior to the fall of Adam there was no death of plants and animals upon the earth.³⁷

Elder Smith, according to his own account to Susa Young Gates, was supported within the Quorum by Rudger Clawson, the president, David O. McKay and George Albert Smith.³⁸ The official report by Clawson to the First Presidency noted that "again the scientific theory, or claim, is set forth in the sermon to the effect that man finally emerged, or was developed from and through a line of animal life reaching back, into numberless ages of the past, to the protoplasm." While in retrospect it is difficult to find evidence for this claim in Talmage's carefully chosen wording, no mention is made of his voicing a disagreement with this analysis.³⁹

Those members of the Quorum who supported publication included—in addition to Talmage himself—Reed Smoot,⁴⁰ Joseph F. Merrill⁴¹ (who was called to be an apostle in the middle of the debate), John A. Widtsoe (whose opinion was solicited by mail),⁴² and, apparently, Richard Lyman and George F. Richards. The latter two were present when Talmage delivered his address and expressed their "tentative approval" to him at the time. (President Anthony Ivins was also there and similarly supportive; Joseph Fielding Smith, present as well, was not.)⁴³ There apparently was additional support within the Quorum, for both Talmage and Smoot speak in their journals of a "majority" favoring publication.⁴⁴

Despite this reported distribution of opinion, Clawson's official report states that,

A motion was made and seconded to the effect that in the opinion of the Twelve, the sermon should not be published. This motion, after some further discussion, was followed by a substitute motion to the

effect that the sermon be returned to Brother Talmage and that he be requested to remodel it if possible by cutting out the objectionable features. Brother Talmage consented to do this. The substitute motion was adopted.⁴⁵

Predictably, the Quorum ultimately was unable to come to the requisite unanimity concerning publication, despite Talmage's willingness to state explicitly that opinions expressed were those held by himself or by contemporary geologists. (This, of course, would still accomplish the desired goal of showing the acceptability of the views cited; it was not Talmage's intent to assert them as "the" church position on the subject.)

As with the Roberts-Smith case, the First Presidency again was called upon to settle the controversy. This time they ruled in Talmage's favor. President Heber J. Grant made note of the decision in his journal, November 17, 1931:

At 11:30 Brother James E. Talmage called, and we went over his address delivered in the Tabernacle a number of weeks ago, and authorized its publication and also gave authorization for it to be printed in the same form as the radio addresses, for distribution.⁴⁶

Four days later the *Deseret News* Church Section carried the text of Talmage's remarks, and it also was issued in pamphlet form.

The publication of "The Earth and Man" marked the final chapter of James Talmage's involvement with questions of science and religion. He died less than two years later, just before his seventy-first birthday. Coincidentally, the seventy-seven-year-old B. H. Roberts, a second principal in the discussions of the past few years, died exactly two months later. The third principal, Joseph Fielding Smith, only fifty-seven at the time, continued as an influential presence for four more decades.

Following publication of Talmage's address, and still in the wake of the First Presidency guidance of April 1931, the controversy temporarily subsided. In 1934, however, just a year after Talmage's death, battle was again joined, but this time between Joseph Fielding Smith and Sterling Talmage. This episode began when Smith approved for publication in the *Deseret News* Church Section an article by Major Howard O. Bennion entitled "Is the Earth Millions of Years Old?"⁴⁷ Bennion, at the time a retired civil engineer, had served in several army and government engineering posts and had studied geology as a hobby. He answered the earth age question negatively, stating clearly that the scriptural and scientific accounts of the earth's creation were mutually exclusive, that the theory of evolution (including theistic evolution) was scripturally absurd, and that the principle of uniformitarianism upon which much of science depended was demonstrably false.⁴⁸

Sterling Talmage immediately responded with a lengthy rebuttal to Bennion's article, which he sent to Apostle John A. Widtsoe (a close friend to both Sterling and his father) and to the *Deseret News*. Widtsoe, now back from Europe, responded favorably to Sterling's article, much as he had reacted to James Talmage's address. He wrote Sterling that he had "expressed myself

as forcefully as I knew how to the brethren when the [Bennion] article was being discussed" but felt he could not formulate a direct reply himself because of the guidance against further discussion by the General Authorities. He could, however, make sure that Talmage's article was published. The matter was discussed with Elder Smith, who agreed that both sides of the argument should be aired.⁴⁹ Talmage's "Can We Dictate God's Times and Methods?" was printed one month later.⁵⁰

Sterling thus began to function for Widtsoe much as he had once served his father, as surrogate spokesman for the ideas these brethren were constrained not to discuss in print. (Howard Bennion served the same function for Smith.) Widtsoe went so far as to offer to act as Talmage's "unofficial agent in bringing matters before the public at home."⁵¹ Sterling's perspective was clearly set forth in his published essay:

As a geologist, I object to erroneous explanations of geological theories offered by one, who according to his own admission, had only a smattering acquaintance with geology As an upholder of the authority of the Church, I object to any statements from a non-authoritative source, of what constitutes "the doctrines of the Church," especially when some of these statements are in direct contradiction of the latest authoritative statements that have come to my attention.⁵²

The "latest authoritative statement" referred to was, of course, "The Earth and Man" address by his father. As to the "authority" of the senior Talmage's remarks, Anthony W. Ivins, First Counselor to the President at the time of the speech, had reportedly informed Sterling that the talk did have the approval of the presiding quorums.⁵³ Significantly, however, Widtsoe counseled Sterling immediately before publication of the latter's rebuttal to Bennion that "there appears to be no evidence on file that your father's splended article, 'The Earth and Man,' went out with what is held to be full authoritative approval, that is, the vote of approval of the Presidency and the Twelve."⁵⁴

Before their debate upon the pages of the *Church News* was over, both Bennion and Talmage had written follow-up articles. Bennion's entitled "Further Observations on the Age of the Earth," really did not address the issues raised by Talmage, simply reiterating much of the same material in his first article.⁵⁵ In the issue of the *Church News* that contained Talmage's second article, however, Dr. Sidney Sperry, a well-known Mormon Bible scholar, published an article supporting Bennion's position on scriptural grounds, and attempting a specific reply to Talmage's charges as Bennion had not done. In this Sperry maintained that "The Earth and Man" address, so heavily relied upon by Sterling Talmage, was an inappropriate airing of James Talmage's own views "for which the Church should not be held responsible."⁵⁶

Agitated by Sperry's criticism of his father, Sterling drafted a scathing rebuttal but, surprisingly, there is no evidence in his correspondence that it was ever sent to the *Deseret News*. A partial explanation may be found in the

fact that he also had immediately addressed a letter to President Anthony W. Ivins:

I do not like to come out in print, and brand another member of the Church as a plain liar, even though under the circumstances the designation seems strictly accurate. Dr. Sperry's accusation that my father assumed personal responsibility for portions of "The Earth and Man" that were not in accordance with the doctrines of the Church is utterly and unqualifiedly false.⁵⁷

Talmage requested the First Presidency to officially correct this "misstatement . . . with reference to my father's sermon."⁵⁸ Although a copy of the First Presidency's reply to Talmage is unavailable, it is apparent that they declined to comply with his request.

In the summer following the foregoing exchange of articles, Joseph Fielding Smith read an article by Dudley J. Whitney, introduced as "Esq., B.S., of Exeter, California," in the *Journal of the Transactions of the Victorian Institute* purporting to prove that the earth was 6,000 years old.⁵⁹ Smith, impressed by the article, wrote to Mr. Whitney asking him to respond to the Bennion-Talmage debate.⁶⁰ Whitney subsequently drafted a series of articles, the first of which argued that scientific data prove that the creation of the earth took place by divine fiat 6,000 years ago. Smith had Whitney's "The Fiat Creation of the Earth" published in the *Deseret News* but not in the Church Section.⁶¹

Since the Whitney article was neither written by a Mormon nor published in a church periodical, Talmage paid little attention to it. W. W. Henderson, professor of zoology at Utah State University, did write to the *News* stating that since "people generally take seriously whatever articles of this kind they find published in the *News*, it is unfortunate to publish such a paper."⁶²

As a result of this and other protests, the *Deseret News* decided against printing the last three or four articles of the Whitney series. In writing him of their decision, they suggest he could take up the matter personally with Talmage or Henderson if he wished. Talmage subsequently received an angry letter from Whitney offering Sterling \$100 to participate in a debate on the merits of the case for the fiat creation.⁶³

Talmage was astonished by Whitney's letter, especially since he had had nothing to do with discontinuing the series. In his letter, Whitney mentioned that "our mutual friend, Mr. Joseph Fielding Smith, the Church Historian," had been responsible for the publication of Whitney's articles at the *Deseret News*; Talmage therefore wrote to Smith for an explanation.⁶⁴

Smith replied that he had, indeed, favored publication of the Whitney articles:

As you know I am not in accord with many of the theories of the present day, including organic evolution and other theories taught by geologists, biologists, and others. For this reason I thought articles might be of interest showing there is another side to the questions. . . . While scientists are not atheists and are led to believe in some kind of a God, yet the tendency of the times is to destroy the Son of God and the plan of redemption.⁶⁵

Talmage expressed appreciation of Smith's reply in a return letter, although noting that Smith had merely re-emphasized the points of basic disagreement between them.⁶⁶

Although Talmage declined Whitney's offer to debate publicly, he did attempt to spell out his objections to Whitney's articles in private correspondence. To this Whitney replied, "I confess with deepest penitence that in discussing the essentials of my case I hurried over one part of the subject with some generalizations that were not strictly correct." He still felt, however, that his basic thesis was "unanswerable." As a matter of fact, "I figure that if about seven or eight of [my] series had been published, the teachings of evolution would have been pretty badly demoralized in the Inter Mountain States."⁶⁷ With this, the Whitney-Talmage exchange seems to have ended.⁶⁸

Scarcely one year later Elder Smith approved an article similar to those of Whitney and Bennion for publication in the *Church News*. This one was by Floyd Day, unmentioned in the article, and was entitled "Can the Scriptures Be Relied On?" If so, according to Day, the earth was only 13,000 years old; there was no death before the Fall of Adam 6,000 years ago; and the principles of organic evolution were blasphemous.⁶⁹ Talmage once again protested strongly to the First Presidency that "the scriptural quotations are strained and misapplied." He pointed out, again, that the article was in direct contradiction to his father's "Earth and Man" address, which "is to be considered an apostolic utterance." Perhaps wearied by the persistent appearance of such articles, he also informed the Presidency that he did not intend to draft a direct rebuttal, commenting only that "the present article . . . is so puerile that it carries its own refutation."⁷⁰

Joseph Fielding Smith, shown a copy of Talmage's letter, was particularly upset that "The Earth and Man" should be considered "an apostolic utterance delivered by appointment." He wrote Sterling that he knew personally that the talk had been issued "arbitrarily, in the absence of the President of the Church, and over the protest of the majority of the Council of the Apostles."⁷¹

To Sterling, Smith's statement was tantamount to a charge that James Talmage in publishing his talk was guilty of unethical, clandestine behavior. He responded to Smith that "I knew my father better than that; and so did you. I must admit that the paragraph carries a note of personal resentment against what appears to me to be an utterly unfair aspersion relative to my father's methods and motives."⁷²

At this point Talmage again sought confirmation of the status of his father's talk in a letter outlining Smith's charges to "President Heber J. Grant and Counselors." The First Presidency replied with a letter outlining a history of the publication of "The Earth and Man." Contrary to Sterling's belief that the sermon was authoritative, they asserted, it was twice "the unanimous view of the Twelve minus one, that the sermon not be published." As a result, "President Ivins withdrew the sermon from the consideration of the Council and himself decided that it should be published. It was printed within two or three days thereafter."⁷³ At the time Ivins made the final decision, according to the letter, President Grant was not at home and was apparently not

consulted. The Presidency continued, "You can see from the foregoing that the sermon 'The Earth and Man' cannot be regarded as an official expression of the Church;" however, "we make this foregoing statement without making any comment at all upon the matters discussed in the sermon." These remarks were followed by an exposition on the phrase, "by appointment." To the Presidency, "These 'appointments' are made merely in order that certain work shall be done, . . . but that does not mean that the Church must approve everything" that is said or done "by appointment."⁷⁴

This account of the events surrounding the publication of "The Earth and Man" is remarkable in that it disagrees with almost every other account available, including President Heber J. Grant's personal journal and Rudger Clawson's official report quoted above. One wonders what sources the 1935 Presidency consulted. A satisfactory explanation for this discrepancy is unavailable, because of the inaccessibility of critical historical records. It is probably relevant to note that when this explanation was sent to Sterling Talmage, only President Grant remained of those who were in the First Presidency in 1931. Second Counselor Charles W. Nibley had died in December 1931, and First Counselor Ivins in 1934. J. Reuben Clark, the New First Counselor and a frequent official respondent to inquiries to the First Presidency during the later Grant years, had not been a General Authority in 1931 and was not a party to the earlier discussions. The new Second Counselor was David O. McKay, formerly of the Quorum of the Twelve. (Aside from replacements for Talmage and McKay, the Quorum itself was unchanged.)

Whatever the explanation for the letter, its effect on Sterling was profound. He replied to the Presidency and to Smith in a highly conciliatory manner:

I am very grateful to you for clarifying my mind in this respect. I shall not again, either in publication or in private correspondence, place undue stress on the authoritativeness of this document, or any statements contained in it.⁷⁵

Thereafter, he was never again so willing to commit himself publicly in disagreement with conservative elements of the Church, although he had several opportunities to do so.⁷⁶ Three years later, when Apostle John Widtsoe decided to involve himself in the public defense of science against scriptural traditionalism, Talmage published one last article on the age of the earth in the *Improvement Era*, in support of Widtsoe.⁷⁷ He did not, however, follow through with plans to publish a series of articles written with Widtsoe's approval and defending the theory of evolution.⁷⁸ Although he completed a book length manuscript called *Can Science Be Faith Promoting?*, he was unable to publish this work before his death in 1956.⁷⁹

The highlights of the subsequent developments in this history have been covered elsewhere.⁸⁰ A climate sympathetic to the scientific perspective was evident in the Forties, supported by Widtsoe's important articles on science in 1938, 1939, and 1948. The Fifties saw the return of vigorous controversy, triggered by two talks at Brigham Young University by Joseph Fielding Smith, and the publication of his *Man: His Origin and Destiny* in 1954—all emphat-

ically reiterating the positions he had expressed several decades before. Ironically, the men who were counselors to Heber J. Grant in 1935 were called upon to lead the disclaimer to Smith's still authoritarian pronouncements. J. Reuben Clark, who had become First Counselor in the First Presidency, delivered his important sermon on "When Are the Writings of Church Leaders Entitled to the Claim of Scripture?" in response to questions raised by Smith's book. After David O. McKay became President of the Church, he repeatedly advised inquirers that Smith's book "was not published by the Church, and is not approved by the Church. The book contains expressions of the author's views for which he alone is responsible."⁸¹

In the Sixties, still in the McKay administration, a generally "pro-scientific" atmosphere was in evidence. The Church's *Instructor* magazine carried a series of essays on "modern problems" in 1965 which included articles by prominent LDS scientists on issues such as the age of the earth. The most controversial of these dealt sympathetically with evolution. Written by BYU botanist Bertrand Harrison, and entitled "The Relatedness of Living Things," this essay was introduced with a note stating clearly that it had been approved by the editor—David O. McKay.⁸² James Talmage's "The Earth and Man" also was reprinted in the *Instructor* as part of the same series.⁸³ The most recent decade, however, again has seen an apparent shift to a more fundamentalistic, anti-science perspective, both in official church manuals and in widely discussed talks by Apostles Ezra Taft Benson, Mark E. Petersen and Bruce R. McConkie.⁸⁴

Those who previously addressed this chapter in LDS history have noted that it illustrates several important points. At the most immediate level, as Duane Jeffery made clear in his pathbreaking study in 1974, it is evident that there is no formal "Church position" on many science-related questions historically under dispute.⁸⁵ More recently Richard Sherlock carried this conclusion a major step further with the generalization that, in fact, "Mormonism lacks theological 'orthodoxy' in the usual sense" on most issues: "We have few, if any, creedal statements to define our convictions with precise language. What usually passes for 'orthodoxy' is simply a widely held opinion."⁸⁶ Finally, Thomas Alexander pointed out that the men involved in these disputes were accustomed to acting authoritatively in actually resolving doctrinal ambiguities.⁸⁷

The present study supports these conclusions. Whatever the implications of the discrepancy in the record for 1935, two important themes emerge from the collective experiences of the Thirties. The first is that the issue of "orthodoxy" was much obscured by the carelessness with which the term "authoritative" (or its implied equivalent) was used. The second is that Sherlock's "widely held opinions" have been shaped by past protagonists not only through their own rhetorical style, but also through their intentional recruitment of vicarious opinion molders.

In support of the first point, it is easy to see that neither side has been immune from the temptation to advance its position in categorical, or authority-shrouded terms. B. H. Roberts, no less than Joseph Fielding Smith, was

willing to assert flatly the certainty of several disputed conclusions—the former in part because of his acceptance of the “truths” of science, the latter because of his acceptance of the “truth” of the fundamentalistic reading of the scriptures. Thus in 1931, the First Presidency felt compelled to take an official position denying, with the precision of a statement of classical logic, both sides of the argument: “the existence of pre-Adamites is not a doctrine of the Church;” neither was “the statement: ‘There were not pre-Adamites upon the earth.’”

Similarly, although Apostle Talmage in his 1931 address advanced his opinions in more carefully chosen language, he stated as fact scientific conclusions on which the First Presidency might correctly have ruled that the Church had no official stance. As a leading church authority, Talmage, no less than Smith or Roberts, could be viewed as speaking with religious authority. Thus, it was required before publication that such important qualifiers as “according to geologists” be added to the text.

The problem of assumed or perceived “authority” can also be seen in succeeding events. To Sterling Talmage, it was important that his father’s remarks, notwithstanding the incorporated caveats, be considered “authoritative utterances.” Conversely, both Smith and Sperry argued not only that the remarks were not “authoritative” but implied that their opposition to Talmage’s views reflected an authoritative consensus. In this context a key message in the First Presidency letter of 1935 was that James Talmage was not expressing an official position for the Church. As the Presidency affirmed both in 1935 and 1931, they did not have a position at all on the subject in dispute.⁸⁸

The Presidency’s further clarification in 1935 that discourses of General Authorities on official assignment were not necessarily official doctrine was perfectly consistent with these rulings. It also illuminates the emergence, during these and later years, of the *pro forma* disclaimer in the introduction to many books by the Authorities. Clark’s 1954 address and McKay’s responses to inquiries about *Man: His Origin and Destiny* or, a few decades later, McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* can be seen as obvious applications of this decades-old position.

The problem, of course, is that this practical and seemingly official view has not received significant (official) public exposure over the years. Only Clark’s talk—which it should be acknowledged could by his own standard be labelled “not official”—was delivered publicly, and it has received little reinforcement in recent years. If anything, the “follow the Brethren” theme now so much in vogue has encouraged the idea that *anything* uttered by a church authority or contained within a church manual is official. Yet ironically, the familiar disclaimer as to official status now appears in—of all places—the otherwise authoritatively presented Bible dictionary in the recent official LDS Bible.

John Widtsoe, amidst the controversies of the early Thirties, expressed his frustration at having been “afflicted with these questions [of science] for a generation of time.” It seemed to him that it was “high time that the Church

answer them definitively or declare that it does not know, so that more important questions may engage the minds of young and old."⁸⁹ To judge from his personal correspondence and diary entries, Apostle Talmage hoped to accomplish this end by publicizing the acceptability of popularly suspect notions. Ironically, his efforts to resolve what was "official" church doctrine and what was not were to some extent blunted by the question of his own "authority." Despite the decades-old infighting for "authority" to speak in the name of the Church about science (or perhaps because of it), neither the issues of science nor those associated with doctrinal authority have yet been resolved.

NOTES

¹*Dialogue* 13 (Fall 1980): 63–78.

²*Ibid.* For a thorough discussion of the contents of *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, see Truman Madsen, "The Meaning of Christ—The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Analysis of B. H. Roberts' Masterwork," *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (Spring 1975): 259–92. At the present time, the manuscript is closed to scholarly research.

³He states, "I will make some remarks in regard to this earth and its inhabitants, which some of you may think has little if any bearing on the question of salvation of the dead," p. 146.

⁴21 (October 1930): 145–158.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.

⁷"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 which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end." Smith, "Fulness," p. 148.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 149, 155. For a more thorough discussion of Joseph Fielding Smith's views, see Duane Jeffery, "Seers, Savants, and Evolution: The Uncomfortable Interface," *Dialogue* 7 (Autumn-Winter 1973): 41–75; and Richard Sherlock, "A Turbulent Spectrum: Mormon Reactions to the Darwinist Legacy," *Journal of Mormon History* 5 (1978): 33–59.

⁹Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Origin and Destiny of Man," *The Improvement Era*, 23 (March 1920): 375.

¹⁰Joseph Fielding Smith, Small Journals, Dec. 28, 1938. Typescript of this quotation in Eugene Thompson Collection, BYU Archives.

¹¹B. H. Roberts to Heber J. Grant and Counselors, Dec. 15, 1930. Church Archives-Historical Department, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter cited as Church Archives).

¹²See Jeffery, "Interface," and Sherlock, "Affair," op. cit.

¹³Heber J. Grant diary, January 25, 1931. Heber J. Grant collection, Church Archives.

¹⁴Personal Journals of James E. Talmage, Dec. 12, 1881, James E. Talmage Collection, Brigham Young University Special Collection Archives (hereafter cited as BYU Archives).

¹⁵The Birth and Growth of the Earth," *The B.Y.A. Academic Review*, Dec. 1884, p. 19.

¹⁶Talmage Journal, March 16, 1884. Italics Talmage's. Two months later, after hearing a Methodist minister preach on the evils of Darwinism, Talmage wrote, . . . like most ministers whose remarks I have heard or read upon this subject he showed his ignorance. . . . 'Darwin.' Oh yes—says 'we come from monkeys'—then

condemns. I certainly think 'tis the ministers themselves who have 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. . . . Darwin wrote for those who can understand him: some of whom will agree with and others oppose him: but he did not write for ministers who never read beyond others' opinions of the man. (*Ibid.*, May 4, 1884).

¹⁷James E. Talmage, *The Theory of Evolution* (Provo: Utah County Teacher's Association, 1890). This last point was used later by Talmage also as a criticism of the anti-evolutionists who fail to recognize that evolution only concerns the physical body. Of the evolutionists, he wrote in this lecture:

Facts warrant me in asserting that the theory of evolution has been greatly injured through the vague, wild, aye, even insane enthusiasm of many of its professed adherents. Atheists have flocked to its standard, and with a pretence of defending its principles have hurled abroad their shafts of hatred toward their Godly parent.

¹⁸James E. Talmage, "The Methods and Motives of Science," delivered in the Logan Temple, Feb. 5, 1898, and published in *The Improvement Era*, 3 (Feb. 1900): 250–259. The controversy that gave rise to Talmage's remarks in the Temple arose in 1896, when John Rocky Park, a Mormon and retired president of the University of Utah, delivered a series of lectures on psychology which included many evolutionary notions about the development of psychological traits. He was subsequently challenged on the pages of the *Deseret News* by George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency as teaching grave error and "boldly enunciating the non-existence of a personal deity." (*Deseret News* June 16, 19, 22, 23, 24, 26, 33, 1886.)

¹⁹Sherlock, "Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair," *op. cit.*

²⁰Sterling Talmage to John A. Widtsoe, April 17, 1934. All of the letters cited involving Sterling Talmage are in the possession of William Lee Stokes at the University of Utah.

²¹George McCready Price, *The New Geology* (Mt. View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1923). Price writes of geology, for example:

In geology, facts and theories are still *in-extricably commingled*, and in the ordinary college textbook of the science, the most absurd and fantastic speculations are still taught to the students with all the solemnity and pompous importance which might be allowable in speaking of the facts of chemistry or physics.

²²Sterling Talmage to James Talmage, Feb. 9, 1931. Italics Talmage's.

²³James Talmage to Sterling Talmage, May 21, 1931.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶See Jeffery, "Interface," and Sherlock, "Affair," *op. cit.*

²⁷Talmage Journals, April 7, 1931.

²⁸Talmage Journals, Nov. 21, 1931.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Sterling Talmage to James Talmage, June 15, 1931.

³¹Joshua 10:12–14.

³²Sterling Talmage to James Talmage, June 15, 1931.

³³Sterling Talmage, "Open Letter to Elder Joseph Fielding Smith," June 28, 1931. The reference to geologists as "miserable fools" had evidently been made by Elder Smith at a stake conference attended by Sterling Talmage.

³⁴James Talmage to Sterling Talmage, June 23, 1931. Italics Talmage's.

³⁵James Talmage to Sterling Talmage, July 23, 1931.

³⁶James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," *Deseret News*, Nov. 21, 1931.

³⁷James Talmage, to John Widtsoe, Nov. 18, 1931, Talmage Papers, Church Historian's Office.

³⁸Susa Y. Gates to John A. Widtsoe, undated, Widtsoe Collection, Utah State Historical Society.

³⁹When Clawson's report was read to the Council of the Twelve, the only objection voiced was that "some of the brethren took exception to the expression, '*reaching back, into numberless ages of the past, to the protoplasm.*' I presume I should have said '*reaching back, into numberless ages of the past, to the single-celled protozoan.*'" (Report of Rudger Clawson to the First Presidency, Clawson Papers, Church Historian's Office).

⁴⁰Smoot wrote Talmage that he hadn't "a word of complaint to offer against" the address. (Nov. 24, 1931, Talmage Collection, BYU Archives).

⁴¹Merrill was reported to have "upon hearing the sermon expressed a great pleasure and satisfaction and asked for a thousand copies of the sermon to distribute among his seminary teachers." (Hand-written report of Rudger Clawson, *op. cit.*).

⁴²Widtsoe wrote, "I am pleased, indeed, that the address was delivered publicly and hope it may soon be published." (Widtsoe to President Rudger Clawson, Sept. 9, 1931, Widtsoe Collection, Utah State Historical Society).

⁴³Talmage wrote in his journal that "the other brethren named [Richards and Lyman], including President Ivins, expressed their tentative approval of what I had said." (Talmage Journal, Nov. 21, 1931, BYU Archives). Joseph Fielding Smith wrote in his small journals, "(attended) Tabernacle in the afternoon. Dr. J. E. T. spoke not edifying but questionable." (Copy in Eugene Thompson Collection, BYU Archives).

⁴⁴Smoot wrote, "I voted that the article with a few slight changes be published and a majority voted that way." (Reed Smoot Journals, Sept. 29, 1931, BYU Archives). Talmage wrote, "The majority of the Twelve have been in favor of the publication of the address from the time they first took it under consideration." (Talmage Journals, Nov. 21, 1931).

⁴⁵Rudger Clawson Papers, Church Historian's Office.

⁴⁶Grant Journals, Nov. 17, 1931, Church Historian's Office.

⁴⁷Howard S. Bennion, "Is the Earth Millions of Years Old?" *Deseret News Church Department*, March 17, 1934, p. 6, and March 24, pp. 4, 7.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹John A. Widtsoe to Sterling Talmage, April 11, 1934.

⁵⁰Sterling Talmage, "Can We Dictate God's Times and Methods?" *Deseret News Church Department*, April 14, 1934, pp. 3, 5 and April 21, pp. 3, 6.

⁵¹John A. Widtsoe to Sterling Talmage, April 11, 1934.

⁵²Sterling Talmage, "Can We Dictate?," April 14, pp. 3, 6.

⁵³Sterling Talmage to President Heber J. Grant and Counselors, Dec. 30, 1935.

⁵⁴John A. Widtsoe to Sterling Talmage, April 11, 1934.

⁵⁵Howard S. Bennion, "Further Observations on the Age of the Earth," *Deseret News Church Department*, May 19, 1934, p. 4; Sterling Talmage, "Some Lessons Involved in the Age of the Earth," *Deseret News Church Department*, June 16, 1934, p. 2.

⁵⁶Sidney Sperry, "What Shall We Then Believe?" *Deseret News Church Department*, June 16, 1934, p. 3.

⁵⁷Sterling Talmage to President Anthony W. Ivins, July 1, 1934. The health of the 81-year-old Ivins at this time is unclear. He died just two months later.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹Dudley Joseph Whitney, "The Age of the Earth as Deduced from the Salinity of the Ocean," *Journal of the Transactions of the Victorian Institute*, 65 (1933), 26-37.

The Victorian Institute was a society established in 1867 in London, England, that had as its goal "To investigate fully and impartially the most important questions of Philosophy and Science, but more especially those that bear upon the great truths revealed in Holy Scriptures, with the view of defending these truths against the oppositions of Science, falsely so-called." (*Transactions* 1 (May 1867): vi). While the society defended

many scriptural "truths" such as creation *ex nihilo* that were not compatible with Mormon thought, Smith was impressed with their treatment of evolution. Most of the society's articles on this subject, which invariably denounced evolution as being incredible unscientific as well as unscriptural, were written by recognized scientists. Almost all of the post-1930 references in Smith's *Man: His Origin and Destiny* are to the Victorian Institute's *Journal*. When Smith in 1953 revised his 1930's manuscript for publication, the addition of the Victorian Society material constituted the bulk of the revision.

⁶⁰Dudley J. Whitney to Sterling Talmage, Sept. 29, 1934.

⁶¹Dudley J. Whitney, "The Fiat Creation of the Earth," *Deseret News*, June 16, 1934, p. 6.

⁶²W. W. Henderson to editor, *The Deseret News*, June 26, 1934.

⁶³Dudley J. Whitney to Sterling Talmage, Aug. 22, 1934.

⁶⁴Sterling Talmage to Joseph Fielding Smith, Sept. 16, 1934.

⁶⁵Joseph Fielding Smith to Sterling Talmage, Sept. 29, 1934.

⁶⁶Sterling Talmage to Joseph Fielding Smith, Sept. 16, 1934.

⁶⁷Dudley J. Whitney to Sterling Talmage, Sept. 29, 1934.

⁶⁸John A. Widtsoe remarked concerning Whitney's articles. "Life within the Church does not hinge upon the age of the earth, nor does any vital principle within the Church body of doctrine." John A. Widtsoe to Sterling Talmage, Sept. 27, 1934.

⁶⁹Floyd Day, "Can Scripture Be Relied On?" *Deseret News Church Section*, Nov. 16, 1935, p. 7.

⁷⁰Sterling Talmage to President Heber J. Grant and Counselors, Nov. 24, 1935.

⁷¹Joseph Fielding Smith to Sterling Talmage, Dec. 4, 1935.

⁷²Sterling Talmage to Joseph Fielding Smith, Dec. 7, 1935.

This letter contains a hint of the intense feelings that ran between the Talmage and Smith families after 1931. Sterling's sister Elsie referred to a "Smith-Talmage family feud," and quit her job with the *Improvement Era* so that she could escape Elder Smith's influence. (Elsie Talmage to Sterling Talmage, Jan. 11, 1935 and April 12, 1935, George Albert Smith Collection, University of Utah Special Collections Archives).

⁷³Heber J. Grant, J. Rueben Clark and David O. McKay to Sterling Talmage, Dec. 19, 1935.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵Sterling Talmage to President Heber J. Grant and Counselors, Dec. 30, 1935.

⁷⁶See, for example, Sidney Sperry, "Challenge to Scientists in the Church: Harmonize Learning, Faith," *Deseret News Church Section*, April 4, 1936, p. 3, and Joseph Fielding Smith's eulogy to William Jennings Bryan, "Was the Hero's Death So Bad?" *Deseret News Church Section*, October 31, 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁷Sterling B. Talmage, "Genesis and Geology," *Improvement Era*, 42 (March 1939): 143-144.

⁷⁸Widtsoe encouraged Talmage in this endeavor: "It is very likely that the time is ripe for someone to begin right now to prepare a wise, temperate, scientific statement of the doctrine of evolution. . . . Evolution, as a law, seems to me to have been demonstrated." (Widtsoe to Sterling Talmage, April 20 1934). It is not clear whether this series was not published because it could not receive the approval of the brethren besides Widtsoe, or if Talmage voluntarily withdrew the manuscript.

⁷⁹The manuscript was recently rejected for publication again, this time by BYU Press.

⁸⁰See Jeffery, "Interface," *op. cit.*

⁸¹Two of President McKay's many letters concerning *Man: His Origin and Destiny* have been published: William Lee Stokes, "An Official Position," *Dialogue*, 12 (Winter 1979): 90-92, and

Robert C. Stones, *Science and Religion*, (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) 18-22.

David O. McKay's opposition to the book *Man: His Origin and Destiny* has been well documented. He sought the opinions of several LDS scientists concerning the book. (See Steven H. Heath, *Henry Eyring: Mormon Scientist*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Master's Thesis in History, 1980, pp. 171-186). McKay was even more forceful in the private interviews which he granted to various individuals. In one such interview with George Boyd, T. Edgar Lyon, and Lowell Bennion (all teachers at the institute adjacent to the University of Utah), President McKay emphasized that the men "were to tell [their] students that the book . . . was not to be taken as representing the Church's position on such matters as the age of the earth and the theory of evolution." He also stated that it had been a mistake to use the book as a text at a 1954 summer school held at BYU for seminary and institute teachers. (Quotations are from George Boyd's notes of this interview). McKay indicated in an interview with Richard Poll that he personally could accept the theory of evolution as a possible explanation for the Lord's creative process. (Richard Poll interview notes.)

⁸²Bertrand Harrison, "The Relatedness of Living Things," *Instructor*, 100 (July 1965): 272-276.

⁸³James Talmage, "The Earth and Man," *Instructor*, 100 (December 1965): 474-477.

⁸⁴Summarized in Sherlock, "Affair," pp. 74-76.

⁸⁵Jeffery, "Interface," op. cit.

⁸⁶Sherlock, "Affair," op. cit.

⁸⁷Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* V (July-August 1980): 24-33.

⁸⁸It should be apparent to all readers of the Presidency's letter that they were not repudiating the concepts taught in "The Earth and Man." Their point is only that the sermon is not to be considered official in the sense that it is binding upon the Church membership. The same principle applies to other similar writings such as *Man: His Origin and Destiny*.

⁸⁹Widtsoe to Susa Y. Gates, Oct. 30, 1931, Widtsoe Papers, Utah State Historical Society.



Joseph Fielding Smith