

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

DAVID O. MCKAY, PRESIDENT

February 3, 1959

Dr. A. Kent Christensen  
Department of Anatomy  
Cornell University Medical College  
1300 York Avenue  
New York 21, New York

Dear Brother Christensen:

I have your letter of January 25, 1959 in which you ask for a statement of the Church's position on the subject of evolution.

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.

Evolution is a theory. You say that biologists would agree on the general lines of what happened, although there may be less agreement about just how it happened. While scientific people themselves differ in their interpretations and views of the theory, any conflicts which may seem to exist between the theory and the truths of revealed religion can well be dealt with by suspending judgment as long as may be necessary to arrive at facts and at a complete understanding of the truth.

Sincerely yours,

David O. McKay  
(President)

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
Office of the First Presidency  
SALT LAKE CITY 11, Utah

April 21, 1960

Mr. Robert C. Stones  
Riverside Trailer Court  
Provo, Utah

Dear Brother Stones:

In reference to your letter of April 18, 1960, addressed to President David O. McKay, I have been asked to acknowledge for him as he is under a very heavy schedule of duties associated with the general administration of the Church.

I have been directed to say that the enclosed statements published in the Improvement Era over the signature of President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors express the position of the Church upon the subject of the "origin of man".

I have also been directed to say that the Church has made no official statement on the subject of evolution. It is a scientific theory and is subject to and is undergoing modification from time to time. Scientific people seem to differ in their interpretation and views of the theory. A biologist expressed the opinion that biologists would agree on the general lines of what happened, although there may be less agreement about just how it happened.

While scientific people themselves differ in their interpretation and views of the theory, any conflict which may seem to exist between the theory and truths of revealed religion can well be dealt with by suspending judgment as long as may be necessary to arrive at the facts and complete understanding of the truth.

The authorities of the Church rely upon the revelation of the Lord for information about the creation of man.

I have also been directed to say that the book to which you refer in your letter (Man, His Origin and Destiny by Joseph F. Smith) expresses the views of the author, for which he assumes full responsibility. The book was not published, approved, or authorized by the Church, nor did the author intend that it be.

Sincerely yours,

signed A. Hamer Reiser  
Assistant Secretary to:  
The First Presidency

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
OFFICE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY  
SALT LAKE CITY II, UTAH

May 3, 1960

Dr. Harold J. Bissell, Professor of Geology  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah

Dear Dr. Bissell:

Your letter of February 10th telling us of your work at the Brigham Young University in geology, and questions that are put to you at times, has been received. In your letter you ask for a statement from the First Presidency that you might read to honest, inquiring students regarding the question of "organic evolution" and the status of the work by President Joseph Fielding Smith entitled, "Man, His Origin and Destiny."

The Brethren feel very sure that serious reflection on the matter will persuade you of the problems and resulting difficulties that would come to the First Presidency from any announcement that they might make on this matter of "organic evolution." You will appreciate that any statement they might make on this subject would be presumed to meet the problem as it is now understood by the scientists and the people. They feel sure that you will also appreciate that the problem as it now exists under the theories of present scientists might well not be the problems that will exist 50 or 100 years from now any more than that an explanation made to meet the theories of 100 years ago would meet the problems of today. As the Brethren understand, science must never accept any alleged solution of the problems of science (and they are many and in different fields), as the final truth. As a matter of fact, some of the older Brethren know that the explanations made 50 years ago are quite inapplicable to what are virtually the same problems of today. For example, the character and structure of the atom and molecule, etc., etc. At that time the scientists told us there were 76 elements and they did not anticipate the discovery of any more. Now they advise us that there are more than 130 elements, and the end is not yet. Furthermore, you will appreciate that anything they might say to you in this personal letter that you request would not remain personal with you, nor with them, nor with your students. It would become a public document, and the Brethren say they would not wish to make any statement that might not be made public. We seem to be in an age of such great and fundamental scientific readjustments on many matters, which age we have come to speak of as the nuclear age, that to attempt to harmonize the spiritual truths of the Gospel with the scientific theories would be futile, not because spiritual truths are not truths, because they are, but because the theories

Dr. Harold J. Bissell

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are admittedly largely hypothetical and subject to change. The Brethren sometimes say that this harmonizing of which so much is sometimes said should be harmonizing of science with spiritual truth, and not the harmonizing of spiritual truth with science, which latter can be accepted only when science comes to the ultimate truth, and nobody knows when that will be.

This would seem sufficiently to cover the general problem of "organic evolution;" however, apparently one of your difficulties has to do with President Joseph Fielding Smith's book, "Man, His Origin and Destiny." You will find in the Improvement Era, volume 13, pages 75 to 81, a statement by the First Presidency of the Church, at that time Presidents Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, on this very question of the origin of man. This will give you the position of the Church as of that time, and there has been no change. For your further information I am pleased to send you a copy of a sermon by Dr. James E. Talmage entitled "The Earth and Man," which may also be of some interest to you.

Faithfully your brother,

  
Secretary to the First Presidency

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
47 EAST SOUTH TEMPLE STREET  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

DAVID O. MCKAY, PRESIDENT

May 8, 1964

Mr. Pertti Felin  
F-3116 Helaman Halls  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah

Dear Brother Felin:

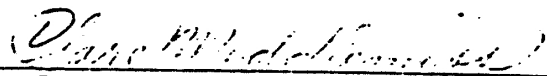
President McKay, who is recuperating at home from an illness, has asked me to acknowledge for him your letter of May 6, 1964, wherein you ask regarding the Church's position on the theory of evolution.

I have been directed to say that the Church has issued no official statement on this subject. It is a theory, and it is subject to and undergoing modification from time to time, at least in the differing interpretations of scientific people. Under these circumstances, any conflict which may seem to exist between the scientific theory and the truth of revealed religion should be dealt with by suspending judgement as long as may be necessary to arrive at the facts and a complete understanding of the truth.

While the theory is subject to controversy and differences of opinion in the scientific world, the authorities of the Church rely upon the revelations of the Lord for information about the creation of man.

Enclosed you will find copies of statements which appeared in Church literature on this subject. One is entitled, "The Origin of Man", a statement by the First Presidency. The other is an address given in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, August 9, 1931 by Dr. James E. Talmage, entitled "The Earth and Man."

Sincerely yours,



Secretary to:  
President David O. McKay

