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Not long ago, I expressed my belief that the LDS church has not taken an official stance on the subject of evolution vs. creation. I was taken to task by one reader who cited official statements strongly supporting the belief in God as creator and man as being created in the image of God. Of course, I knew of these statements, but was unaware of any direct pronouncement that dismissed the theory of evolution entirely and finally.

In this brief collection of statements from the First Presidency and others Evenson and Jeffery have compiled a three-fold tool to help those wanting to understand the Church's position on this volatile issue.

First, we have the content of what is called the "BYU Packet," a collection of documents distributed to faculty and students to help clarify the Church's teachings as they touch both science and theology.

Next, we have a chronological presentation of other documents generated through the years as they present what the compilers call "non-official" statements. Because they do not come directly from the First Presidency, they are given lesser weight, even though some are made by men who would later ascend to the First Presidency.

Finally, the editors provide brief "Context" notes, moving us from one statement to another, often giving us a behind the scenes peek at the conflicts and questions surrounding this ongoing discussion.

Some of the statements reproduced here are quite vivid, and raise more questions than they answer. For example, in a 1911 article in the *Juvenile Instructor*, Pres. Joseph F. Smith advocated, in my opinion, something of a head in the sand approach:

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. We think that while it is a hypothesis, on both sides of which the most eminent scientific men of the world are arrayed, that it is folly to take up its discussion in our institutions of learning; and we can not see wherein such discussions are likely to promote the faith of our young people. (p. 49)

One must immediately ask the question, why should discussions about science need to be "faith promoting"? And does this attitude affect the standard of education in LDS institutions, does it isolate students from the real world of scientific endeavor? I don't know the answers to these questions.

In a 1931 message from the First Presidency, the following appears:

We call attention to the fact that when one of the General Authorities of the Church makes a definite statement in regard to any doctrine, particularly when the statement is made in a dogmatic declaration of finality, whether he express it as his opinion or not, he is regarded as voicing the Church, and his statements are accepted as the approved doctrines of the Church, which they should be. (p. 67)

And while the next paragraph suggests we leave the questions about science to the scientists, one must wonder how this would be read in light of, for example, B.H. Roberts' "The Truth, The Way, And the Life" and Joseph Fielding Smith's "Man, His Origin and Destiny," both discussed in this book. In each case, these men were speaking in areas of history and science, and were both urged not to propagate their ideas.

In one fascinating chapter, we get a glimpse of some turmoil over the disagreements between Roberts and Smith on the subject of the pre Adamites, among other topics. James E. Talmage believed that Smith's views were widely known among the Saints, but Roberts' theses were not, and merited a larger audience. He delivered a speech advocating the Roberts views in August of 1931, later republished under the Church's name, in a booklet, over the objections of Smith.

If one were to try to distill some statement of absolute teaching from these documents, one may come up empty. I tried to discern how creationists and evolutionists would each understand these statements. I thought the creationists would likely edge ahead, but not in a triumphant way. Neither side attains a clear victory.

In issuing the aforementioned "BYU Packet," the Board of Trustees advised that faculty members may distribute additional materials advocating either position, but that they were to be distributed *in addition* to the Packet, and not to *replace* it. The Board believed that

BYU faculty should avoid the implication that a greater sense of unanimity or resolution of this topic exists than is actually the case. (p. 5)

I agree. Studying the documents preserved in this book, the reader gains a broad view of how the Church has addressed these teachings over the years. Kofford Books has provided a valuable service in presenting this to the Mormon reading public.

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