

May 25, 1981

Dear Elder McConkie,

First, let me apologize for not acknowledging sooner your long and helpful letter of February 19, 1981. It was forwarded to me at my assignment here in London, but by some oversight it was sent by boat, which took three months. I am grateful for your letter and for your willingness to take time from your tremendous responsibilities to make such a thorough response.

Second, I assure you that I do not speak “at firesides and elsewhere” on the subject of the progression of God and, as you have instructed, I will not give other people copies of the material I sent you. Contrary to the hearsay reports you refer to, the subject is not a “hobby” of mine, I have never actively “championed” a special position on it, and I am perfectly willing to follow the directions you have given me. I wrote sincerely for your judgment of my efforts to building faith by harmonizing for others, including some of my students, what had seemed to them (not to me) to be troubling differences in the statement of the prophets. I was, in fact, trying, with the best thinking, study, and inspiration possible to do what you recommend in the excellent guide you sent me in your letter, “Finding Answers to Gospel Questions”: “to seek for harmony and agreement in the scriptures and among the Brethren rather than for seeming divergences of views.” I was of course aware of your teachings on this subject and was in no sense attempting to counter them or presuming to “correct” you or any of the Brethren. In fact, I did not see my paper or my ideas as in any way out of harmony with your teachings, with which I have felt in accord. I was merely trying to state clearly how it seemed to me possible to affirm fully and without rationalization not only your teachings (and thus of course the scriptures) about God’s perfect knowledge but also those teachings by a number of prophets about God’s continued growth in knowledge. I would have felt no need to do this simply because of an apparent discrepancy, because I knew, as you stated in your letter, that prophets do not always speak as prophets and can err on minor matters. My concern was that this seems a major matter, that two of Brigham Young’s statements about God’s progression in knowledge come in official letters of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, and that I had been taught, (as have a majority of the people I know) all my life, by Sunday School, Quorum, Seminary, and Institute teachers, and parents, without any sense of controversy or opposition to the established teachings of the Church, that God is “all knowing” but also that we would progress forever in knowledge (that that was in fact one of the great attractions of eternal life and one incentive to our energetic Mormon pursuit of learning here) and thus obviously so would God progress forever in knowledge. Because I have long sensed that the key to harmony in these matters lay in the concept of different spheres of divine activity, suggested in the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, and developed by Brigham Young and B. H. Roberts, I have felt no disharmony with your powerful statements about God’s absolute knowledge of this universe and of the processes of salvation. I did not feel your warnings of heresy applied to me because I have certainly never imagined that

God might “someday learn something that will destroy the plan of salvation” or that he is “just dabbling with a few truths he already chanced to learn or experimenting with a few facts he already discovered”—notions you ascribe to such heretics and condemn—as I do, in strong terms. It was only when your son, Joseph, insisted to me that I was out of harmony with you that I felt a need to re-study the entire matter carefully and write you about my ideas for your judgment. I have received that judgment and will obey your directions exactly.

Let me just say finally that there is no spirit of rebellion in me—and never has been—and no need to be concerned that it will now “well up in /my/ heart.” It hurts and bewilders me to have you imply in your letter that I am somehow comparable to those cultists who use the obscure speculations of President Young and Adam and God to support their self-indulgent and evil ways, or to have you think that I will go about speaking in opposition to the revealed doctrines of the Church, or to have you feel that I presume to try to instruct you or any of the Brethren or set myself against you in any way. I have never done any of these things. I have known the presence of God’s spirit and the perfect truth of the Restored Gospel since I knelt in a wheatfield as a boy of eight with my father and felt overwhelmingly the reality of that Spirit, which has come to me to direct and comfort me many times since. I have given myself wholly to the Lord and the building of His Kingdom under His appointed leaders, having sacrificed very great things professionally and financially without regret in order to fulfill that commitment and having accepted without question every call and assignment that has come to me. Everything I have ever done, yes, including the immense and thankless labor of helping to start and preserve the integrity of Dialogue magazine, has been solely with the intent to build faith, especially in the young students of the Church for whom I have a special stewardship. I am certainly aware that I have made mistakes in judgment about the best ways to build faith, but I have diligently sought to be counseled by the Spirit and by Priesthood leaders, and I have never knowingly gone contrary to the direction or even the advice, of those leaders, all of whom I honor as direct representatives of God. With my family and my father’s family I have committed myself to live as closely as the Church allows to the law of consecration and stewardship, literally giving now all of my times, talents, and financial inheritance for the building up of the Kingdom--and you know something of the result in our family’s large scale support of missionary work. I love you and all the Brethren with all my soul, pray for you daily, diligently study and live by your teachings and strive to teach my children and students to honor and obey you as the Lord’s representatives, and I enjoy the knowledge through the Spirit that I am used by the Lord to build faith in those I teach and live with. Why, after all this I should continue to be perceived as antagonistic or rebellious, as one who in the words of your colleague, needs to be “rescued,” I must confess is extremely painful and difficult to understand. For this reason I would like to visit you in your office according to your generous invitation. I will phone your secretary for an appointment when I return from London in August.

May the Lord continue to bless you as his special witness and strengthen you in the divine work you help lead and upon which I know my salvation depends.

Sincerely, Eugene England, Associate Director

Cc: Elder Boyd K. Packer, Elder David B. Haight