

Interesting Quotes on Science and Mormonism

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2006-08-16

[Listed chronologically, with most recent listed last.]

True science is a discovery of the secret, immutable and eternal laws, by which the universe is governed; and when practically applied, sets in motion the mighty wheels of useful engines, with all the various machinery which genius has invented, or art contrived. It ameliorates the condition of man, by extending the means of intellectual, moral, social, and domestic happiness. [John Taylor, *Times and Seasons*, vol. 4, pg. 46, Dec. 15, 1842].

Well, now, Brother William, when the house of Israel begin 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, 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 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 and see and know as we are seen and known! [W. W. Phelps, *Times and Seasons*, Vol.5, Pg.758, Jan. 1, 1844].

The study of science is the study of something eternal. If we study astronomy, we study the works of God. If we study chemistry, geology, optics, or any other branch of science, every new truth we come to the understanding of is eternal; it is a part of the great system of universal truth. It is truth that exists throughout universal nature; and God is the dispenser of all truth. [Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, pg. 157, February 12, 1860].

How gladly would we understand every principle pertaining to science and art, and become thoroughly acquainted with every intricate operation of nature, and with all the chemical changes that are constantly going on around us! How delightful this would be, and what a boundless field of truth and power is open for us to explore! [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9, pg. 168, January 26, 1862].

Every discovery in science and art, that is really true and useful to mankind, has been given by direct revelation from God, though but few acknowledge it. It has been given with a view to prepare the way for the ultimate triumph of truth, and the redemption of the earth from the power of sin and Satan. We should take advantage of all these great discoveries, the accumulated wisdom of ages, and give to our children the benefit of every branch of useful knowledge, to prepare them to step forward and efficiently do their part in the great work. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 9, pg. 369, August 31, 1862].

Yet I will say with regard to miracles, there is no such thing save to the ignorant--that is, there never was a result wrought out by God or by any of His creatures without there being a cause for it. There may be results, the causes of which we do not see or understand, and what we call miracles are no more than this--they are the results or effects of causes hidden from our understandings. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, pg. 140 - p.141, July 11, 1869].

Science reveals the beauty and harmony of the world material; it unveils to us ten thousand mysteries in the kingdom of nature, and shows that all forms of life through fire and analogous decay are returned again to its bosom. It unfolds to us the mysteries of cloud and rains, dew and frost, growth and decay, and reveals the operation of those silent irresistible forces which give vitality to the world. It reveals to us the more wonderful operations of distant orbs and their relations to the forces of nature. It also reveals

another grand principle, that the laws of nature are immutable and unchangeable as are all the works of God. [John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, pg. 224, May 6, 1870].

The origin of life whether human or inferior, must be lodged in some character whom I have not seen! Follow it back, no matter whether it be for six thousand years, six millions, six million millions, or billions of years, the figures and numbers are immaterial, I must have come from some source, my natural philosophy teaches me this. But, leaving the natural philosophy of the child free from false tradition, let us inquire. What does the philosophy of the Christian sects, or many of them, not all, teach? "God made the world in six days, out of nothing!" This is very wrong; no child should be taught any such dogma. God never did make a world out of nothing; He never will, He never can! [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, pg. 248, September 25, 1870].

It is hard to get the people to believe that God is a scientific character, that He lives by science or strict law, that by this He is, and by law he was made what He is; and will remain to all eternity because of His faithful adherence to law. It is a most difficult thing to make the people believe that every art and science and all wisdom comes from Him, and that He is their Author. [Brigham Young, JD vol. 13, pg 302, November 13, 1870].

In these respects we differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. You may take geology, for instance, and it is a true science; not that I would say for a moment that all the conclusions and deductions of its professors are true, but its leading principles are; they are facts--they are eternal; and to assert that the Lord made this earth out of nothing is preposterous and impossible. God never made something out of nothing; it is not in the economy or law by which the worlds were, are, or will exist. There is an eternity before us, and it is full of matter; and if we but understand enough of the Lord and his ways, we would say that he took of this matter and organized this earth from it. How long it has been organized it is not for me to say, and I do not care anything about it. As for the Bible account of the creation we may say that the Lord gave it to Moses, or rather Moses obtained the history and traditions of the fathers, and from these picked out what he considered necessary, and that account has been handed down from age to age, and we have got it, no matter whether it is correct or not, and whether the Lord found the earth empty and void, whether he made it out of nothing or out of the rude elements; or whether he made it in six days or in as many millions of years, is and will remain a matter of speculation in the minds of men unless he give revelation on the subject. If we understood the process of creation there would be no mystery about it, it would be all reasonable and plain, for there is no mystery except to the ignorant. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 14, pg. 116, May 14, 1871].

Our religion embraces chemistry; it embraces all the knowledge of the geologist, and then it goes a little further than their systems of argument, for the Lord almighty, its author, is the greatest chemist there is. [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 15, pg. 127, August 11, 1872].

Among the popular errors of modern times, an opinion prevails that miracles are events which transpire contrary to the laws of nature, that they are effects without a cause. If such is the fact, then, there never has been a miracle, and there never will be one. The laws of nature are the laws of truth. Truth is unchangeable, and independent in its own sphere. A law of nature never has been broken. And it is an absolute impossibility that such law ever should be broken. [Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 1891, pg. 102].

The science of geography will then be extended to millions of worlds, and will embrace a knowledge of their physical features and boundaries, their resources, mineral and vegetable; their rivers, lakes, seas, continents and islands; the attainments of their inhabitants in the science of government; their progress in revealed religion; their employments, dress, manners, customs, etc. The science of astronomy will also be

enlarged in proportion to the means of knowledge. System after system will rise to view in the vast field of research and exploration! Vast systems of suns and their attendant worlds, on which the eyes of Adam's race, in their rudimental sphere, have never gazed, will then be contemplated, circumscribed, weighed in the balance of human thought, their circumference and diameter be ascertained, their relative distances understood. Their motions and revolutions, their times and laws, their hours, days, weeks, sabbaths, months, years, jubilees, centuries, millenniums and eternities, will all be told in the volumes of science. [Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 1891, pg. 161-162].

Miracles are commonly regarded as occurrences in opposition to the laws of nature. Such a conception is plainly erroneous, for the laws of nature are inviolable. However, as human understanding of these laws is at best but imperfect, events strictly in accordance with natural law may appear contrary thereto. The entire constitution of nature is founded on system and order. [James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, Deseret Book, SLC, 1966, originally published 1899, pg. 220.]

I believe also that with this flood of knowledge concerning these highly spiritual things, there has come into the world, almost imperceptibly, a more generally diffused and brighter spirit of intelligence than was known before; like collateral rays shooting off to right and left from the more direct light of God's revelations which ushered in the great work of the last days. By those collateral rays of light men have been led to those great discoveries in the arts and sciences and in mechanics, which make our age so wonderful as an age of progress and enlightenment. [B. H. Roberts, *Conference Report*, Oct 1903, pg. 73].

The time of creation has ever been a subject of much comment and dispute. Yet I challenge anybody to produce from the Bible itself any finite limitation whatsoever of the periods of creation. By strained inferential references and interpretations men have sought to set the time in days or periods of a thousand years, but I feel sure that no justification of such limitations is warranted by the scriptures themselves. If the evolutionary hypothesis of the creation of life and matter in the universe is ultimately found to be correct, and I shall neither be disappointed nor displeased if it shall turn out so to be, in my humble opinion the Biblical account is sufficiently comprehensive to include the whole of the process. [Stephen L. Richards, "An Open Letter to College Students," *Improvement Era*, vol. 36 (June 1933), pg. 451-453, 484-485.

Truth is truth forever. Scientific truth cannot be theological lie. To the sane mind, theology and philosophy must harmonize. They have the common ground of truth on which to meet." [John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist*, originally published in 1908, Bookcraft, 1964, pg. 156].

On the other hand, to limit and insist upon the whole of life and death to this side of Adam's advent to the earth, some six or eight thousand years ago, as proposed by some, is to fly in the face of the facts so indisputably brought to light by the researcher of science in modern times, and this as set forth by men of the highest type in the intellectual and moral world; not inferior men, or men of sensual and devilish temperament, but men who must be accounted as among the noblest and most self-sacrificing of the sons of men -- of the type whence must come the noblest sons of God, since "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36); and that too the glory of man. These researchers after truth are of that class. To pay attention to and give reasonable credence to their research and findings is to link the church of God with the highest increase of human thought and effort. On that side lies development, on the other lies contraction. It is on the former side that research work is going on and will continue to go on, future investigation and discoveries will continue on that side, nothing will retard them, and nothing will develop on the other side. One leads to narrow sectarianism, the other keeps the open spirit of a world movement with which our New Dispensation began. As between them which is to be our choice? [B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, originally written 1931, published by Smith Research Associates, 1994, pg. 364].

According to the conception of geologists the earth passed through ages of preparation, to us unmeasured and immeasurable, during which countless generations of plants and animals existed in great variety and profusion and gave in part the very substance of their bodies to help form certain strata which are still existent as such. ...

Geologists say that these very simple forms of plant and animal bodies were succeeded by others more complicated; and in the indestructible record of the rocks they read the story of advancing life from the simple to the more complex, from the single-celled protozoan to the highest animals, from the marine algae to the advanced types of flowering plant -- to the apple-tree, the rose, and the oak.

What a fascinating story is inscribed upon the stony pages of the earth's crust! ...

This record of Adam and his posterity is the only scriptural account we have of the appearance of man upon this earth. But we have also a vast and ever-increasing volume of knowledge concerning man, his early habits and customs, his industries and works of art, his tools and implements, about which such scriptures as we have thus far received are entirely silent. Let us not try to wrest the scriptures in an attempt to explain away what we cannot explain.

The opening chapters of Genesis, and scriptures related thereto, were never intended as a textbook of geology, archaeology, earth-science or man-science. Holy Scripture will endure, while the conceptions of men change with new discoveries. We do not show reverence for the scriptures when we misapply them through faulty interpretation. [James E. Talmage, "The Earth and Man," address delivered in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, Aug. 9, 1931, and published by the Church under direction of the First Presidency].

But science, dominated by the spirit of religion is the key to progress and the hope of the future. For example, evolution's beautiful theory of the creation of the world offers many perplexing problems to the inquiring mind. Inevitably, a teacher who denies divine agency in creation, who insists there is no intelligent purpose in it, will infest the student with the thought that all may be chance. I say, that no youth should be so led without a counter balancing thought. Even the skeptic teacher should be fair enough to see that even Charles Darwin, when he faced this great question of annihilation, that the creation is dominated only by chance wrote: "It is an intolerable thought than man and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long, continued slow progress." And another good authority, Raymond West, said, "Why this vast spinture [expenditure] of time and pain and blood?" Why should man come so far if he's destined to go no farther? A creature that travels such distances and fought such battles and won such victories deserves what we are compelled to say, "To conquer death and rob the grave of its victory." [David O. McKay, "A Message for LDS College Youth", BYU devotional talk, Oct. 10, 1952, pg. 6-7. See also *Conference Report*, Apr. 1968, pg. 92].

Whatever the subject may be, the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ may be elaborated upon without fear of anyone's objecting, and the teacher can be free to express his honest conviction regarding it, whether that subject be in geology, the history of the world, the millions of years that it took to prepare the physical world, whether it be in engineering, literature, art -- any principles of the gospel may be briefly or extensively touched upon for the anchoring of the student who is seeking to know the truth. [David O. McKay, "Gospel Ideals -- Life's Surest Anchor," address delivered at BYU, Oct. 30, 1956.]

Even the most devout and sincere believers in the Bible realize that it is, like most any other book, filled with metaphor, simile, allegory, and parable, which no intelligent person could be compelled to accept in a literal sense. ...

The Lord has not taken from those who believe in his word the power of reason. He expects every man who takes his "yoke" upon him to have common sense enough to accept a figure of speech in its proper setting, and to understand that the holy scriptures are replete with allegorical stories, faith-building parables, and artistic speech. ...

Where is there a writing intended to be taken in all its parts literally? Such a writing would be insipid and hence lack natural appeal. To expect a believer in the Bible to strike an attitude of this kind and believe all

that is written to be a literal rendition is a stupid thought. No person with the natural use of his faculties looks upon the Bible in such a light. [Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., *Doctrines of Salvation*, Bookcraft, 1956, vol. 3, pg. 188].

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. The book contains expressions of the author's views for which he alone is responsible. [Pres. David O. McKay, letter to Prof. William Lee Stokes, Feb. 15, 1957].

We may go further. Every person born into the earth has claim upon the assistance of the Spirit of God. That is a species of revelation. Consequently, all good achievements of man, in science, literature, or art, are the product of revelation. The knowledge and wisdom of earth have so come. [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, 1960, pg. 101].

The Church, the custodian of the gospel on earth, looks with full favor upon the attempts of men to search out the facts and laws of nature. It believes that men of science, seekers after truth, are often assisted by the Spirit of the Lord in such researches. It holds further that every scientific discovery may be incorporated into the gospel, and that, therefore there can be no conflict between true religion and correct science. The Church teaches that the laws of nature are but the immutable laws of the Creator of the universe. [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, 1960, pg. 139].

Every person must decide for himself, on the basis of the evidence produced, which of these three opinions as to the age of the earth, before Adam, seems most reasonable to him, whether (1) six days, or (2) six thousand years, or (3) many millions of years. Clearly it does not matter to one's daily welfare or ultimate salvation which view he adopts, except that every Latter-day saint must seek and cherish truth above all else [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, 1960, pg. 149].

Just what forces were brought into operation, or what process was used, to organize the "elements" into an earth is not known. Latter-day Saints are inclined to hold that forces about us, known in part through common human experience, especially in the field of physical science, were employed in the formation of the earth. The progress of science may yet shed much light on the origin of the earth. [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, SLC, 1960, pg. 150].

By recognizing our universe as one of law, order, and intelligence, science has driven fear from the hearts of men. Intelligence acts in intelligent ways. The intelligence at the head of all things may be trusted to act intelligently. There arises therefrom a trust in the things about us. The age-old horror, called fear, which has so long distracted humanity, vanishes. Superstition is laid low. Men come to understand better the love of God, and his offerings of goodness. Certainly, in so doing, science has contributed to religious faith. [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, 1960, pg. 171].

As science advances and increases, as new discoveries are made, as more complete command is obtained over the forces of nature, the more necessary it becomes that we have a religion to guide us in employing these discoveries. To save the world from science, and to make science the builder of a good world, we must hasten our progress towards the fuller acceptance of God. So, the answer to the question at the head of this article is very simple. In an age of science we have greater need than ever before of religion. A conscience of science is a present need. [John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, Bookcraft, 1960, pg. 178].

Religion and science have sometimes been in apparent conflict. Yet the conflict should only be apparent, not real for science should seek truth, and true religion is truth. There can never be conflict between revealed religion and scientific fact. That they have often occupied different fields of truth is a mere

detail. The gospel accepts and embraces all truth; science is slowly expanding her arms and reaching into the invisible domain in search of truth. The two are meeting daily -- science as a child, revealed religion as the mother. Truth is truth, whether labeled science or religion. There can be no conflict. Time is on the side of truth -- for truth is eternal. [Ezra Taft Benson, *Conference Report*, April 1966, pg. 129].

With the tremendous strides that science is making in our day, there is dawning upon this age what might be termed a scientific spirituality -- a new type of mind that studies the truths of faith with the care and caution and candor of science, yet keeping the warmth and glow and power of faith. Spiritual insight is as real as scientific insight. Indeed, it is but a higher manifestation of the same thing. The saint as well as the scientist has witnessed the truth of reality. One may redeem his knowledge revelation, and the other, intellectual conclusion, but in both cases it is insight -- the conviction reality. [Hugh B. Brown, *Conference Report*, April 1967, pg. 49].

Both science and religion beget humility. Scientists and teachers of religion disagree among themselves on theological and other subjects. Even in our own church men and women take issue with one another and contend for their own interpretations. This free exchange of ideas is not to be deplored as long as men and women remain humble and teachable. Neither fear of consequence or any kind of coercion should ever be used to secure uniformity of thought in the church. People should express their problems and opinions and be unafraid to think without fear of ill consequences.

We should all be interested in academic research. We must go out on the research front and continue to explore the vast unknown. We should be in the forefront of learning in all fields, for revelation does not come only through the prophet of God nor only directly from heaven in visions or dreams. Revelation may come in the laboratory, out of the test tube, out of the thinking mind and the inquiring soul, out of search and research and prayer and inspiration. We must be unafraid to contend for what we are thinking and to combat error with truth in this divided and imperiled world, and we must do it with the unfaltering faith that God is still in his heaven even though all is not well with the world.

We should be dauntless in our pursuit of truth and resist all demands for unthinking conformity. No one would have us become mere tape recorders of other people's thoughts. We should be modest and teachable and seek to know the truth by study and faith. There have been times when progress was halted by thought control. Tolerance and truth demand that all be heard and that competing ideas be tested against each other so that the best, which might not always be our own, can prevail. Knowledge is the most complete and dependable when all points of view are heard. We are in a world of restlessness and skepticism, where old things are not only challenged but often disappear, but also a world of miraculous achievement, undreamed of accomplishment, and terrifying power.

Science offers wonderful tools for helping to create the brotherhood of humanity on earth, but the cement of brotherhood does not come from any laboratory. It must come from the heart and mind and spirit of men and women.

Peace and brotherhood can be achieved when the two most potent forces in civilization -- religion and science -- join to create one world in its truest and greatest sense. We should continue to become acquainted with human experience through history and philosophy, science and poetry, art and religion. Every discovery of science reveals clearly the divine plan in nature. The remarkable harmony in the physical laws and processes of the universe, from the infinitesimal to the infinite, surpasses mortal understanding and implies a supreme architect, and the beauty and symmetry of God's handiwork inspire reverence.

One of the most important things in the world is freedom of the mind; from this all other freedoms spring. Such freedom is necessarily dangerous, for one cannot think right without running the risk of thinking wrong, but generally more thinking is the antidote for the evils that spring from wrong thinking. More thinking is required, and we should all exercise our God-given right to think and be unafraid to express our opinions, with proper respect for those to whom we talk and proper acknowledgment of our own shortcomings. We must preserve freedom of the mind in the church and resist all efforts to suppress it. The church is not so much concerned with whether the thoughts of its members are orthodox or

heterodox as it is that they shall have thoughts. One may memorize much without learning anything. In this age of speed there seems to be little time for meditation.

While speak of independence and the right to think, to agree or disagree, to examine and question, I need to remind myself not to forget that fixed and unchanging laws govern all God's creation, whether the vastness of the starry heavens or the minute revolving universe of the atom or human relationships. All is law. All is cause and effect, and God's laws are universal. God has no favorites; no one is immune from either life's temptations or the consequences of his or her deeds. God is not capricious. [Hugh B. Brown, "A Final Testimony", from *The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown: An Abundant Life*, Signature Books, 1988].

The position of the Church on the origin of man was published by the First Presidency in 1909 and stated again by a different First Presidency in 1925:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, declares man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity. ... Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes (see Appendix, "Doctrinal Expositions of the First Presidency").

The scriptures tell why man was created, but they do not tell how, though the Lord has promised that he will tell that when he comes again (D&C 101:32-33). In 1931, when there was intense discussion on the issue of organic evolution, the First Presidency of the Church, then consisting of Presidents Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, and Charles W. Nibley, addressed all of the General Authorities of the Church on the matter, and concluded,

Upon the fundamental doctrines of the Church we are all agreed. Our mission is to bear the message of the restored gospel to 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. ...

Upon one thing we should all be able to agree, namely, that Presidents Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund were right when they said: "Adam is the primal parent of our race." <First Presidency Minutes, Apr. 7, 1931>. [William Evenson, "Evolution," complete text, from Daniel Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Macmillian, NY, 1991. This article was prepared by Evenson under direction of the LDS First Presidency, who provided the 1931 letter.]

But in a larger sense this has been the best of all centuries. In the long history of the earth there has been nothing like it. The life expectancy of man has been extended by more than 25 years. Think of it. It is a miracle. The fruits of science have been manifest everywhere. By and large, we live longer, we live better. This is an age of greater understanding and knowledge. We live in a world of great diversity. As we learn more of one another, our appreciation grows. This has been an age of enlightenment. The miracles of modern medicine, of travel, of communication are almost beyond belief. All of this has opened new opportunities for us which we must grasp and use for the advancement of the Lord's work. [Gordon B. Hinckley, *Conference Reports*, April 1999].

Few American theologies are more complex than that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but its flagship Brigham Young University teaches off-the-shelf, industry-standard evolution. That has been the case since 1931, when the church officially said: "Leave biology, archaeology, and anthropology, no one of which has to do with the salvation of the souls of mankind, to scientific research." ... What the church requires is only belief "that Adam was the first man of what we would call the human race," says Gordon Hinckley, the church's living prophet. Scientists can speculate on the rest, he says, recalling his own study of anthropology and geology: "Studied all about it. Didn't worry me then. Doesn't worry me now." [Gordon B. Hinckley, from Larry A. Witham, *Where Darwin Meets the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2002, pg. 176-177].