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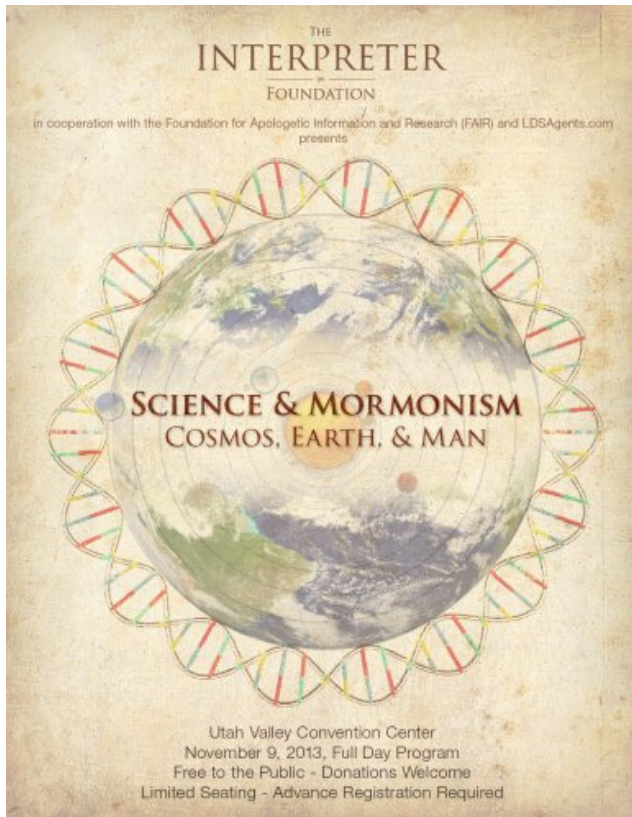


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Conference to Explore Relationship Between Mormonism and Science

Posted by [Stephen Smoot](#) | [2 comments](#)

*The author is an Editorial Consultant with *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*.



The Interpreter Foundation, in partnership with FairMormon, will be hosting a symposium exploring the relationship between Mormonism

and science. The symposium (“[Science & Mormonism: Cosmos, Earth & Man](#)”), which will feature a number of Latter-day Saint scientists discussing topics relating to all branches of natural science, is geared, according to the foundation’s website, towards an audience who want “concise and colorful summaries of the state-of-the-art in scientific research relating to [Mormonism].” The expectation of the conference is to grant attendees “a deeper appreciation of the unique contributions of LDS doctrine to the ongoing conversation” surrounding advances in modern science.

Mormon leaders have expressed positive views concerning the relationship between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and modern science. In 1871, Brigham Young, immediate successor to Joseph Smith in the presidency of the Church, taught, “We differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular.” On another occasion Young taught, “The idea that the religion of Christ is one thing, and science is another, is a mistaken idea, for there is no true religion without true science, and consequently there is no true science without true religion.” More recently, apostle Russell M. Nelson taught in the October 2012 General Conference of the Church, “The human spirit yearns for enlightenment. Whether truth comes from a scientific laboratory or by revelation from God, we seek it!”

According to Gregory L. Smith, one of the symposium’s organizers, Mormons should welcome this sort of conference. “Historically, Mormonism has had a very friendly relationship with the sciences and scientific thought,” Smith said. “The Saints have not believed in separate ‘silos’ by which religious truth is segregated from truths about the material world. All truth is ultimately congruent, though we obviously don’t know enough to appreciate the totality.”

The symposium will be useful to individuals who wonder about conflicts between religion and science. Henry Eyring, a prominent 20th century chemist and faithful Latter-day Saint asked, “Is there any conflict between science and religion? There is no conflict in the mind of God, but often there is conflict in the minds of men.” As part of the program, presenters will engage “areas . . . such as evolutionary biology, as well as emerging areas that some see as problematic, such as neuroscience,” according to Daniel C. Peterson, Chairman and President of the foundation. “Broadly speaking, I don’t think that there are substantial conflicts between Mormonism and science,” Peterson said. “But there are, and probably long will be, specific areas of conflict between interpretations of Mormonism and current interpretations of this or that particular scientific viewpoint. We humans enjoy a perfect understanding of neither the Gospel nor science, and our grasp of each is always . . . subject to adjustment.”

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, a Senior Research Scientist at the Florida Institute for Human and Machine Cognition and an organizer of the conference, concurred with Peterson. “Because our knowledge is incomplete, some disagreements between science and religion are inevitable,” Bradshaw said. “Church leaders have frequently advanced views about the ultimate compatibility of religious and scientific truths and, with notably few exceptions, have maintained markedly positive attitudes toward both the methods and conclusions of mainstream science and the advance of modern technology. In those instances where controversy has arisen, it has been a question of the interpretation of results and differences in opinion about how to harmonize these results with scripture and church teachings, not the value of science itself.”

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Presenters and Discussants include:

David H. Bailey
Berkeley National Laboratory (ret.) and University of California, Davis

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw
Senior Research Scientist, Florida Institute for Human and Machine Cognition

Ron Hellings
Research Professor, Department of Physics, Montana State University

Bart J. Kowallis
Professor, Department of Geological Sciences, Brigham Young University

John S. Lewis
Professor Emeritus of Planetary Sciences, Lunar and Planetary Laboratory,
University of Arizona and Chief Scientist, Deep Space Industries

Steven L. Peck
Associate Professor, Department of Biology, Brigham Young University

Michael R. Stark
Associate Professor, Department of Physiology & Developmental Biology, Brigham Young University

Michael F. Whiting*
Associate Professor, Department of Integrative Biology and Director of
BYU DNA Sequencing Center, Brigham Young University

Richard N. Williams
Founding Director, The Wheatley Institution, Brigham Young University

* Interim

Organizing Committee: David H. Bailey, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, John S. Lewis, Gregory L. Smith

For additional details and registration, see MormonInterpreter.com/events



Many prominent Mormons have held both scientific and ecclesiastical roles.

Early-twentieth-century apostles James E. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe, who held degrees in Geology and agricultural science, respectively, and current apostle Richard G. Scott, who has a degree in Mechanical Engineering, have shown the possibility for members of the Church to

attain harmony between personal belief and modern science. Other Mormons, including the before-quoted Henry Eyring, Harvey Fletcher, and Philo T. Farnsworth, have likewise made substantial contributions to modern scientific and technical understanding.

But while many Mormon leaders and members have found harmony between their faith and science, others have expressed more negative views towards scientific theories that may conflict with Mormon orthodoxy. Joseph Fielding Smith, the Church's president from 1970-72, and his son-in-law, apostle Bruce R. McConkie, were both outspoken critics of Darwin's theory of evolution. Both vigorously taught that there was no harmony between Mormon theology and Darwin's theory. Writing in his popular treatise *Mormon Doctrine*, McConkie rejected evolution as compatible with Mormonism. "From the day of their first announcement, these theories of organic evolution found themselves in conflict with the principles of revealed religion as such are found recorded in the scriptures and expounded by inspired teachers. . . . There is no harmony between the truths of revealed religion and the theories of organic evolution."

In response to examples of apparent anti-science attitudes amidst Church members and leaders, Smith was quick to stress their rarity, and to emphasize the more positive examples of Church members interacting with science. "There have been a few LDS thinkers or leaders that have expressed some views that are hostile to science, but they stand out as something of an anomaly, and other leaders have not always shared those views." For example, given general questions that arise from time to time about organic evolution in general and specifically the origin of man, it should be remembered, says Bradshaw, "that the first formal class in evolution was instituted at BYU in fall 1971 with the First Presidency's approval. It has become one of the most successful graduate programs at BYU and is currently a required part of the core curriculum of BYU students in the biological sciences. LDS life scientists are breaking new ground in the field."

Latter-day Saints sometimes wonder about philosophical positions (such as naturalism, or determinism) extrapolated from science that seem to conflict with Mormon doctrine. "There are some uses (we might say 'abuses,' more appropriately) of science with which Mormons would and should disagree—on both spiritual and intellectual grounds," says Smith, "But that's challenging a philosophical stance or interpretation, not science *per se*."

The symposium will focus on issues in a constructive manner. "I'm interested not only in addressing areas of concern that might arise out of apparent conflicts, but in ways in which faithful understanding of the gospel might be affected, perhaps even deepened, by what science is disclosing about the universe in which we live," Peterson clarified. "People should be interested in this symposium because science is intrinsically interesting and because the participants are serious and thoughtful people on the forefronts of their scientific fields. As we consider the Gospel, we should try to do so in light of the best knowledge of everything else that we can get."

When asked why individuals should be excited about the conference, or should consider attending, Smith expressed his admiration for the group of Mormon scientists asked to present at the symposium. "These are Church members who are also widely respected and regarded in their academic fields. Most if not all of them have a lot of experience in speaking to a mixed audience, so I think it's a unique opportunity to learn what sort of perspectives someone from their disciplines can provide," Smith said. "Just as students of the Hebrew Bible or ancient warfare might teach us things about the scriptures that we hadn't otherwise considered, so too can men and women of science suggest some perspectives and avenues of research that wouldn't otherwise catch side of."

Bradshaw opined that the conference "will be of interest to people of all faiths, as well as to those who may sincerely question the existence of God. With respect to members of the Church, I would note that we are encouraged not merely to be tolerant of secular scholarship, but rather to embrace opportunities for learning as part of our religious duties."

The symposium is November 9th, 2013, at the Utah Valley Convention Center in Provo, Utah. The conference is free, but seating is limited and registration is required.

For more information, visit: <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/events/2013-symposium-science-mormonism-cosmos-earth-man/>

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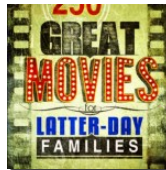
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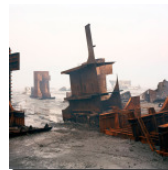
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