

December 1, 1981

Elder Boyd K. Packer  
Council of the Twelve  
47 East So. Temple  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

Dear Elder Packer:

I have read and reread the entire printed text of your recent address. "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect" and noted with great interest and satisfaction your eloquent and welcome call, even plea for help. "We need your help" were your exact words.

May I respond to both your address and your plea? First a little background: I guess you could say I have been studying Church history most all my life. I started publishing in the field over thirty years ago in the Millennial Star. This great love of and interest in Church never left me and even though my PH.D. from Columbia is in East European history, I have studied and published in Church history throughout my professional career. I also belong to all the appropriate professional associations and for over twenty-five years I have known well almost all the important professional and non-professional students of Church history.

What I am trying to suggest, Brother Packer, is that my background may lend some weight to what I am about to state. And that is simply this--I know of no other group of men or women in the Church who collectively have stronger testimonies of the Restoration or who more willingly wish to lay their gifts upon the "altar of sacrifice" to build and better the Kingdom than professional Church historians.

One of the sources of our strong testimonies is Church history itself. That is why we diligently research and publish as we do. We are far more interested in helping others gain stronger testimonies through a deeper and more thorough knowledge of Church history than the "Scholarly reputation and the acclaim of your [our] colleagues in the world..." (Your words once more.)

And yet I do not know personally of a single instance in which faithful Mormon historians have ever suffered professionally for their living and working in accordance with their testimonies. Most of us are honored and do very well in our profession.

Never have I had to alter a word in any lecture, book, or article for any committee or editor or done anything professionally which would have required me to compromise my faith or understanding of Church history.

I have advised my share of M.A. and Ph.D. candidates, some of whom have worked in Mormon history. None of them has ever suffered by holding to the faith. I can well understand your great concern over the doctoral candidate who came to you for advice and felt he suffered professionally for his beliefs. He did, however, have one other option. He could have written the dissertation to satisfy his committee and then have rewritten it to satisfy himself and searched around for a publisher. All dissertations have to be rewritten for publication anyway, for dissertations are a peculiar art form unto themselves. It might very well have been possible for this young man to have had the mantle AND the intellect. Elder Packer, the very idea that the mantle and the intellect are mutually exclusive is disturbing. I personally claim to have it and believe that most of my colleagues in the Church do too. It is a very easy thing when one falls short of one's professional aspirations to decide that "holding to the iron rod" was the cause of such failure; this is a most comforting rationalization.

I too have "walked that road of scholarly research and study and know something of the dangers" to use your words again; in fact, I suppose I live on that road, or at least by its side. I can state categorically, however, that it is the collective experience of professional Mormon historians that an in-depth study of Church history is faith promoting, even uplifting, not hurtful to testimonies.

What kind of testimonies are we building in the Church, protecting in the Church if the fact that some of the sons of Brigham Young smoked is so shocking? Rather weak testimonies I would judge. Our unusual concern over the truth regarding the evolution of the Word of Wisdom does not strengthen the youth of Zion, rather, it leaves them vulnerable to anti-Mormons who delight in pointing out these unadmitted truths. I wrestled with this for years while writing the life of Heber C. Kimball who certainly did not worry much over the Word of Wisdom. I am happy to say, however, that my responsible (and prayerful) treatment of his full life has won for me the love and respect of the great Kimball Family Association.

If such relative trifles are of such import, what are we to do with holy scripture. I take great comfort from the fact that the authors of the Old and New Testament and the Book of Mormon were not censored. In a responsible manner they presented balanced pictures of our religious heroes, and only One was unflawed. Scripture does not offer us two-dimensional, cardboard cutouts for our heroes. I believe millions have taken courage from the Bible and Book of Mormon and concluded that perhaps there was hope for them too, if even those annointed sometimes struggled under the burden of perfection.

In my biography of Heber C. Kimball I quote what George Q. Cannon noted that President Lorenzo Snow said, "I saw Joseph Smith the Prophet do things which I did not approve of; and yet...I thanked God that he would put upon a man who had these imperfections the power and authority which he placed upon him...for I knew myself I had weaknesses and I thought there was a chance for me. These same weaknesses...I knew were in Heber C. Kimball, but my knowing this did not impair him in my estimation. I thanked God I saw these imperfections."

Over the ten years I worked on the life of my great-great grandfather and grandfather to the current president of the Church, I spent much time on my knees praying for guidance which I verily received. Important, though not always pleasant, truths can be told responsibly.

I perceive of three levels of understanding of Church history. First the simple, standard, Sunday School version. Second, a level where some problems appear to contradict the first level. It is at this level that critics of the Church operate. It is this level which so disturbs the Saints at large--for they are not prepared to cope with it when critics of the Church draw it to their attention. (As a professor of history of over twenty years and an Institute instructor for over eight years, I have counselled with such disturbed Saints and, with one exception concerning the Book of Abraham papyri, not only helped them quiet their fears, but emerge from the experience with even stronger testimonies.

The method is simple. All I did was take them carefully to level three, the bedrock of Church history. At that level the problems of the second level are answered and the simple presentation at level one is fully confirmed.

Now you may ask, if going to bedrock merely confirms level one, why bother? That would be permissible if...if only anti-Mormons would do the same thing. But they do not. Their stock in trade are the problems of level two and they are too successful for we have not properly prepared the Saints to understand what anti-Mormon literature is all about. Trying to prepare the Saints to meet these challenges is one thing professional Church historians strive to do and believe to be part of their "calling."

As an experienced Institute instructor, I would recommend a new course titled "An Introduction to Anti-Mormon Literature." In this course, I would take my students through all three levels of understanding of selected events in Church history. I would try to follow the admonition of the Saviour to help them become as harmless as doves and as wise as serpents. There is no way one can be as wise as a serpent and not thoroughly understand Church history.

Let me tell you of one case in particular. Some years ago, a member of our library staff, a BYU graduate, return missionary, married in the temple had just come across an anti-Mormon book and read it out of curiosity; ahen-faced he later came to me because he felt his testimony slipping. I asked him to bring me the book and arranged to have lunch with him a week later. At that time, taking the book chapter by chapter I showed him how each problem disappeared at level three. Slowly I showed him that all anti-Mormon literature is a two edged sword. Anti-Mormons use certain arguments to cut against the Church; persons with an in-depth understanding of Church history can skillfully turn the sword back on such detractors of our faith.

Let me quote you my concluding paragraph to an article on the Anthon Transcript which I published in the Spring, 1970 issue of B.Y.U. Studies.

"For a variety of reasons most institutions, especially religious ones, ultimately face the necessity of preparing a detailed history of their own origins. While the early generations are so close to the beginning that their personal knowledge is adequate and their faith strong, succeeding generations have to acquire their knowledge second-hand and therefore require written accounts, not only to buttress their own faith, but to answer the ever present critics and doubters. This generation must now utilize fully the art and science of history to recapture the past and properly narrate and interpret its own origins; we must search out more fully the sources of the Restoration..."

I was especially arrested by your "Second Caution," concerning "the exaggerated loyalty to the theory that everything must be told." What "theory" is this? It certainly never formed part of my extremely rigorous training at Columbia University during the years 1955-59. Only rank amateurs tell everything. My colleagues are not such. Whatever this theory is, it is not held by professional Church historians.

In all the arts what one leaves out is as important as what one puts in. Telling everything is not only unprofessional, it is unreadable; in fact, it is not even history, chronicling perhaps.

Elder Packer, I could continue, but perhaps this will suffice. Permit me to close with a plea to you, in the same spirit in which you made your eloquent plea to us. I am confident there are those in the Church who needed your dressing down and your office carries great weight. I hope those who need to hear, hearken. I fear, however, if your address as it now stands is issued as a separate pamphlet, appears in the Ensign and in BYU Studies, it will do serious harm to those of us who do not write the kind of history you deplore. We have always been a history keeping and minded people and, for the most part, have trusted and appreciated our historians. Some have even been called and sustained by several Prophets. In spite of such callings even now the Historical Department of the Church has been seriously downgraded. Your address is another most serious blow to some of the most faithful and dedicated men and women in the Church.

We affirm that the glory of our God is intelligence, intellect, and strive to place what little intellect and mantel we might have in His Service.

If the position of professional Church historians and those of us that write Church history is further undercut, if the Saints are caused to lose faith in us, how will Church historians be able to effectively defend the church against calumny, distortion, incrimination, slander, libel, anti-Mormon propoganda, and such acts? Professional Church historians, or professional historians of Church history, form the Church's first line of defense concerning our past. Certainly, it is not your intention to weaken this line of defense.

It is a very sobering experience to read the original history of the Church as published in the Times and Season, the Millennial Star, and the Deseret News. Those Church historians, personally acquainted with Joseph Smith and

other early leaders, were far less inhibited in their writing of Church history than contemporary professional historians in the Church.

Could you not clarify your position, making it clear that you are addressing those in the Church who do violate the canon of good historical writing and not give the impression of tarring with the same brush many of us so anxious to lay our gifts on the altar, trying to be "anxiously engaged in a good cause?"

Since you and Elder Gordon B. Hinckley were at one time advisors to the former Historical Department of the Church, I feel it might be appropriate to share these thoughts with him.

Sincerely,

Stanley B. Kimball  
Professor

cc: Elder Gordon B. Hinckley

P.S. Elder Packer when some of the prophecies of Heber C. Kimball come to pass, the Church will need all the faithful professional historians it has and Saints will need to have faith in them. After prayerful consideration, I have decided that perhaps I should send a copy of this letter to President Kimball.

cc: President Spencer W. Kimball

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The Council of the Twelve  
47 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84150

24 February 1982

*lv:  
For Your file?  
Stan Kimball*

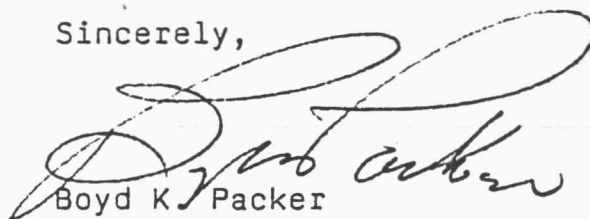
Stanley B. Kimball  
Department of Historical Studies  
Peck Building  
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026

Dear Brother Kimball:

I must apologize for the long delay in answering your letter of December 1 expressing your comments on my talk "The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect." Inasmuch as you sent copies of your letter to others, I assume that you were not requesting a personal response to you on the issues you raised.

The fact that you would take time to write is appreciated. May the Lord bless you.

Sincerely,

  
Boyd K. Packer

BKP/jm



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14 January 1982

Dr. Stanley B. Kimball  
Southern Illinois University  
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026

Dear Stan:

I have just learned that you have responded to Boyd Packer about his address on Mormon Historians.

I am trying to collect all pertinent papers and comments about this recent attack on our profession. Jan Shipps, Davis Bittin, Jim Clayton, and Mike Quinn have furnished me with copies of their correspondence and comments. Could I ask the same of you?

Some of the items are to be handled "with discretion," where others are to be open to any person desiring to use them. If you choose to give us a copy, you may wish to determine how you want it used.

I hope you will cooperate in our collection building venture. My best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Everett L. Cooley  
Assistant Director for  
Special Collections

ELC/mtww



Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

School of Social Sciences  
Department of Historical Studies

Jan. 19, 1982

Everett L. Cooley  
Special Collections  
U of U  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84112

Dear Ev :

I am pleased you wish a copy of my missive. Here it is. I will opt for the "With discretion" provision. I do not especially wish it published in the Messenger or the Evangel or the like.

The use or misuse of this letter ultimately depends on your professionalism, which I happen to trust. I wrote the letter to effect good and if a copy in your collection can effect such good, fine; neither of us wishes to merely hang out dirty laundry for the curious.

I understand BKP's talk has been pulled from the Enisgn and that, of course, is the acid test of how effective our letters were. It was, of course, too late for us to have had any control, I don't mean control, I mean effect over its appearance in the BYU Studies, but most readers of Studies will probably be more offended than influenced. So the Enisgn bit is a real victory. I believe that Elder Hinckley is responsible for that.

Sincerely,

  
Stanley B. Kimball  
Professor

enc:

Peck Building, Edwardsville, Illinois 62026





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26 January 1982

Dr. Stanley B. Kimball  
Southern Illinois University  
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026

Dear Stan:

Thank you for furnishing us with a copy of your letter to Boyd Packer. We are collecting everything we can on this attack on our profession. So far everyone has been most cooperative in furnishing us copies of their papers, correspondence, etc.

Once again, thanks for helping us build a file on this matter. We appreciate your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Everett L. Cooley  
Assistant Director for  
Special Collections

ELC/mww